

PLANETARY

STORIES



THE 3rd FOUNDATION
DOOMED LENS MEN

PLANETARY STORIES

= Contents =

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Vol 1 No 1

COVER

Original Artist Gordon Monson,
converted to pulp cover by William Jackson

Featured Novel

DOOMED LENSMEN

The Lensmen must prove themselves!

Sybly White
(Lee Gold)

A Short Story

TROUBLE ON SHRLNDU

Some travel by rocket, but not Greg.
Illustration by Clif Jackson

Shelby Vick

* * * FEATURES * * *

EDITORIAL

FROM THE VIBRATING ETHER

LINKS FOR YOU

WRITE!

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EDITORIAL



How 'bout that? As they say in the scary movies, "We're ba-a-ack."

And it IS scary, isn't it? Well, joking aside, it was touch-and-go. As usual, I jumped into Planetary Stories with absolutely NO planning! I had lotsa stories hanging around to print, so -- why worry?

Then -- AFTER the first issue, of course! -- it occured to me: I can't fill the mag up with nothing but my own stories!

Now, the first issue was -- obviously! -- not all my own stuff. Several others contributed generously of their ideas

and time. "Well," I said to myself, "when people see Planetary Stories out there, they'll be practically breaking my door down to contribute!"

Yeah. . . .

Don't misunderstand me; there HAVE been volunteers. For one thing, look at the cover; that was a volunteer artist, and the story, Doomed Lensmen, was volunteered as well. And I have another volunteer story on hand.

It'll be in the next issue. . . along with lots of my stuff, unless more of you have a bone you wanta toss my way.

On Doomed Lensmen: It has an interesting story behind it. For one thing, the artist, Gordon Monson, was the original artist of the cover. William Jackson took Gordon's picture and added color and stuff, and you see the result. The story, as the heading says, was in the first issue of a fanzine. . . that was listed as number 77.

Gordon Monson also did the interior illos for Doomed Lensmen. (I'm being optimistic; I've never put a picture into text and I'm saying this before the fact!)

And, yeah, once again a picture of me. Why not? Makes it even MORE scary.

DOOMED LENS MEN

by

Sybly Whyte

Originally serialized in *The Third Foundation*, beginning with issue #77 (the first issue of the fanzine) in 1967

Chapter One: GHARLANE'S ESCAPE

As the flagship of the Thralian Grand Fleet sped towards Klovia, the Eddorian energizing the body of Premier Fossten suspiciously questioned Gannel, Tyrant of Thrale. Suddenly he shouted, "Die then! I should have known from the sheer perfection of your work that you were what you really are — Star A Star!" Even as he spoke, he attacked. Gannel, in reality Second Stage Lensmen Kim Kinnison, met the mounting fury of that attack, never knowing that he was not alone in his battle against the apparent leader of the Boskonian forces. At length, his sight and sense of perception revealed to him his conquered foe in the image of a huge Brain, apparently identical to that of Mentor the Arisian. Nor was this similarity surprising, for both images were actually hallucinations produced in Kinnison's mind by the fourfold Arisian fusion which called itself Mentor.

So Kinnison relentlessly pummeled the illusion of a brain, while unbeknownst to him Mentor created such a screen of mental force around the captive Eddorian that that entity could neither communicate with its fellows nor escape the form of flesh it was then energizing. Finally, at Mentor's direction, Kinnison drew his ray-gun and, with apparently only that feeble instrument, succeeded in reducing what it was that lay before him to a smoking, shapeless heap.

But neither the dogged Lensman nor the subtle Arisians were aware or indeed ever became aware that there had been yet another witness to that titanic battle of mind. Back on Thrale, in the Premier's secret quarters, a spy-screen had relayed the entire struggle. And the entity who watched it was none other than Gharlane of Eddore himself!

Well was it for the Arisians' peace of mind that they never thought to check exactly which Eddorian had been cornered that day and forced to pass to the next plane of existence. Actually Gharlane had cautiously chosen to stay entirely away from the forefront of the battle. True, Premier Fossten had gone on the flagship of the Boskone Grant Fleet, but that worthy's body was then being energized not by Eddore's mighty Second-in-Command, but by one of his underlings — his ascosporic twin — differing from him only in strength of will and force of personality.

The Arisians had long known that the Eddorians were completely asexual entities who were immortal except for death by violence and who multiplied their numbers by asexual sporulation. By this means, when an Eddorian had reached its capacity to live and learn, it simply divided into two new individuals, each of which, in addition to possessing in full the parent's mind and memories and knowledge, had also a brand-new zest for living and a greatly increased capacity for knowledge.

This reproductive process in its purest form obviously produced two individuals equal in power and in competitive drive. But no Eddorian of the Innermost Circle was willing to allow such an equal to exist. These powerful minds, therefore, controlled the conditions of their self-reproduction so that of the two individuals produced, one was markedly the superior in vital force — and that one only was considered the true inheritor of the former personality.

Thus it was that Gharlane's personality had endured through the countless millennia since the original formation of Earth. And thus when the time came for a direct attack on the Klovian Patrol Headquarters, Gharlane, wishing to keep personal control of the battle but wary of treachery, deliberately twinned himself and sent in Fossten's body an entity with his own desires and hatreds, a stupendously capable mind inferior only to himself and to the All-Highest in stark power. No wonder then that the Arisians were so confident that Gharlane had been destroyed. One of him had been. But another still remained!

As he turned off the spy-screen, Gharlane was raging with barely controlled anger that he had been so nearly outmaneuvered. But instead of giving way to his almost incandescent fury, he deliberately forced himself to consider the implications of the scene he had just witnessed. The Grand Fleet was now for all intents and purposes already destroyed. The Patrol Headquarters would have little difficulty in demolishing it with one of their own Lensmen in control of the flagship. Indeed Thrale itself must now be temporarily conceded to the hated foe. He could most effectively oppose the Lensmen and their Civilization only by operating in secret, not by fighting a last ditch battle to keep control of a world of only tertiary importance.

Also, as Gharlane now began to realize, there were advantages to be drawn even from this wreck of his plans. The Arisians would now probably be sure that he was dead. Let them continue to think so. They based, he knew, all their calculations on a highly intellectual Visualization of the Cosmic All, a system of speculation so subtle and intricate that it could be blurred by even one major unknown fact. And the continued existence of Eddore's Second-in-Command was a major fact indeed!

So Gharlane cautiously retreated from Thrale, leaving the planet so quickly and so secretly that not a single mind there was ever aware that a second Eddorian had ever been there at all. He went, not to Eddore nor to any of the worlds which the Eddorians had already mobilized against Civilization, but to the very outskirts of the Second Galaxy, to the bleak world of Nergal, a world so far removed from the struggle between Civilization and the Eddorian Menace that no Arisian and, except for Gharlane, no Eddorian had ever spared time to investigate it thoroughly.

Gharlane, however, had long been aware that Nergal was inhabited by a race of humanoid beings with a set of ethics equivalent to that of the Delgonian Overlords — plus a capacity for disciplined intellectual strategy such as no Overlord ever dreamed of possessing. Gharlane had chosen to keep this planet out of the grand scheme of Eddorian cosmic conquest, to keep its existence secret even from the All-Highest. He had built up an organization upon it loyal not to Eddore but to himself, an organization with only one aim: to gather every possible item of information about the Arisian plans — and to devise schemes of nullifying them. Nergal thus represented to Gharlane his own private intelligence organization.

As soon as the Eddorian had landed on that fortress world, he issued a summons for Zagan, the planetary chief, to attend him immediately. When the dictator arrived, Gharlane greeted him perfunctorily, then asked abruptly, "What is the state of your planetary defenses?"

Zagan, inwardly perturbed at the unexpected arrival of his master, replied with outward calm, "We have been studying the data you lately made available to us about hyper-spatial tubes and negaspheres. As you are doubtless aware, the latter can easily be dealt with by simply focusing the light of a star upon them, a technique which we call the astrobeam. Detecting and combating a hyper-spatial tube is a more interesting problem. We have, however, I believe, solved the problem to your satisfaction by construction of hyper-space screens which not only indicate the presence of such tubes but also can stop even the most powerful from penetrating into normal space. We are fully equipped then against both these varieties of attack."

"What about your defenses against mental attack?" the Eddorian demanded.

"As you know," Zagan answered, "our screening is an exact duplicate of the plans you gave us of Eddore's own defense systems. However, I must confess that I am not wholly satisfied with this set up. It is true that such screens prevent the entrance of an invader or group of invaders of minds with the capacity of one of the Eich or even that of a Plooran. But we have no reason not to hypothesize that some of the enemy possess minds with a capacity nearly equal to yours. And against an assemblage of such minds, such screens would be of relatively little use. I hope I have not offended you by this frankness."

"On the contrary," replied Gharlane, "a recent experience of mine has convinced me that our defenses must be even more powerful than those of Eddore. Now, by exactly what methods are you planning to repel a possible mental attack by such third-level minds?"

Zagan hesitated slightly, then answered, "Actually for some time we found ourselves to be totally incapable of devising any such mechanism. But we have recently achieved a breakthrough on this and several other lines of investigation due to our new device: the telepathic computer. I have not previously informed you about this project since I wished to wait until I was sure it would be successful.

"We have devised a computer capable not only of logically categorizing and extrapolating from data but also of gathering data by means of telepathic scrutiny of the cosmos. Only second- and third-level minds are immune to its sensors. Our first command to it was to assemble as much information as possible about the accursed Arisian Lens. As you know, the Lens is no mere artifact but a living entity, attuned to only one being, and when not in contact with that being immediately lethal to any other being who touches it. Our computer was able to give us such accurate data on the composition of this device that we are now capable of altering the Lens-Lensman relationship so that the Lens ceases to be attuned to its wearer and instantly kills him.

"Unfortunately," and the Nergalian spoke with genuine grief, "the energy required for this feat is so great that all our resources are capable of killing only a handful of Lensmen. We have therefore decided to reserve this device as a defense against a possible attack by third-level intellects. We have developed a type of atomic-powered thought screens capable of detecting and for a limited time of blocking all such attack. We have tied the anti-Lens projectors into this defense so that any Lensman who gets past these screens will instantly be destroyed by his own Lens. I hope you approve of our planning."

Gharlane complimented the tyrant brusquely, then remarked, "I should like to see this computer of yours. Where is it located?"

The Nergalian complacently replied, "I took the liberty of mounting one of its extensions here in your offices." He strode to a corner of the room and indicated a dullish-gray, circular visiplate one yard in diameter. "This extension is keyed to your personality pattern. Simply address it telepathically, and it will obey all your instructions to the limits of its capabilities. Was there anything else that you wished to discuss at this time?"

"No," Gharlane replied, "you may go, but be ready to return should I have need of you."

He watched the Nergalian leave, then turned with grim satisfaction to the computer extension and asked, "What lines of inquiry are you currently pursuing?"

The computer's answering thought was precise and dry, free from any personality overtones. "There are four projects in all. First, to collect all possible data about the entity or group of entities tentatively termed Star A Star. Second, assuming that Arisia ultimately aims at the conquest of Eddore, to determine in detail how it plans to achieve this end. Third, to determine what Arisia plans to do after the destruction of Eddore. Fourth, to determine what the possibilities are for Nergalian domination of the Material Cosmic All when Eddore is destroyed."

The Eddorian replied grimly, "Modify that last project. Seek instead to determine how Nergal under my leadership may come to dominate the Material Cosmos. Now," he continued, "give me a precis of your findings on those first three projects of yours."

For Gharlane was in no way perturbed that the machine should thus assume the total destruction of his home planet and of the rest of his species. The dominant, nay the only, drive of Eddorian psychology was for power, absolute power. No Eddorian ever felt any loyalty to any other. No Eddorian was capable of such emotions as pity, friendship or patriotism. For millennia, the Eddorians had indeed striven to kill each other. Now the survivors of those fierce battles cooperated — but for only one reason: to conquer enough galaxies so that each Eddorian could have as much power and authority as he could possible handle. And now Gharlane of Eddore dreamed of ruling the Macrocosmic All!

Chapter Two: THE INVADER INVADED

Nearly twenty years later, however, Gharlane seemed no nearer to his goal. The Nergalian scientists, in spite of all their attempts, had proven to be incapable of refining their telepathic computer to the point at which it could tap second or third level minds without alerting the individuals involved. As Ingleroy, the chief of the project, explained to Gharlane, "One of the chief characteristics of these higher level minds is a virtual fusion of the conscious and unconscious. Thus such individuals are able to function at top efficiency even when their bodies are asleep or drugged. And for the same reason, we are incapable of penetrating such a mind without in some way alerting it consciously to the fact that such a penetration is being attempted."

During this period, Gharlane had confined himself to the Nergalian neighborhood of space. Much as it irked that proud mind to appear to be in hiding from the accursed Arisians and the Lensmen, he still recognized that such a course of activity was necessary. The fact that his ascosporic twin, his near equal, had been totally destroyed indicated that the Arisians were preparing to move openly against Eddore in the relatively near future, probably within the next few Tellurian centuries.

Gharlane had been reluctantly forced to acknowledge the Arisians' highly perfected planning ability. He knew that he could upset their visualization only if that plan of action did not take his existence into account. Therefore, he would have to keep his survival unknown to them until the moment at which his reappearance would be most effective. For this reason, he never attempted to communicate directly or indirectly with the Innermost Circle of Eddore. Knowledge that he was still alive would certainly affect their actions, and so that knowledge could be induced as a second order variable by the observant Arisians.

So for twenty years Gharlane played a lone hand, devoting himself to masterminding the Nergalian researches as he had once masterminded the affairs of two galaxies. Nor was he yet completely isolated from those extra-Nergalian doings. The Nergalians' telepathic computer in effect had turned virtually the entire population of many planets into a huge corps of spies. None of these spies was aware of the importance of his mission, or indeed aware of his mission at all. No spy could betray the Nergalian project to either Eddore or Arisia because they were all totally unaware of its existence.

Gharlane himself analyzed all of the data thus gathered, but for all his efforts, he and the computer were able to solve only the first of the computer's four projects: the identity of Star A Star. It soon became clear to Gharlane that this hypothetical entity exhibited far too many inconsistencies to be possibly only one person. Instead there was, according to the computer, a probability of 97% that the activities ascribed to Star A Star resulted from those of at least three and no more than six second level minds, all with varying personalities, two of whom must be Kim Kinnison of Sol III and Nadreck of Palain VII.

No breakthrough had occurred on the other three projects, however, until nearly twenty years after Gharlane's arrival on Nergal. At that time, Gharlane was digesting the latest reports on Kandron's success in creating a Civilization-wide epidemic of psychoses and mass hysteria, when he was notified that Ingleroy urgently desired to speak to him. Gharlane gave his permission, and the Nergalian scientist excitedly entered the room.

"As you know, Master," he began without preamble, "we have been long searching for some means of probing the thoughts of high level mentalities. We met with utter failure because we had confined ourselves to seeking to tap these minds directly. But, on the other hand, I have found it to be quite easy to create a device which would indirectly probe the mind of even a third-level mentality — provided that that individual was wearing a Lens. We know that the Arisians have already built such a function into the Lens for their own purposes, that the Lens not only catalyses the wearer's mental power but also enables any Arisian to observe in complete detail anything that its wearer senses or thinks.

"Obviously," the Nergalian continued, "under normal circumstances, the Arisians would be capable of observing any attempt of ours to make use of this same Lens function. But we do not need to confine ourselves to normal circumstances. The Arisians are clearly grooming the five Kinnison children for some kind of major attack, probably against Eddore itself. The boy in particular is known to have visited Arisia over ten times. He is undoubtedly privy to most of the Arisians' plans. All that we need to do is wait and watch for a time when his Arisian guardians are distracted, and then probe his mind through his Lens. Because this procedure is wholly indirect, no effect will be left on the brat's mind to alert either his siblings or his Arisian teachers."

"That's all very well, but how do you know your device will work?" asked Gharlane.

"I have already had it field-tested," Ingleroy replied. "First one of my subordinates used it on a first level Lensman, one of the recent graduating class."

"That's hardly significant," retorted the Eddorian. "Our computer is also effective against such mentalities. What makes you think your device will work on second or third level minds?"

"Once I knew that the device worked," Ingleroy continued imperturbably, "I tested it myself on two occasions. First I used it to probe the mind of a being at present at the first level of development although capable of advancing to second level if given the proper training. I refer, Master, to Clarissa Kinnison, wife of one second-stage Lensman and mother of five third-stage Lensmen. Since the second-stage Lensmen are, of course, under full Arisian scrutiny at all times, I did not attempt to probe any of their minds. Instead, I then trained the device on Dur of the Eich, a second-stage mentality who is one of the Boskonian Black Lensmen.

"In both cases, the results were completely successful. Transmission was clear and intact, nor was there any perception by the individuals involved or by others of their society that such invasion had taken place. If you would like me to conduct any other tests, I would be perfectly willing to do so, but I consider the efficiency of the device to be fully proven.

"In any case, there is one other matter of importance that I would like to raise, if you have time," the scientist continued. "Are you aware that Zagan has been plotting to seize ultimate control from you immediately after we have conquered the Arisians?"

"And you want to become tyrant in his stead," Gharlane said curtly.

"That's right. I—"

"Well, you won't," said the Eddorian flatly. "I have known about his schemes for the last century and foresee no difficulty whatsoever in forestalling them. Nor have I any illusions that you would be any more loyal a subordinate. However, that's not the reason why I'm refusing your request. Ingleroy, you're a scientist — and Zagan's an administrator — and as far as I'm concerned, you are both my tools, which I am using to achieve a specific desired end. I am not going to use you to perform an administration function of which you are not capable, no matter how much it might please your petty ego to get the title of tyrant. However, if your dissatisfaction with your present job seems unbearable, I would be quite willing to have you executed in order to give you peace of mind. Is that clear?" he demanded coldly, and the shaken Ingleroy indicated his assent.

Gharlane continued in a mollified tone, "Very well. Now I want you to work with Zagan to set up an organization to watch those five Kinnison brats, particularly the boy. I want them watched so closely that we can be ready to pull off that Lens-tap trick of yours with only a minute's notice. Now go away, and don't come back unless you have something else new to report or unless I summon you." The scientist silently left.

Time passed. Kandron of Onlo was destroyed by the coolly calculating Nadreck of Palain VII. The five young Kinnisons, children no longer, recognized their own limitations and returned one by one to Mentor for the treatment that would enable them to become mature third level minds. Their mother, Clarissa Kinnison, the Red Lensman, finally became a second stage Lensman through the aid of her son Kit. And finally one day, two years after his last visit, Ingleroy returned to Gharlane's office with news that Kit Kinnison seemed to be preparing to attempt an invasion of Eddore. "Zagan has remained in the Communications Room to monitor the reports," the scientist informed Gharlane. "We believe that conditions will soon be optimum for a Lens-tap and judged that you would want to supervise the proceedings yourself."

Gharlane signified his approval and followed Ingleroy to the Communications Room where he found everything in readiness for the delicate task of mental invasion that was about to be performed. Zagan greeted him effusively as he entered the room, then said, "The Tellurian is currently within a light year of the star cluster within which Eddore lies; he is still outside the furthestmost defense screens. We will be observing him by means of several of our agents who are mining artifacts and rare elements in the remains of the near-by systems destroyed in the Ancient Wars before the Eddorians chose to cooperate with one another."

Slowly the dot of light representing the young Lensman's ship on the visiscreen moved closer to the Eddorian sun. "He must be through the first four screens by now," commented Ingleroy tensely. "According to the computer estimate, there is a probability of 83% that he will reach the lowest level and escape. We intend to let him get as far as possible into the Eddorian defense network before tapping. After all, every new bit of information he gains will also advance our own knowledge of the situation."

Far away, Kit Kinnison doggedly drove his tiny spaceship forward until he reached a point inside of Eddore's innermost defensive screen. Here he knew he would be safe only as long as he did nothing;

the slightest crack in his shield would leave him open to detection. For a moment, he panicked. Then he regained his self control and continued to drive the ship straight downward toward the planet through the noxious mixture of gaseous substances which composed the Eddorian atmosphere.

When low enough, he halted the ship's downward motion and commenced to probe the planet with every one of his perceptive senses. Within almost a second, however, an Eddorian had detected him and came to investigate the intruder. Kit blasted him out of existence — and before the completely surprised monster had died, the young Lensman learned all that that entity had ever known about the Eddorian culture — its history, its ideals and ideologists, its organization, its military strategies — in short, its goals, strengths and weaknesses. He knew now exactly how, if Civilization were to triumph at all, the victory had to be achieved.

Little did the young Klovia realize, however, that even as he had absorbed this incredible amount of information, a relay had been momentarily opened up that had connected his Lens to far-off Nergal, that all of his hard-won knowledge and conclusions had already been broadcast to Civilization's deadliest enemies!

And so, completely unaware that his mind had been indirectly probed, Kit Kinnison, Child of the Lens, desperately hung on and slugged his way up into clear space as an entire planet furiously attempted his destruction. At long last, the young Lensman's ship passed through the second Eddorian screen and into an impenetrable protective sphere of Arisian thought.

At the shock of his sudden relief from mental torment, Kit fainted in his control chair. He lay there in a stupor which changed gradually into a deep and natural sleep — slumped, inert, with his Lens shining brightly on one brawny forearm. Ominous was it for the forces of Civilization on that day that neither the young Lensman nor his four fair sisters nor his Arisian protectors were ever to guess that the Lens which had aided the advancement of Civilization so greatly had now betrayed it in the penultimate hour of need.

And as Kit lay tranquilly sleeping, on far-off Nergal, Zagan impassively remarked, "I believe the computer should have fully digested the new data by this time." He turned to one of the machine's extensions and said, "Summarize your findings on your four areas of inquiry as modified by this new body of information."

The computer emotionlessly replied, "The first project concerned the identity of the so-called Star A Star. As indicated by previous findings, the actions attributed to this being resulted from the life patterns of several individuals. Those individuals are four in number: Kim Kinnison of Klovia, Nadreck of Palain VII, Worsel of Velantia, and Tregonsee of Rigel IV.

"The second project concerned the Arisian plans for conquering Eddore. It now appears that they intend to use three major forces in this battle: first, the Arisian world mind; second, a Lensman group mind; third, a fivefold fusion of the Kinnison children, which the entity being probed termed the Unit. This last will be a weapon of great power, since all the cooperating entities have third level minds

and were furthermore bred to have personalities that would ensure an almost perfectly efficient fused group mind. Therefore, I predict a probability of 98% that such an invasion, unhindered by us, would be successful."

Zagan began to make a remark, but Gharlane curtly silenced him and told the computer to continue.

"The third project," said the machine, "concerned the actions of the Arisians after the destruction of Eddore. The mind being probed was not consciously aware of such plans but did contain several pieces of data relevant to them. I compute a probability of 96% that the Arisians plan to pass collectively on to the next stage of existence after, as they think, ensuring the survival of Civilization by the total destruction of the Eddorians.

"The fourth project, as modified by the command of Gharlane, is to ascertain the chances that Nergal under his leadership might successfully dominate the Material Cosmic All once Eddore is destroyed. I have insufficient data to give even a tentative solution at this time to the probabilities for such a scope of conquest. However, I do compute a probability of 85% that Eddorian-led Nergalian forces can successfully dominate the entire First and Second Galaxies by following a certain optimum course of action."

Stark silence reigned in the Communications Room when the computer had finished. Finally Zagan again emboldened himself to speak. "Of course, the computer's estimate of a 989% probability of Arisian victory applies only in the event that we ourselves take no part in the struggle. Since the Arisians are not aware of our existence, a surprise attack would probably be capable of totally disrupting their plan of action. The anti-Lens device in particular would enable us to destroy the five third stage Lensmen and thus deprive the Arisians of their most valuable weapon, plus wreaking great psychological damage among their forces."

"You are totally correct," said Gharlane coldly. "However, we shall take no action whatsoever. If the other members of the Innermost Circle are foolish enough to allow themselves to be destroyed, let them die. I see no advantage to be gained by rescuing them. Instead, we shall continue to wait and watch. Only if new information is gathered which tends to disprove the computer's present findings shall we take any part in the forthcoming battles."

And so again time passed without any overt action from Nergal. Arisia was defended against the attacking forces of Boskonian. Ploor fell, destroyed by its own sun, in a supernova produced by the Arisians throwing a loose planet through a hyper-spatial tube deep into that variable star. And finally Eddore itself was totally conquered, all its monstrous inhabitants exterminated by the incredible driving force produced by the cooperation of the Arisians and the Lensmen, as led and coordinated by the Unit itself.

Less than a day later, the five Children of the Lens spoke again with that fourfold fusion of personalities which they knew as Mentor. Their first concern was to prevent Civilization from ever realizing the true nature of that last battle. The official story was to be that Ploor had been the top of Boskone and that it had been destroyed through the efforts of the four second stage Lensmen. The titanic Battle of Eddore would be spoken of only as a mopping-up mission, necessary to eradicate a residue of non-material malignancy left by the destruction of Ploor.

But then, after they had agreed on this version of events, Mentor surprisingly announced that the Arisians now planned to resign their Guardianship of Civilization into the hands of the Unit. As the Five incredulously listened, they became aware that all the rest of the Arisians had already vanished from the cosmos, gone to explore the possibilities of the next stage of existence.

Mentor reassured them that despite the resent chaotic condition of both galaxies, all hostile activity was completely disorganized, well within the ability of the Galactic Patrol as headed by their father to handle. They listened to him, still half-unbelievingly, as he said, "You may believe implicitly that what I now tell you is the truth, that even though we Arisians are no longer here, all shall be will: with us, with you, and with all Civilization." And thus, deluded into confidence by their false visualization, the four Moulders of Civilization departed to the next stage of existence; the last of the

Arisians were gone.

And on Nergal, Gharlane perceived that all of his hated enemies had now finally died. The triumphant Eddorian contemplated the future with an indescribably malignant pleasure, in an ecstasy of evil. Two forces had curbed his vaulting ambition for millennia: the Arisians and that one among the Eddorians who was his superior, that entity who was called the All-Highest. Now both were destroyed. and every atom of Gharlane's being rejoiced in the satisfaction of being the most powerful mind in the known universe, able to realize his dreams of infinite power unhindered by any effective opposition whatsoever!

Chapter 3: KINNISON KIDNAPPED AGAIN

Mentor's last act before his final departure had been to restore Kim Kinnison to the arms of his loving wife. By an irony of fate, the Galactic Coordinator had been the only Lensman in existence who had not participated, even though unknowingly, in the Battle of Eddore. Only a short time before that awe-stirring clash of mentalities, he had been trapped in a hyper-spatial tube and thrown through the cosmos to a place beyond even Mentor's ability to locate him. He was found not by the Arisians but by his wife and children combined in a sixfold linkage of love. And Lensmen everywhere rejoiced at the news that Kimball Kinnison, the Keystone of Civilization, had returned to lead the Galactic Patrol once again.

And so Kim and Clarissa happily returned home to Klovia, secure in the knowledge that even the immaterial residuum of Ploor had been destroyed.

Only a week later, however, Kim received a Lensed thought from Cliff Maitland, Vice Galactic Coordinator, who had been acting head of the Patrol during the last few days.

"Hello, Kim," thought Maitland. "My apologies for breaking into your homecoming like this, but something rather interesting's come up. We've received word that Planetary President Renwood of Antigan IV has reappeared. You remember, the guy who vanished almost a year ago, probably through a hyper-spatial tube."

"QX, I remember," replied Kinnison. "We never really figured out whether he was an innocent victim of a kidnapping or a Boskonian agent. When and where did he reappear?"

"He's been back on Antigan IV for the last two days," said Maitland. "He's announced he plans to formally reassume the planetary presidency day after tomorrow. His successor doesn't seem to be too happy about the situation, but he's being graceful about it. Anyway, Renwood's requested us to send an official representative of the Patrol Administration to witness the re-inauguration. Have you got any suggestions as to who we should send?"

"Don't be coy, Cliff," said Kinnison. "You know I want to follow this thing up. Either he's a genuine wooly white lamb who needs our protection or else he's a low man on the Boskonian totem pole who's daring us to come and get him. Either way I'm going to handle this mess personally."

And so it came about that the Gray and the Red Lensmen parted once more. And less than a day later, Kim Kinnison disembarked once again on Antigan IV. He was met once more by Wainright, chief of the local Patrol unit.

"QX, Wainright, fill me in on the situation," Kinnison directed briskly. "When and where did the president reappear?"

"Renwood landed here at the planet's only spaceport two days ago," said the Patrol officer. "He came in a private spacecraft of unknown origin. He's already taken over control of the government again; the ceremony tomorrow is just a formality. When he got word of your coming, he said he wanted to talk to you and tell you all about what happened to you while he was gone. He hasn't said anything about it to us as yet.

"I've got a shielded car waiting for you — with four other Patrolmen in it. Fontelray and Nambry, the two Rigelian Lensmen you assigned to the planet after the president's disappearance, stayed back at the Capitol Grounds to keep watch just in case someone tries pulling something fancy again."

"QX," said Kinnison. "Let's go join them there. I'd like to meet the president personally."

As the shielded Patrol car headed toward the Capitol Grounds, Kinnison noticed that the streets were practically deserted. "Why isn't there any traffic or any pedestrians?" he asked. "Is the planet panicking again?"

"No, sir," replied Wainright. "First of all, this day of the week, it's called Wunzi in the local time system, is a working day. And those people who aren't working are staying home to follow the news. Renwood is going to be delivering a state of the planet address that's scheduled to go in about fifteen minutes. I can set up reception if you want to hear him."

"Do that," said Kinnison. Then, while Wainright adjusted the receptor controls, the Gray Lensmen attuned himself to the minds of the two Rigelian Lensmen stationed on the planet. "This is Kinnison," he said curtly. "I've come to town as official Patrol delegate to the re-inauguration. Has either of you noticed anything unusual lately — particularly in connection with Renwood?"

"Welcome, Galactic Coordinator Kinnison," Fontelray responded. "As far as either I or my companion are able to perceive, President Renwood appears to be sincerely on the side of Civilization. However, we do not have sufficient data to form a definite conclusion about this or any other matter relating to this entity, since he is possessed of some screen which blocks our sense of perception at what appears to be his skin."

Kinnison did an abrupt mental double-take. He was encountering bigger game than he had expected. "I've experienced such a phenomenon only once," he told the two Rigelians. "It was in the case of Premier Fossten of Thrale, the renegade Arisian. What in the name of Klono's aluminum appendix is Renwood doing with one?"

"Perhaps," began an answering thought from Nambry, but then the Lensman's thought ceased, and Kinnison felt an indescribably agonizing mental blow that tortured every fiber of his being. Before he had fully recovered, a second such wave of anguish swept over him. And he knew with a shuddering certainty that while in the very act of communicating with him, the two Rigelian Lensmen had died. It had happened to him dozens of times before, but still Kinnison knew he would never be able to cease to respond to such an indescribable moment of utter tragedy.

Kinnison now turned his attention again to Wainright, but barely had he started to inform the Patrolman of this new development when he became aware that the shielded car's progress had become marked by an ominous bumping sound. "I'm afraid, sir," said Wainright apologetically, "that we've developed a flat tire. Patrolman Van Dibble," he said to the husky Valerian who was driving, "pull over to the curb."

Then Wainright turned to Kinnison and said respectfully, "Lensman, I'm not altogether certain this

flat is purely accidental. Our course of action from here depends on your estimate of how much danger we're probably in right now. We can change tires and go on, but that involves someone's opening the door and leaving the car. Or you can Lens back to headquarters and have them send out some more Patrol units for extra safety value. But it'll take at least fifteen minutes for them to get here, and anything's liable to happen in the meantime. What do you think we should do?"

But the Gray Lensman never answered. For even as Wainright finished speaking, in a truck a block away, three Nergalian henchmen happily smiled as a fourth opened an ultra-relay — and a capsule carefully hidden under the front seat of the Patrol car obediently let out a jet of compressed air which within seconds had filled the air of the vehicle with a volatile suspension of thionite.

And trapped within that drug-laden atmosphere, every man in the car stiffened into the characteristic thionite muscle-lock. Even Kim Kinnison's powers of concentration were utterly dissipated by the effects of the drug as the entranced Gray Lensman suddenly realized that he had attained the ultimate satisfaction of all his desires.

By this time, the Nergalian truck had pulled up alongside of the Patrol car. Using a portable tractor beam, the leading henchman easily yanked open the shielded Patrol car's door, dragged Kinnison's passive body out into the street, and then hurriedly dumped the Lensman into a specially prepared, dureum-lined compartment in the back of the truck.

Meanwhile two of the other Nergalians had gotten out of the truck and were amusing themselves by raying off the heads of the Patrol escort, who were too locked in ecstasy to recognize that they were being murdered, let alone to defend themselves against the attack. Now the fourth zwilnik called impatiently from the truck, "Come on, you imbeciles, we've got a deadline to meet." The three hurriedly got back into the truck which did a rapid U-turn and headed at a furious rate back to the spaceport.

And inside the speeding vehicle, Kim Kinnison finally emerged from the ecstatic thionite trance. Resolutely the Gray Lensman forced himself to ignore both his humiliation at having been so easily captured and his body's insistent demand for more of the indescribably degrading joy he had just experienced. Instead, Kinnison doggedly concentrated on finding some loophole of escape from his present trap.

In vain. The compartment was lined, as has been mentioned before, with dureum, that unbelievably strong synthetic metal which is the only known substance that can fully exist both in normal space and in the pseudo-space of the hyper-spatial tube. Kinnison's DeLameters were unable to even heat up the compartment's lock mechanism, let alone melt it. And worse still, the compartment was solidly screened. Kinnison's sense of perception was stopped a full inch away from the dureum lining. The telepathic spectrum was also impenetrably blocked. Try as he would, the Gray Lensman was unable to drive a thought beyond the imprisoning dureum.

Suddenly there came a squeal of brakes, and the shock of the vehicle's deceleration flung Kinnison against the back of the compartment and knocked him into momentary unconsciousness. When he recovered, the scene had greatly changed. He was still in the same dureum-lined compartment, but now the air that he breathed was dense and viscous. And the Lensman's body again experienced the starkly indescribable nausea characteristic of inter-dimensional acceleration.

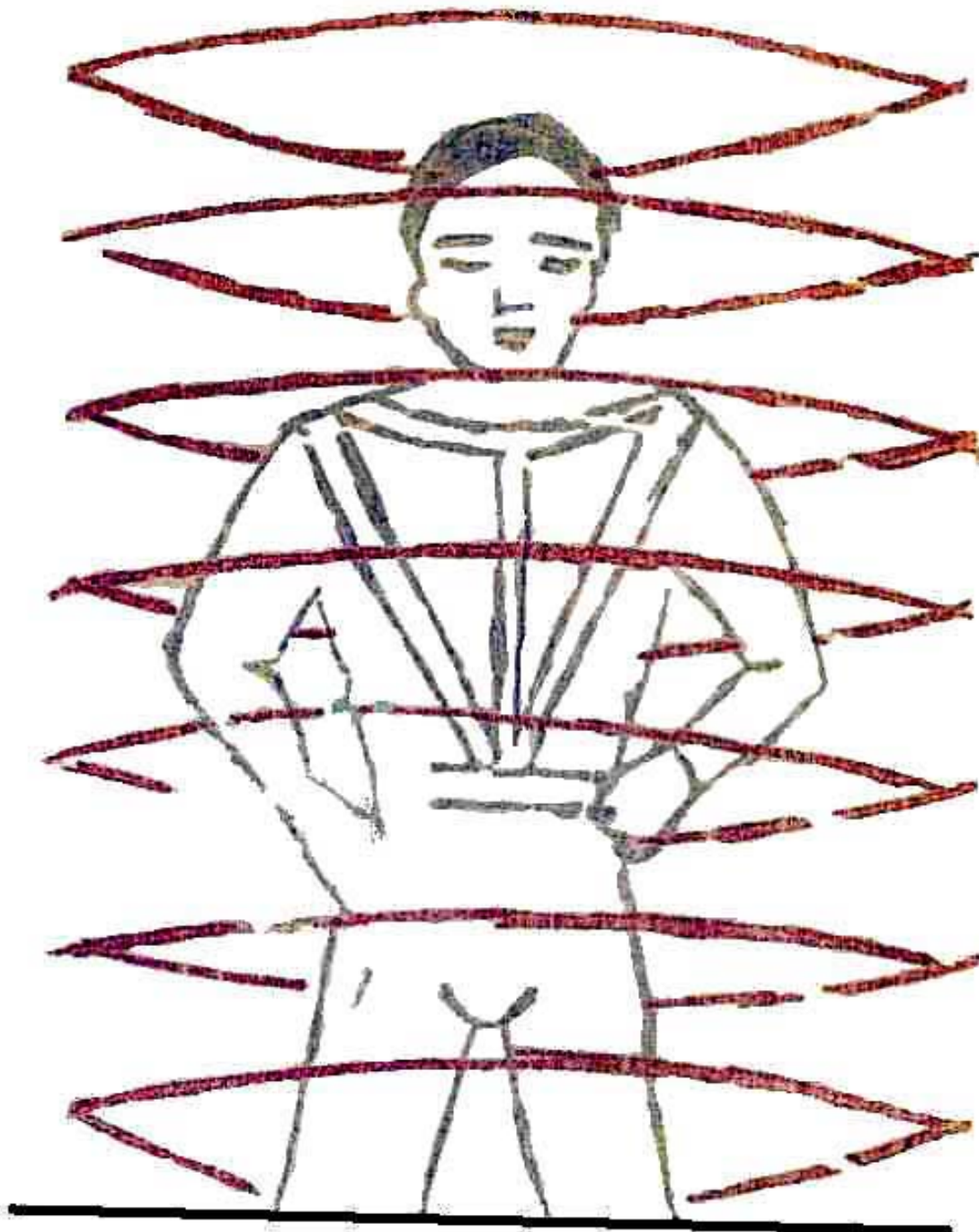
"This makes the third time this year I've been trapped in a hyper-spatial tube," the Gray Lensman thought in disgust. "By Klono's lithium liver, it's getting monotonous."

He rubbed his sore head, then made himself as comfortable as he could manage inside the bare

compartment and prepared to wait until his captors decided to investigate him further.

And so Kinnison waited, while the inter-dimensional acceleration died away and then, after several hours, was replaced by the equally indescribably sickening sensation of inter-dimensional deceleration. Finally that torture too ceased, the air became normal once more, and Kim Kinnison drew a deep sigh of relief. Surely he would not have to wait much longer.

But still no one came to inspect the captive, and after a few minutes, Kinnison felt himself pressed tight to the floor of the compartment as if it were speedily accelerating upward. Then this motion too seemed to cease, and gravity became normal again. But it was not until an hour later that the lid of the compartment was finally raised, and Kinnison could sense the outer world again.



He drew his DeLameters, but they were instantly yanked out of his hands by tractor beams. He tried to make use of the Worsel-Thorndyke projector of life-destroying vibrations, but found, as he had half-expected, that it was of no more use than it had been against the beings he had encountered in the hyper-spatial tube he had entered on Radelix nearly a year ago. He tried to move forward to attack his captors in hand-to-hand combat, but found himself unable to move either forward or back, helplessly caught in a tractor zone.

And then a cold voice reached his ears: "I have permitted you these few minutes of folly to show you the futility of attempting to attack me or in any other way to resist my will. I trust you are now convinced." "Who are you?" asked Kinnison angrily.

"You may call me President Renwood," answered the other. "And I am most gratified to meet you. I am only sorry that I am now unable to welcome you to Antigan IV, but two circumstances prevent me. First, we are not present on that planet but in space. And second, strictly speaking, Antigan IV no longer exists. That is, Antigan IV is now what used to be Antigan V. In short, Mr. Galactic Coordinator, one of your planets is missing."

Kinnison's mind raced furiously. This ape looked exactly like Renwood down to twenty decimal places. But that proved exactly nothing when there was a skin-level screen against his sense of perception. Could he be a Plooran who'd been off-planet when his home world was destroyed? (Kinnison was never to know that the being he now confronted was in reality D'zillich, the chief of Nergal's corps of interstellar secret agents, a fiendishly clever master of stealth and disguise.) All Kinnison knew was that his only chance of escape lay in putting this self-styled Renwood off his guard. With intentional naivete, he demanded, "President Renwood, are you trying to tell me you blew up your own planet

"Not at all," replied the other, "merely removed it — via hyper-spatial tube, of course. However, the planet is now without any effective source of solar heat and illumination. Also, its inhabitants are incapable of leaving it, because a rather large duodec bomb totally destroyed the spaceport a few minutes after this ship's departure. In fact, even if I took no further action, most of the planetary population would probably be quite dead before the end of the day. ""No more incredulous comments, Lensman?" he asked sardonically. "Well, suppose I tell you then what's going to happen next." The Nergalian glanced at his wrist chronometer. "Or better still, suppose I show you?" He turned to one of the side walls which was totally featureless except for a gray visiscreen. "Computer," he said quietly, "indicate the current progress of Operation K.... The K, of course," he explained to the Lensman, "stands for Klovia. The first step in this operation has already been completed. You have been decoyed off-planet."

By this time, the visiscreen had sprung into life. D'zillich turned to one of his subordinates. "Explain the screen's symbolic system to the Lensman here, Borkle."

"Yes, sir," the man responded. "The screen is now focused on the Klovia solar system and adjoining space. Our receptor is focused along the plane of the ecliptic, which is why the picture appears to be two-dimensional. The white dot represents the Klovia sun and the black dot is Klovia itself. The green dots indicate the Patrol's seventy-six defense bases and ships. Patrol-controlled planets and negaspheres are indicated by blue dots.

"Most of our forces are not currently on the screen. When they appear, the pink dots will represent planets. The two red cylinders now on the screen are our hyper-spatial tubes. They have not yet entered normal space, and so are impossible for the Patrol to detect. Their entrance into normal

space will be indicated by the appearance of a tip of purple at their front ends,"

Borkle turned to the visiscreen and asked, "What stage is the operation now at, computer?"

A coldly unemotional voice from the visiscreen announced, "Step Two completed. Step Three in progress — to be completed in 310 seconds."

"That means," said Borkle to the Lensman, "that out fleets have already begun moving into the hyper-spatial tubes. In approximately five minutes, the first of them should reach the mouths of the tubes. Three seconds before that happens, the tubes will emerge into normal space. We expect to give Klovia quite a series of surprises. Tube A here will be carrying over a hundred planets, and the computer estimates that at least thirty of them should get through before your Patrol is able to destroy the tube."

"You seem to have left something out of your calculations," Kinnison said grimly. "Even if we don't stop your fleet of planets from emerging into normal space, we still have our sunbeam."

"Ah yes, the sunbeam," D'zillich smiled. "We call it the astrobeam incidentally. A most fascinating weapon, enormously destructive, but really quite incapable of being rapidly maneuvered. A very unwieldy means of defense."

"In any case, we don't greatly care what becomes of those planets. Most of them are merely cosmic clutter, totally useless except for purposes of destruction. There is, however, one exception. One of the planets is the ex-Antigan IV. And your Patrolmen will soon destroy it, either by blasting it with the astrobeam or else by destroying it within the hyper-spatial tube." The Nergalian chuckled at the thought of forcing the Patrol of Civilization to destroy one of their own planets, then became impassively quiet, watching the visiscreen.

Time crawled by. The Lensman raged inwardly to be thus trapped at a time when Boskonian threatened Klovia itself, the center of Civilization, the world on which he and his family had lived so happily for over twenty years. And he was unable to do anything to stop it.

He scanned the room frantically to see if there was any unshielded being that he could work through — a pet, a spider, a worm, even a fly. But the room was void of such lifeforms. Nergalians are too unsentimental to own pets and far too efficient to permit pests on board their spacecraft.

Finally on the visiscreen, the red cylinder which Borkle had called Tube A acquired a purple tip, and instants later, there emerged through it a series of pink dots representing planets, all heading directly towards Klovia. After what seemed an eternity to the helpless Kinnison, three of the great Patrol outposts swung towards the mouth of the tube and, seconds later, the tube vanished from the visiscreen. But still the line of pink dots remained, rapidly advancing towards Klovia. Then suddenly the white dot which was Klovia's sun elongated itself, put forth a thin line which reached out toward the invading planets.

"The sun beam," Kinnison cried in triumph. "Your attack has failed."

"Not at all," replied D'zillich coldly. "You have apparently not noticed that our second tube emerged into normal space some time ago, about ten seconds after the first was destroyed. Already some of its cargo of planets has advanced within the orbit of the outermost planet of this solar system. The tube itself will soon be destroyed, but the planets will get through. Your sunbeam is far too massive, too unmaneuverable, to be able to complete a 180 degree turn in the few seconds left before the planets

reach their target."

And Kinnison watched with horror as what the Nergalian had predicted came to pass. As the first of the massive planets struck the black dot which was Klovia, the Lensman felt an aching sense of loss in every fiber of his being and knew that the Boskonian had spoken truly. Hitherto he had tried to console himself with the thought that all of this might be a hoax, a delusion intended to break his spirit. But he knew that this overpowering sense of grief and deprivation which he now felt could have only one cause. Mac, Clarissa, the Red Lensman, his wife for over twenty years, had just died. Not all the thought screens in the cosmos would have been able to prevent him from sharing with her the agony of that moment of her death.

"And so Klovia is finally destroyed," observed D'zillich. "the last seconds of its inhabitants must indeed have been interesting to experience. The shock as that first planet struck home created a blast of pure energy, vibrating on all levels of the spectrum. Probably the last sensation that the inhabitants of Klovia experienced was that of a blinding flash and a deafening report.

"But I should not waste time with these irrelevant details. Let us get return to the duty of the day. Lensman Kinnison, your moment of death has come." D'zillich turned to Borkle. "Ray him down."

Borkle smilingly picked up Kinnison's own DeLameters and turned them on the helpless Lensman. Two torrents of man-made lightning leapt forward from the two hand-projectors, and moments later Kinnison's charred body lay on the cold dureum floor.

Yet a spark of vitality still remained within the Tellurian's rugged frame. Softly the Gray Lensman muttered his last words. "By Klono's thorium thalamus,... all alone now... Not even... a spider... to help." And so Kimball Kinnison, second stage Lensman, Galactic Coordinator of Civilization, died.

"Vaporize the corpse, Borkle, while you're at it," said D'zillich briskly. "We don't want any mess aboard ship." And while Borkle impassively destroyed the final fragments of what had once Kim Kinnison, D'zillich contentedly removed the Renwood disguise he had been wearing.

Then, with what for a Nergalian approximately light-heartedness, he went to the intercom and contacted the pilot. "Set course at once for Nergal," he ordered. "We've accomplished our mission here in full. And I have a pressing engagement to keep once we get back home."

Chapter 4: Alarums and Incursions

The destruction of Klovia plunged Civilization into a state of demoralized chaos. For over twenty years, people had been told that Klovia was the most securely guarded planet in the Two Galaxies. If it had now been obliterated, then no other world could be considered safe.

Nor was there much the Galactic Patrol could do to bolster morale. Indeed, the Patrol was itself the chief victim of the attack. At one fell stroke, it had lost its prime headquarters, its central bureaucracy — and its top officers. Its Galactic Coordinator, Kim Kinnison, was missing — along with the entire planet of Antigan IV. Its Vice-Coordinator, Cliff Maitland, had died in the annihilation of Klovia. In fact, the Patrol's entire chain of command had been beheaded.

It was indeed a tribute to the courage, self-reliance and initiative of the surviving Patrolmen that utter chaos did not immediately result. In that hour of need, each Lensman, each Patrolman, continued to do his best for Civilization — but the central, driving force that had previously coordinated those efforts now was gone.

To the five young Kinnisons, the news came like a nightmarish bolt of lightning from a clear summer sky. They had spent the last week on Arisia, now a totally deserted world, all of its former inhabitants gone on to the next plane of existence. Yet the planet itself was still a beautiful one. The five Children of the Lens had planned to stay there for some time, fitting themselves to be Guardians of Civilization. For the first time in months, they had allowed themselves to partially relax, totally confident in Mentor's assertion that all the Eddorians were now totally destroyed.

Kit, with the aid of his sisters, had devoted his first few days on Arisia to preparing transcripts of a history of that last momentous year of galactic intrigue and conflict, for the benefit of future third level mentalities. These transcripts were encased in containers of force which only a third level mind could open and which radiated their presence on bands of thought that only a third level mind could hear. Aside from this relatively minor task, the Five had done little those first few days, taking the time as a well-deserved vacation from the tensions of the last year.

And so on the ninth day after the Battle of Eddore, the Five went to the beach — the eastern equatorial shore of Arisia's one ocean, to be exact. The air was warm, the water pleasantly cool, and the hours passed quickly. Constance had just finished ducking Kit's head under water for some fancied insult, when Kathryn pointedly remarked, "Children, I believe it's time for lunch." Gaily the five young redheads trooped to the shore. Then suddenly Kit became aware that Tregonsee was trying to Lens him.

"Hello, Uncle Trig," called Kit. "What's up?" But at first there came no answer, only a strong wave of grief and sympathy. Then Tregonsee mastered himself and related, as concisely as possible, the tragic events of the last few days.

Every fiber of Kit's being shook with shock at that dreadful news. Karen stood stunned. Camilla suddenly sat down on the damp sand and buried her head in her hands. Kathryn closed her eyes for a moment as if fighting against tears, then resolutely opened them and thought to Tregonsee, "If they've touched one hair on Dad's head, I'll—"

"Kat," her brother interjected quickly, "we have to face facts. Mom's dead, and Dad may be too. I hope like anything he's not. But we'll have to assume that he is until we get some proof to the contrary."

Kathryn answered defiantly, "And I'm going to assume he's alive until we get some proof to the contrary. Dad had plenty of jets going for him." She abruptly screened off her thoughts from the rest and retreated to the inner fastness of her own mind.

"It's not fair," cried Constance. "We were told all the danger was over," and then the traumatized girl broke into hysterical tears. Kit stayed his new maturity of viewpoint. He resolutely stifled his own grief, and walked over to his weeping sister and held her in his arms. "Don't cry, Con," he said gently. "We don't have time to cry. We've got to hurry and find out just who were the zwilniks that did these things — and then we'll have to destroy them. Otherwise, they aren't going to give us time to mourn for Mom and Dad. They'll just go ahead and destroy us."

Tregonsee's thought broke in again. "I am glad to see that you are able to think so maturely. I have no doubt, Christopher Kinnison, that this must be Civilization's hour of greatest danger. I believe it would be wise for us surviving high level Lensmen to have a conference about what our course of action must now be.... Shall we meet together again in an hour's time?" Deep in thought, Kit assented, and then — after Tregonsee had broken off contact — turned to his four sisters. "What I said just now to Con applies to all of us," he said grimly. "We've got no time for private griefs. We've

got two galaxies to take care of."



Constance said rebelliously, "We didn't do a perfect job of it before — or this wouldn't have happened. And that was when we had help. Now we're all alone. Even Mentor's gone. And Dad's... disappeared."

"That's right," Kit said somberly. "We're the only Guardians that Civilization's got left — and we've got to live up to the responsibility. It's Lensman's Burden." He looked down tenderly at Constance's tear-stained face. "Done crying, sis?" he asked. She nodded mutely. He absent-mindedly reached for a handkerchief toward his swim trunks, then shrugged and kissed each of her wet eyelids briskly. Then he grasped her by the hand and pulled her up the sandy beach to where stood the other three Children of the Lens.

"QX, kids," he said. "We've got less than an hour till that conference with Worsel, Tregonsee, and Nadreck. Now suppose we start thinking about what exactly went wrong and about what exactly we're going to do about it. Any first-order conclusions, anybody?"

There was a long pause, then Karen said slowly, "The first thing we've got to face is that Mentor's whole scheme of visualization was somehow dead wrong. Remember his last words to us were that Dad and the Patrol could easily handle all of Eddore's leftover organization. Somehow, some way, someone must have managed to trick him, to hide some vital fact of information from him."

"And," added Constance, "that's the someone that it's now up to us to outmaneuver."

Kit nodded glumly, then said, "Well, first things first. Which one of the second stage Lensmen should we persuade to take over the Galactic Coordinatorship?"

"Aren't you going to do it?" asked Kathryn.

Kit shook his red-thatched head vigorously. "No. And for two reasons. First of all, I'm going to have no time for that kind of paperwork job. And second, it may have slipped your mind, Kat, but my chronological age is barely twenty-two. The Lensmen wouldn't mind a bit if I became Coordinator. The Patrol as a whole could probably take it without too much grumbling. But how do you think the average citizen would feel at the thought of a Galactic Coordinator barely old enough to vote? No, it's got to be one of the second stage Lensmen. The only question is which one."

"Not Worsel," said Constance regretfully. "He's more human than most people — and a whole lot smarter — but he isn't detached enough to be a good administrator. He's a one-man fighter, not suited to directing group action. He's a leader, not an administrator."

Kit looked inquiringly at Karen. "Not Nadreck," she said. "He's detached enough. Too detached. He doesn't have the scope of viewpoint to handle the job. Remember when he destroyed Kandron. He didn't find out what Kandron knew about the upper echelons — because it was out of his project focus."

She turned to Camilla. "Cam, I hate to say it, but it's got to be Tregonsee. He's the only one left who can handle the job the way it's got to be done."

Camilla nodded vigorously and added, "The very fact that he was the one the other two asked to notify us clinches it. It proves they'll be willing to work under him."

"QX," said Kit. "Tregonsee it is. Now who for Vice-Coordinator?"

"Better take a humanoid," said Karen. "Why not Port Admiral Raoul LaForge? He was off Klovia when....".

"Good idea," Kit hastily interjected into the dead silence. "Question number three: what kind of action do we Five take?"

"First," said Kathryn, "let's clarify what we're going to be acting against. Our Enemy out there — whoever he is — favors the direct approach. So far he hasn't used any hallucinations like an Overlord would have, or any of that wheels within wheels approach that Kandron was so fond of. When this boy wants to destroy something, he strikes directly at it. And his targets so far have been Patrol Centers — and second stage Lensmen."

"Then maybe we should go back to our earlier strategy," said Constance. "One girl riding herd on each second stage Lensmen."

"QX," said Camilla, "but that still leaves two of us unaccounted for, Kat and Kit."

"Not really," Kit said. "Listen, Con, Cam and Kay — you three tag after those second stage proteges of yours as near as you can get without making them nervous. Guard them as close as is absolutely

possible. Meanwhile, Kathryn and I will be keeping watch on the rest of the Two Galaxies. I'll take Galaxy Two," he said grimly, "since that's where the last attack was. Kat, you take the First Galaxy, and concentrate on Earth. If Klovia can be taken, then Tellus can too. And we can't let that happen. Them's my plans. QX, everyone?" Four red-thatched heads nodded approval, and the Five prepared themselves to subtly insinuate their plans into the minds of Worsel, Tregonsee, and Nadreck at the forthcoming conference.

And only a few hours later, the five Children of the Lens left Arisia and once more took up their tasks as Guardians of Civilization. Their five speedsters flew at high velocities through the void, each with its own special mission, its own destination. They left behind a deserted planet, guarded only by mechanical screens now that its former inhabitants had voluntarily chosen to pass on to the next stage of existence.

But Arisia did not stay deserted for long. Once, millennia before, the Eddorians had come into the Arisian time-space continuum, from a horribly different plenum. The Arisians had summoned all their power and ingenuity to combat the Eddorian menace, and they would indeed have totally succeeded had it not been for the duplicity of Gharlane.

Now, only days after all but one of the Eddorians had been destroyed, by an ironic twist of fate, the plenum was invaded anew, this time not by a race of beings but by a single entity. Yet that worthy was in his own way as egocentric, as power hungry, as hostile to the basic tenets of Civilization as any Eddorian. Nor was his mind potentially inferior in power to that of Gharlane himself.

This being entered the space-time continuum on the outskirts of the First Galaxy. However, soon after his arrival, he became aware of the third level emanations proceeding from the force field transcript containers on Arisia. He immediately drove his ship toward that distant world and, easily making his way through the unmanned screens set to repel anyone who was not a second or third level mentality, to obliterate the menace of any invader loyal to Eddore or Boskone, landed on the planet, the first being neither an Arisian nor a Lensman ever to do so. He then made his way to the transcript containers, and soon had one open.

And as the interloper impassively scanned the contents of the transcript, trouble was already also brewing elsewhere in the nearby cosmos. On the desolate planet of Zabriska, a conference had just begun between Zagan, planetary dictator of Nergal, and Surgat, the ranking survivor of those Ploorans who had by various quirks of fate been off-planet at the time of the destruction of their home world. Surgat thus officially controlled what was left of the Boskonian organization, a force much diminished in power yet still one to be reckoned with. For the Galactic Patrol's policy of striking at the top of the enemy totem pole had left literally hundreds of lower echelon operations completely untouched.

"Greetings, Zagan," began Surgat. "I am delighted to meet with you once again. How are your plans progressing for overthrowing Gharlane?"

Without bothering to acknowledge the Plooran's greetings or his question, Zagan brusquely demanded, "Why did you call and ask me to meet you here? Don't you know how difficult it is for me to keep that Eddorian and his underlings from suspecting me? I'm certain D'zillich has planted dozens of spies on me. Just exactly what came up that's so important that our normal communications arrangements aren't secure enough?"

"My news," said Surgat furiously, "is that our operatives are crossing each other up all over both galaxies. If our Plooran-Nergalian plan to conquer the Macrocosmic All is to succeed, we must have better coordination of efforts. For example, just five days ago, at a thionite auction, one of your

agents and one of mine started bidding against one another for the drug till the price went up sky high. I believe it was my agent who ended up buying it, but that scarcely matters — such incidents indicate the present extremely inefficient state of our alliance.

"Then, only three days ago, two of my Black Lensmen, Eichdur and Eichwight, spent over an hour destroying what they assumed was a fleet of Patrol ships before the accidentally found out that the camouflaged fleet was really Nergalian in origin. I'm afraid only a few hundred of your ships in the seventeenth sector survived. Another costly blunder due to lack of coordination.

"Worse yet, one of my humanoid subordinates, a being by the name of Kartong, spent five years working his way into the position of planetary vice-president on Antigan IV. He had just spent the last year slowly shaking the planet's faith in the Patrol, and was about to maneuver it into being the first world to secede voluntarily from the ranks of Civilization. And then your accursed D'zillich spoiled the whole plan by disguising himself as Renwood and kidnapping the whole planet to use it to bombard Klovia — destroying my agent Kartong in the process. Zagan, something must be done to prevent instances like these from multiplying."

The Nergalian nodded grimly, then said, "I agree wholeheartedly. When I get back to Nergal, I shall certainly speak severely to D'zillich about his actions." He turned to go back to his spaceship.

"Don't leave quite so quickly," said Surgat. "You still haven't answered the question I asked you before — how are you planning on disposing of Gharlane? You know that we two can never become Joint Overlords of the Cosmic All as long as that Eddorian continues to exist."

Zagan's always present suspicions about the Plooran's trustworthiness suddenly became greatly intensified. This matter of Plooran and Nergalian forces unintentionally sabotaging each other was only a routine problem, scarcely as urgent as Surgat's earlier coded message had implied. And the Plooran's curiosity about Zagan's plans for Gharlane seemed somewhat excessive.

The Nergalian replied evasively, "I've been perfecting my plan for destroying Gharlane over the last twenty years, and I guarantee it'll be successful. Why do you ask? Was there any helpful suggestion you wished to contribute?"

Surgat said, "Not at all. In fact, I admire your planning ability immensely. For instance, the way you maneuvered Kinnison into allowing himself to be killed by his own DeLameters. Magnificent."

Zagan's countenance — and, more important, his outer thoughts — remained impassive at that remark, but his inner mind raced furiously. No one could know how Kim Kinnison had been slain except for himself, D'zillich, and the crew. Surgat couldn't have infiltrated spies as a member of the crew without D'zillich's knowledge. Ergo, Surgat's information came either directly from D'zillich or with D'zillich's knowledge.

Could Surgat have become a spy for D'zillich and Gharlane? If that were the case, then this all too flimsily justified conference would be in reality merely a pretext to get him away from Nergal while Gharlane arranged for his successor, probably D'zillich, to take office. Surgat's all too obvious attempt to delay him here on Zabriska was probably intended to trap him while some unknown entity — Lensman, Plooran, or Nergalian — arranged for his execution.

All these thoughts — so laborious to detail — flashed through the Nergalian's mind in less than a second, and it was with seemingly perfect composure that Zagan responded to Surgat's remark about Kinnison's death. "Yes, that was indeed a fitting end for such a perfidious creature as that hated

Lensman. He was such an aberrant entity too. Always disguising himself as something or other. One of my psychologists has theorized he was probably subconsciously bored with his own personality.

"And now," Zagan continued with apparent nonchalance, "let us return to the matter at hand. I deplore our lack of coordinated effort as deeply as you do. Furthermore," the Nergalian added with a calculated appearance of weakness, "I shall be pleased to consider any suggestions you may have for overcoming this situation. Meanwhile, I shall do my best to see that Nergalian forces will never again inadvertently attack Plooran ones. I am going back to Nergal immediately to see that no further such incidents ever occur. Farewell for now, O Surgat," and Zagan with outward calm left the conference spot and returned to his one-man speedster.

Once safely out in deep space again, Zagan turned his thoughts to his next problem — where to go next. Nergal was definitely out. Not only had he told Surgat he was going there, but Gharlane had probably already determined to have him killed immediately upon his return. Nor could he count on his former subordinates' loyal against the Eddorian. For such entities as Nergalians, loyalty is given only to the powerful. It is axiomatic that the weak are the betrayed.

Where then could he go? In former days, he might have considered becoming a renegade and joining the forces of Civilization. But now, thanks to the plans that he himself had helped devise, he knew that Civilization would not endure long enough to protect him from Gharlane's wrath. Nor were the uncommitted worlds a possible haven. Zagan knew only too well how easy it was to terrorize such a world into abject submission — particularly when the price for freedom from fear was merely the life of a worthless alien.

No, there was only one place in the Two Galaxies where he might be safe — safe because it was the one place Gharlane would not dream of looking for him. With trembling fingers, Zagan drove his speedster at maximum speed — straight toward Arisia.

And in a relatively short time, the former Nergalian potentate had reached the region of space in which Arisia lay. Conquering a reflexive shudder of dread at his closeness to the planet which had frustrated, tortured and destroyed so many of his co-ideologists, Zagan cautiously drove his ship forward, meeting little resistance from the merely mechanical screens which surrounded the system.

Finally Zagan landed the ship and heaved a deep sigh of relief. He was at least temporarily safe from D'zillich's or Gharlane's pursuit. Slowly, he got up from the control board chair, stretched luxuriously, and then froze stark still. Suddenly, before his very eyes, a humanoid had materialized into the empty air of the control room.

Zagan rubbed his eyes but found that the impossible sight had not disappeared. The being was tall with powerful build, his heavily bearded, saturnine face surmounted by thick, intensely black hair. His equally intensely black eyes radiated a sneering contempt for what he now surveyed.

Not even Zagan's worst enemy would ever have termed the Nergalian a coward, yet even his arrogant spirit was slightly shaken as he turned the stranger and demanded, "Tell me your identity and your purpose in invading my ship; otherwise I will be forced to destroy you."

The newcomer smiled coldly. "None of your weapons, whatever they may be," he replied, "could have any effect on me. What you see before you is not my actual body but merely a sixth-level projection, a phenomenon I have recently learned that your plenum is totally unfamiliar with. Now, you tell me — what is your name and what brings you here?"

The Nergalian did not reply but snatched out his DeLameter and fired point blank at the intruder. He felt shaken to the very core of his being to see that the weapon's deadly rays had absolutely no effect on the figure before him. The man, in fact, was actually laughing at the attack.

When his mirth died down, he spoke again. "As you now realize, you are totally powerless to destroy me. Nevertheless, I will be charitable enough to answer your questions. My purpose in entering your ship is to find out just which faction you belong to in this space-time continuum's political jigsaw puzzle. As for my identity — at the present my name would have no significance to any inhabitant of this plenum, although I plan to alter that situation before not very long. In fact," and the man's sardonic smile grew even broader, "you may congratulate yourself on being the very first person in this space-time continuum to make the acquaintance of Dr. Marc C. DuQuesne."

Chapter 5: Lensman DuQuesne

For one brief moment, Zagan nearly gave way to total despair. To sink in one day from High Tyrant of Nergal to a hunted refugee fleeing from Gharlane's vengeance had been no short fall. Yet the mysterious arrival of this arrogant being who called himself DuQuesne seemed to presage still greater disasters in store. And then suddenly the full possibilities of his present situation dawned on the cunning Nergalian. All was not yet lost. On the contrary, this situation, if properly handled, could yet ensure his eventual triumph.

He unhurriedly replaced the useless DeLameter in his holster, then said calmly, "It's a pleasure to meet you, Dr. DuQuesne. My most sincere apologies for having thoughtlessly attempted to attack you. My name is Zagan, Emperor of Nergalia, and in what you have termed this plenum's political jigsaw puzzle, my allegiance is — to myself.

"I have come here alone to make a personal inspection of this once-powerful world in order to see what, if any, fruits of Arisian science have survived the fall of Arisia."

He paused briefly, studied DuQuesne's impassive countenance, then continued, "To tell the truth, I have come here searching for a weapon which would enable me to preserve my Empire from the hands of an invader, a pirate chieftain of Boskonian who dreams of becoming Supreme Ruler of the Macrocosmic All. Already four of my outlying worlds have fallen under his attack."

He hesitated, unsure of how best to proceed. DuQuesne remarked coldly, "An interesting story. Why haven't you asked the Galactic Patrol to repel this invader?"

"Because I would rather die than beg for their help," Zagan said haughtily. "They have tried too often to absorb Nergalia into their sphere of influence, to violate our sovereign rights as an independent stellar empire. I will never appeal to that gang of warmongering imperialists for help."

He paused once more, then continued in a changed tone of voice, "I do, however, greatly need allies in my fight. Tell me, how many others of your people have you brought with you into this plenum?"

"I am alone here at the present," said DuQuesne. "Just as you are. Do emperors commonly travel undefended in this plenum?"

"I can understand how my mode of travel might well seem strange to an outsider," replied Zagan. "Actually, this ship is equipped with every means of defensive and offensive weaponry known to my people. I am in no danger whatsoever from any conventional form of attack. Your projector, of course, as you yourself have already said, has not been invented in this plenum. It sounds like a very

interesting device. What is its range of operation?"

"Its practical limit is roughly a thousand times the long diameter of this galaxy," said DuQuesne. "Why do you ask? Are you thinking of renting it?" he asked bluntly.

"It might come in handy," said Zagan unabashed. "I'd be willing to offer you a position in my realm second only to my own, if you'd allow me to use it during this present time of crisis."

DuQuesne laughed derisively. "You expect me to become your subject? Being a small-time emperor must have given you delusions of grandeur. Maybe you don't realize it, but I could kill you right now with my bare hands, and there isn't a thing you could do to stop me. The only reason I've let you live this long is because I want to learn a little more about the power structure of this universe before I start upsetting it.

"You say you need an ally. Well, I need a base of operations. I can't stay here on Arisia indefinitely. I don't want the Patrol to find out about me until I'm fully prepared to deal with them. So we might be able to strike some kind of bargain — but there's one condition. If you want my help, if you want to be able to use my projector or any of the other devices I've brought over here with me, you're going to have to start taking your orders from me. You're going to do what I tell you and like it — or else there's no deal. That okay with you?"

"Under the present circumstances, yes," said Zagan. "And now that we are agreed, I should like to get out of my ship and have a closer look at what remains of Arisia."

"All in good time," said DuQuesne. "First I want to have a closer look at you — in person."

And Zagan abruptly found himself no longer standing in the familiar control room of his space cruiser. Instead, he now stood in the center of a large room, one end of which was evidently some kind of scientific laboratory. At the other end of the room, seated beside a highly intricate control panel, was DuQuesne, this time presumably in the flesh. And on a nearby table, only a few inches away from the stranger's elbow, was a LENS!!!

The Lens, to Zagan's expert eye, was obviously a genuine Arisian one, differing in rhythm, chroma and aura from the Boskonian variety. DuQuesne's first action after he had finished absorbing Kinnison's account of the War against Eddore had been to cause the automatic Lensmaker to produce a Lens for him. Zagan, however, could not know that though DuQuesne's Lens was in truth an Arisian artifact, it had only been in existence for a few short hours. Instead, the uninformed Nergalian immediately concluded that the being he now confronted was not an intruder from another plenum but a LENS MAN with a new kind of transportation device called a projector.

Without hesitation, Zagan reached for his DeLameter, but before he could fire it, a second DuQuesne had materialized beside him, wrestled the weapon from his hands, and rayed the hapless Nergalian in two with his own weapon.

A few moments later, the projected image disappeared, letting the DeLameter drop to the floor with a thud. Then DuQuesne got up from his spaceship's control board chair and walked over to where Zagan's corpse lay. He carefully picked up the DeLameter and stuck it in his belt, then lifted up the Nergalian's head and carried it across the room to where the mechanical educator stood.

Once there, he placed a thought transfer helmet on Zagan's head and began methodically exploring the labyrinthine intricacies of that worthy's brain.

After several hours, he removed the headset, stretched, then went back to the control console and activated his fourth dimensional matter transporter, the same device that he had used only a short time before to transport Zagan instantaneously aboard his spaceship. Now, after having taken all the information he wanted from the dead Nergalian's brain, DuQuesne used the instrument once more, this time to transport Zagan's corpse back to that hapless wight's own spaceship.

Then DuQuesne returned to the project he had had in hand before Zagan's arrival, outfitting his spaceship, recently renamed the Ultraviolet, with a Bergenholm inertialess space drive — a relatively simple task when all of the work of construction and installation could be accomplished by projector.

And so, only a few hours later, DuQuesne's ship soared out into space toward its faraway destination, and Arisia was left uninhabited once more. The only mark left by the past day's events was the small Nergalian spaceship and within it the mutilated body of the luckless entity who only two days ago had been High Tyrant of Nergal.

Meanwhile, back in the Tellurian solar system, selected representatives of the news media of the Two Galaxies gathered in the Grand Assembly Hall of the Directrix. They were there to witness the swearing in of the new Coordinator and Vice-Coordinator of the Galactic Patrol. The ceremony slowly unfolded with the simple dignity that characterized all Patrol activities. First was heard the stirring sound of the Patrol's own anthem, "Our Patrol." Then Tregonsee, who like all members of his species could neither hear nor produce atmospheric vibrations, took the oath of office telepathically amid a dead silence. Then, after the stocky Rigelian had sworn to uphold the authority of the Galactic Council throughout all space, Tellurian Raoul LaForge, formerly Port Admiral, stepped forward to take his own oath of office as Vice-Coordinator.

After the formal ceremony was over, Gray Lensman Flewellen who had administered the oaths of office, informed the newsmen that a short press conference would now be permitted. There was a sudden change from absolute silence to hubbub as almost a hundred newsmen leapt to their feet, each crying out Tregonsee's name or his question. After a brief period of disorder, a Universal Telenews reporter was recognized; he asked, "Coordinator Tregonsee, do you have any idea yet who is responsible for these late attacks on Klovia and Antigan?"

"As yet we have insufficient evidence to draw any valid conclusion about the source of these attacks," Tregonsee answered. "You can be sure, however, that neither I nor any other officer of the Patrol will give up until we have identified and destroyed the beings responsible for these two outrages."

Another newsman hurriedly arose and, after being recognized, asked, "Coordinator Tregonsee, why were you and Vice-Coordinator LaForge sworn in out here in space instead of on Earth, in the Hill? Is this an indication that you feel that Earth's defenses are insufficient to protect the first Galaxy's Grand Fleet Headquarters, just as Klovia's defenses were unable two days ago to protect the Second Galaxy's Patrol Headquarters?"

"The Directrix is also a Grand Fleet Patrol Headquarters," answered Tregonsee patiently. "The difference is that it is a Patrol headquarters not for the First Galaxy nor for the Second Galaxy but for the whole of Civilization. Lensman LaForge and I chose to be sworn in aboard the Directrix to show that, according to the recent decision of the Galactic Council, our authority extends over both of the Civilized Galaxies.

"In regard to your second question, there is no evidence to indicate that Earth's defenses are inadequate. In the recent Defense of Arisia, the Patrol was proved able to protect a planet against a far greater attack than that recently directed against Klovia. The forces which protected Arisia have

already been summoned to protect the four chief planets of Civilization in the First Galaxy: Rigel IV, Sol III, Velantia III, and Palain VII." The newsman sat down again, with a decidedly dissatisfied expression.

And a galaxy away, second stage Lensman Worsel of Velantia grimly drove his mightily armed dreadnought, the Velan, through what had two days ago been the Klovia planetary system, but which could now be best described as a gigantic asteroid belt made up of pieces of worlds disintegrated in the recent battle, none of which had yet settled down into any regular orbit. Beside him in the control room stood Constance Kinnison. And together the two concentrated, to the exclusion of all other sensations, on scanning in fine detail the cosmic wreckage of Klovia for some clues to the parties responsible for the recent catastrophe.

Suddenly Worsel detected, amid the celestial flotsam, a wildly orbiting piece of planetary crust, its surface covered by a layer of fused rubble that had evidently once been some kind of artificial structure. He broke the mental silence of the control room, directing Constance's attention to the fragment. "This may be of some importance — depending on whether it comes from Klovia or from some other once-inhabited planet."

"The evidence shows it comes from some other planet," the girl replied after a careful analysis of the gyrating chunk. "The percentage of carbon-14 is all wrong for Klovia. Besides, the surface has been melted by some intense heat. A fragment of Klovia might show signs of having been battered by other masses but not of having been melted. This must be a piece from one of the planets that the sunbeam was focused on. But the surface rubble can't have come from any kind of space-drive machinery; the percentage of metal is too small. Apparently the Unknown Enemy attacked Klovia by hurling inhabited planets at it."

"There's nothing in this piece that indicates what planet it came from," commented Worsel, "but odds are that the sunbeam didn't have time to melt down all of the world's surface. Let's see if we can find another piece of it."

Their twinned receptors sped out, scanning the entire Klovia solar system. And then Constance spotted what must — from its matching composition — have been the fragment's parent, a misshapen body that had evidently once been a planet but which was now less than a third of what must have been its former size. It bore the marks of countless collisions with the other worlds which had been used to bombard Klovia. For long moments the Velantia and his slim redheaded companion studied this world; then Worsel said grimly, "This was Antigan IV."

Constance nodded curtly. "This confirms our earlier assumption that the same Unknown was behind both attacks."

"All the other planets used to attack this system appear to be uninhabited ones," said Worsel. "The Unknown probably chose to use Antigan IV because—" and then the Velantian fell silent, for he had just sensed a Lensed message emanating from a totally incredible source.

"Hello, Worsel of Velantia. Can you hear me?" It was — it seemed to be — Kim Kinnison.

"Hello, Worsel," Kimball Kinnison's voice seemed to call. "I don't know whether or not you can hear me. My Lens got banged up a couple of days ago, and it only seems to work erratically now. Worsel, I need some taxi service. I'm stuck on a klevous planet called Dunster, and the only spaceship in sight is the Boskonian one I just got finished wrecking. How's about a lift?"

"Worsel, old snake," interrupted Constance, "aren't you going to bother to finish your sentence? Boskonian chose to kidnap Antigian IV because of what?"

Worsel disregarded her. "Kim," he Lensed, "your daughter Constance is here with me. You'd better speak to her. She's been afraid you were dead."

"For a while back there, I almost thought I was dead myself," came back the answer. Then, "Constance honey, how are you? Think you've got time enough to make a detour and pick me up? I'm marooned over on Dunli II. I managed to take over the ship that kidnapped me off of Antigian IV, but its space drive and life support system got pretty much wrecked in the process, so I set her down here on Dunster. I'd have called you before and told you, but my Lens was on the blink. It got banged up in the last few moments of the melee, and just got started working properly a couple of minutes ago."

"Dad! You're alive!" Constance gasped in incredulous delight. "Are you all right?"

"There's nothing wrong with me that a few days rest won't fix, but I'll feel considerably better once I get off of this planet. Dunli's a long-term variable, remember. Well, right now it's summer — and the temperature where I am is 120 degrees in the shade."

Worsel, who had been consulting with the Velan's navigator, now resumed his place in the conversation. "We should be able to get there in about five hours, Kim. I know that sounds slow, but we'll have to spend nearly an hour picking ourselves out of a system-sized asteroid belt before we can start breaking the speed of light."

"QX... You know, I haven't had any sleep for the last forty-eight hours — too busy fighting pirates. I'm going to put myself to sleep now with an alarm clock set to ring in four hours. Give my love to the rest of the kids, Con, and tell them they needn't have worried. Good night, all." And the voice died away in a not very successful telepathic rendition of a snore.

And on Dunster, second planet of the long-term variable star of Dunli, D'zillich of Nergal glowed with satisfaction at a job well done. For a moment he luxuriated in the prospect of destroying yet another of the hated Lensmen. Then the voice of his aide Borkle burst in on his contemplations. "High Tyrant, the computer has requested an interim report on the current progress of the operation."

"Very well." D'zillich turned his attention to a dullish-gray circular visiscreen on the far side of the room, one of the many communications extensions of the Nergalian Prime Computer. He thought into the visiscreen, "D'zillich, High Tyrant of Nergal, with an interim report on the progress of Operation W. Step Two — personal contact — completed. Success estimate of Step Two — 100%."

"My impersonation met with total success. I simulated the dead Lensman's personality perfectly, down to his last side-band of thought. They were both completely deceived. They've promised to be here in no more than five hours from now, and they'll be completely off-guard when the attack comes."

And the computer thought back, "The girl is aboard then. The probability of her presence was only 85%."

"She is definitely aboard. I spoke to her personally. It would have been out of character not to do so. I told her to pass on the news that Kim Kinnison was alive to her brother and sisters. Who knows, we

may be able to make them all believe that their father is still alive — even after the ambush. After all, Kinnison could have been hypnotized into thinking he was alone on Dunster, made into a decoy without his knowledge."

"I estimate the probability of making all of his children believe that at about 15%," replied the computer dryly.

"And what are your estimates of the probability of this operation's success?" demanded D'zillich.

"Current probabilities estimate for Operation W: 98% that you will be able to destroy the second stage Lensman; 44% that you will be able to destroy the third stage Lensman."

"Very well. I have no further questions." D'zillich turned back to Borkle. "Go tell the crew that our visitors are estimated to arrive between four and five hours from now. Make sure that we're ready to greet them properly. Borkle obediently left, and D'zillich allowed himself once more to revel in the contemplation of the woe that he was so soon to wreak on the forces of Civilization.

And only a little more than four hours later, the Velan, racing furiously through space, arrived in the neighborhood of Dunli II. Two eager calls went forth from the ship. "Dad!" "Kim, we're here!" There was no answer.

"Maybe his Lens is malfunctioning again," said Worsel. "We could try to— And at that instant the Velan's screen's suddenly flared brilliant violet, as the space around the mighty dreadnought pulsed with deadly beams.

"He's attacking us!" Constance gasped.

"They're attacking us," Worsel corrected her. "Kim's call for help must have been some kind of trick to get us out here into firing range. And it doesn't look as if we're going to be able to hold out much longer. We're going to have to turn tail and get out of here."

Hastily, the Velantian took over tricky job of piloting the Velan out of the jaws of destruction. The massive ship executed a set of incredibly high speed evasive maneuvers, maneuvers that placed a maximum strain on the Velantian ability to stand up to high acceleration, a strain that would have crushed any ordinary human being to pulp. He did this secure in the knowledge that Constance Kinnison had had the foresight to put on a gravity damper before boarding the Velan.

The mighty dreadnought twisted at seemingly impossible angles in its attempt to elude the destructive beams from Dunster. The Nergalian forces tried to imprison the ship in a tractor zone, but the wildly whirling Velan moved too quickly for the tractor beam operators to focus the zone. And as the slow moments passed away, the Velan drew steadily away from Dunster.

"I'd hoped to dispose of them more easily," said D'zillich, "but I suppose there's no alternative. We can't let them get away. It would destroy the atmosphere of despair and doom that I've worked so hard to build up. Borkle, order the operators to use the anti-Lens projector."

The aide obeyed, and a moment later the most insidious of all of Nergal's weapons was focused on the fleeing ship, a weapon that turned the Lens of Civilization against its symbiotic wearer. The Lens is, of course, no mere artifact but a living entity, attuned to only one being and lethal when not in direct contact with that being. The effect of the Nergalian anti-Lens projector was to alter the relationship between Lens and Lensman so that the Lens ceased to be attuned to its wearer - and

therefore killed him instantly.

And so, only a few moments after D'zillich's order, as the operator of the anti-Lens projector swept its beam steadily across the sky, the sweep of its focus intercepted the Velan. And Worsel of Velantia died at the helm of his own mighty ship, died in utter agony, every atom of his being pulsating with pain, struck down by his own Lens.

For a moment the Velan raced through space without direction. And then a new hand was laid on the navigation controls, and the ship again began its wildly variable evasive maneuvers under the direction of Constance Kinnison. In that hour of peril, the youngest Child of the Lens truly showed what metal she was made of. Unflinchingly she piloted the Velan out of the enemy's range of attack. And only when the moment of immediate danger was over did she permit herself to grieve for Worsel of Velantia, who had been closer to her than any other being in the two galaxies except for her parents, her sisters, and her brother.

"We got the Velantian second stage Lensman," Borkle told D'zillich, "but the Kinnison brat got away safe. The anti-Lens projector didn't affect her because she wasn't wearing a Lens. She materializes her Lens when she wants it, and doesn't wear it the rest of the time. We've got to figure out some more effective way of taking care of those third stage Lensmen."

And Constance grimly reported to her brother Kit, "The Enemy's struck again. This time they used Father's voice to lure Worsel and me into an ambush. And they managed to kill Worsel somehow — I don't know how. The only significant thing I noticed is that his Lens stopped glowing just before he died, not afterwards. I think somehow they killed him through his Lens."

"Any sign of pursuit from Dunster?"

"No. It looks as if this was a one-shot plan of action. Kit, did you notice anything funny about that 'message from Dad' when I sent it to you?"

"Not at the time, but let's go over it again. After all, it's our first piece of direct contact with the Enemy."

Slowly the two analyzed the message in detail. Finally Kit said, "It's almost a perfect job of impersonation. There are a couple of funny points, but I'd never have noticed them unless I was looking for trouble. If they've got somebody that good,...we're going to have to start using a couple of teaspoons of salt to every Lensed message — that and get in the habit of expecting big, small and medium-sized traps wherever we go.

"You take the Velan back to Klovia, Con. I'll take a fleet and investigate Dunster. We'll probably get there too late for any action, but we've got to try."

"In that case," Constance said spiritedly, "the Velan is going to stop right here and wait for your fleet. Were you actually thinking of trying to exterminate those things without inviting me?"

"I wasn't quite sure you'd be in the mood for action right now," Kit apologized, "but you're certainly more than welcome to join the party. I can't think of many people I'd rather have on my side in a fight."

"Well, you're not so bad yourself, brother." What a wealth of meaning there was heterodyned on that seemingly light exchange.

"Clear ether, Con."

"Clear ether, Kit."

And the two sped towards their rendezvous, unaware of the political powder keg that had already been secretly set alight a galaxy away on Tellus.

Chapter 6: DuQuesne Goes to Work

As the Ultraviolet sped from Arisia to its far-off destination, DuQuesne busied himself with investigating his degree of mastery over his recently acquired artifact of Arisian biochemistry — the Lens. He had already found out that he was able to make use of its powers even when not in physical contact with it. He chuckled grimly as he remembered how Zagan had been kindled into murderous fury at the very sight of him with the quasi-living device. DuQuesne was far too callused to feel either pity for the hapless Nergalian or regret at having been forced to kill a possible henchman. Instead, he devoted himself to methodically and meticulously investigating the capabilities and limitations of the Lens of Arisia.

Then, as the ship drove steadily onward through the interstellar void, DuQuesne turned his attention to integrating the knowledge he had lately acquired from the dead Zagan's brain with what he had previously learned about this new plenum by studying the records left by Kit Kinnison on Arisia. One thing was clear on the basis of even a preliminary assessment of his present knowledge: neither the remnants of the Boskonian Empire nor the Patrol nor the Nergalians were presently assured of the eventual domination of the Two Galaxies.

The Boskonian Empire, currently under the leadership of Surgat and the other Plooran survivors, had been incapable of defeating the forces of Civilization even with the aid of Eddore. It had even less chance to succeed now, with Eddore destroyed. The Patrol was laboring under two severe handicaps: the loss of Galactic Coordinator Kinnison and his headquarters at Klovia and — even more important — its ignorance of the nature of its true enemy, Gharlane of Eddore. And the Nergalians, under Gharlane's leadership, were themselves laboring under an equally significant ignorance, unaware that Dr. Marc C. DuQuesne had decided to take a part in the power struggle.

DuQuesne smiled mirthlessly at the thought of the consternation that the news of his arrival would someday soon create on Nergal. Then he turned his attention once again to his plans for conquest. And as he darkly frowned in concentration, the Ultraviolet raced at incredible multiples of light speed toward his first target for conquest, the far-off world of TELLUS!

And soon DuQuesne approached the Solarian planetary system, in this plenum as in his native one the primal home of the species of homo sapiens. Despite his customary preference for direction action, the scientist elected not to land on Tellus itself or any of the other planets of the system, but instead to set his ship down on the back side of Luna. "Borrowing a trick from the Jelmi," he thought to himself reminiscently, as he set his ship's screens to camouflage all its energies — from the visible light spectrum down to the subtle spectrum of thought itself, thus rendering itself invisible to any routine monitoring of the area.

Once that was done, he sat down at the projector to study this new Tellus and see what differences and similarities it bore to the one he had formerly known. During the course of this investigation, he did not thicken the projector's pattern into visibility, studying the world below him with cool detachment while remaining totally unobserved.

He had already ascertained in his initial scan of this plenum that there existed no counterparts of himself nor of the never-to-be-sufficiently-detested Richard Seaton nor of the high and mighty Norlaminians. But now his major concern was with the economic structure of Tellus. Where was a nexus of corruption though which he could work?

First, for old time's sake, DuQuesne investigated Steel, Incorporated, a company similar in its ostensible purpose to what World Steel had been on his home world. But he found this corporation not only strictly honest but of minor economic importance. Steel had long since become too scarce on this Tellus to be anything but a luxury metal, a collector's item. Now steel for commercial purposes was imported — like uranium and most other metals — from other worlds which were as yet richer in natural resources.

Next DuQuesne turned his attention to the automobile industry — to the DeKhotiner and Crownover firms. These companies held a greater place in the Tellurian economy than Steel., Inc., but they too proved to be relatively honest and straightforward in their business dealings.

True scientist that he was, DuQuesne felt neither annoyance nor bafflement at this turn of events. When an idea failed to work, he merely abandoned it and turned to a new plan without rancor or repining. Now he decided to give up his examination of Earth's businesses for the moment and instead inspect the local planetary government. Here he struck pay dirt almost at once in the office of Carl Wallis, Senator from New England — and Majority Leader of the Tellurian Senate.

But Wallis, it soon proved, was comparatively small fry, merely an errand boy for such powerful business cartels as the Tellurian Import-Export Corporation or Central Spaceways or....

DuQuesne suddenly tensed. Surely he had heard something interesting about Central Spaceways. He frowned blackly in concentration, then remembered. According to the Kinnison transcripts, one of the beings killed by Kandron of Onlo in his attempt to spread panic among the forces of Civilization had been one Dillway of Tellus, Operations Chief of Central Spaceways. Was it possible, DuQuesne wondered, that Kandron had had another purpose behind his action, that his choice of victims had been more than merely random? Just what kind of person was this George Hayland who had moved into Dillway's sixtieth floor office and taken over the management of Central Spaceways, Tellus' largest commercial space service? Who, for that matter, were the people who had succeeded to the jobs — or fortunes — of Kandron's other Tellurian victims? DuQuesne spent three days finding out.

And soon a web emerged. A web of subtle graft and bribery, of conspiracies and corruption. A web of evil spun by Kandron of Onlo but abandoned since that being's death at the hands of Nadreck of Palain VII. A web that Nadreck's failure to probe his victim's mind had left unrevealed. There was Wallis, the organization's political errand boy; Hayland of Central Spaceways, and —

Back of Hayland and above him —

Jake Briggs, Chairman of the Board for Universal Telenews and heir to the fabulous fortune of Alexander Edmundson, the business tycoon who slightly more than a year ago had thrown fifteen women overboard from his yacht during an ocean voyage and then jumped after them dressed only in a lifejacket stuffed with lead — at the urging of Kandron of Onlo.

In the center of this web, then, DuQuesne drove his projector and listened. He listened and spied, studied and planned, until he had not only grasped every nuance of this new and yet strangely familiar Tellus but had also meticulously planned the course of action he would pursue to conquer it. Then, one night, he drove his projection into Jake Briggs' inner sanctum, cut in his audio, and spoke:

"For someone who's planning on becoming Master of Tellus, you are just about the most incompetent, nitwitted idiot I have ever had the opportunity of meeting."

When he heard the sneering, caustic tone of the scientist's voice, Briggs seemed to shrink bodily, his face turning a pasty gray as the blood receded from it. "Who is that?" he gasped. "Where — are you?"

"I'm right here beside you, and I have been for the last few days." DuQuesne thickened his image to full visibility. "My name's DuQuesne. Have you got any other irrelevant questions before we get down to business?"

"Are you a messenger from Kandron?" Briggs asked. "I haven't heard from him for the last year, and I've been getting worried."

"Kandron's long dead," said DuQuesne curtly. "And I'm not here on behalf of him or any other Boskonian bumbler. And," he added, forestalling the other's question, "I'm not working on behalf of the pigheaded Patrol either. I'm in this game for myself."

"From what I've seen of you so far, you wouldn't recognize a genuine opportunity to take over this planet unless it stood up and yelled at you, so that's what I'm doing now. And if you've got an ounce of sense, you'll string along with me."

"I think you'd better give me a little more information before you ask me to do anything like that," Briggs replied calmly. "Just exactly what do you have to offer me in return for my cooperation? This invisibility gadget of yours?"

"My invisibility gadget is technically known as a projector, and I have no intention of offering it to you. It's enough for you to know that I'm not really here in person. What you see and hear is merely a projected image which has all the advantages of a personal appearance and none of the disadvantages. NONE of them. A projected image is immune to any kind of attack. Bullets go right through it without damaging it. Rays can't affect it. But, on the other hand, it can manipulate matter quite easily." DuQuesne picked up a fragile glass paperweight from the tycoon's desk, squeezed it with his left hand until it shattered, and then contemptuously dropped the sparkling shards of glass back on the desk. "That could just as easily have been someone's neck," he added callously.

"In addition to the projector, I also have a number of other equally interesting gadgets in reserve, one of which is capable of rendering Tellus invulnerable against the means of attack recently used against Klovia," DuQuesne continued. "Now have you got enough brain power to grasp this information that I've just given you, or would you prefer to be shown a few more object lessons?"

"Under the circumstances of Kandron's death," said Briggs slowly, "I see no reason why I shouldn't feel free to work with you once you've explained just how you propose to repay me for my cooperation. You want the galaxy, you say. Well, if I help you get it, what's in it for me?"

"I'll tell you. I am going to make your front organization, Tellurian Enterprises, Incorporated, the real government of Tellus. And you as the master of its dummy board of directors will therefore be dictator of the world. I don't want the job myself, because I'm going to be too busy with important things to bother about the details of managing a mere planet. In exchange, you're going to allow me to make free use of two of your corporations: Central Spaceways, your private space fleet, and Universal Telenews, your propaganda and espionage corps.

"Once I've actually taken over the galaxy, I may do you a few more favors. But starting in a week or

so, you should have virtual control of Tellus. Just play along with me, and you can run it as you please, subject only to my direction in broad matters of policy; try to double-cross me and you pass out of the picture Got me?"

"I understand you thoroughly," said Briggs, "and I'll happily accept your offer. There's just one relatively minor problem. How do you plan to dispose of the Galactic Patrol? You do realize, I assume, that this planet is infested with them. It's their Grand Headquarters for the whole galaxy. And if you know as much about my business affairs as you seem to, you surely realize that none of my resources are powerful enough to challenge, let alone to defeat the Hill.

DuQuesne laughed. "Don't worry, Briggs; my plan for ousting the Patrol is infallible — and it shouldn't require any military action at all. All you need to do is to give one of your Telenews reporters four little questions to ask Gray Lensman Christopher Kinnison at the next Patrol press conference, and Tellus is yours. There's a Patrol press conference coming up next week in the Second Galaxy, isn't there?"

"Yes, on Thrale. Several of the Second Galaxy worlds have become very disturbed as a result of the Klovian disaster, and the Patrol seems to think a personal appearance by Galactic Coordinator Tregonsee and some of the other big name Lensmen will help calm things down. And I believe young Kinnison is supposed to put in some kind of an appearance there. Just what questions do you want to have my reporter ask?"

DuQuesne picked up a memorandum pad from the mahogany desk, wrote four sentences on it, then tossed it to Briggs.

"These?" The tycoon frowned. "How are you going to get the Patrol to leave Tellus with these?"

"They'll go as gently as a sheep to the stockyards, if your propaganda machine is half as good as it thinks it is. Or have you forgotten that membership in the Patrol's 'Civilization' is wholly voluntary?"

Briggs still frowned. "You're sure these questions can do it?"

DuQuesne smiled mirthlessly. "Just instruct your reporter to ask these questions of Kit Kinnison and insist on a Lensed reply, and once Tellus hears about it, it'll withdraw from the Patrol's 'Civilization' in record time."

"And then?"

"And then you'll take over the planet — and publicly acknowledge me as the Lord Protector of Tellus."

"It's a deal," assented Briggs. "And now that we've agreed to cooperate, I've got another irrelevant question if you don't mind. Where are you from? Not this galaxy, I know that much. Universal Telenews covers the First Galaxy pretty thoroughly, and nothing as new as this projector of yours could have been developed in this galaxy without my knowledge.

"You're quite right," DuQuesne said. "I'm not from this galaxy, and" he went on glibly, "I'm not from your Second Galaxy either."

"You're not. But—"

"I'm from a third galaxy," DuQuesne continued blandly. He had absolutely no intention of telling the truth about his origin to Briggs. "My home galaxy is over five million light years away from here. My native world, Alterra, has already conquered its own galaxy plus two others. I've come here because I'm a licensed conquistador, authorized by the Alterran Ruling Council to take over your entire galaxy, lock, stock and barrel. And I mean to do it within the next year or so. Now, if you've no other questions to ask," he paused momentarily, "I'll be on my way. I'll contact you again after the Patrol press conference on Thrale. What happens then should show whether I've really got the stuff."

The projection vanished.

Briggs stared for some moments at the spot where DuQuesne had seemingly been standing, then opened up direct access to the Thralian office of Universal Telenews. While he spoke, he scribbled notes to himself about things he'd need to do in the next few days — and other things he could do once he ruled Tellus. Occasionally, he broke off to reread DuQuesne's four questions and ponder their implications.

And in the Second Galaxy, Kit Kinnison — after three days of fruitless search — prepared to leave the Dunli planetary system, scene of Worsel's recent tragic death. "Whoever these zwilniks are, they are smooth workers," he told his sister Constance. "They moved in on Dunster, fortified it, destroyed the Velan, and then evacuated Dunster completely — all in the space of less than two days. And we don't have any more clues now as to where they come from or what they look like or what they plan to do next than we did a week ago.

"What still disturbs me most," said Constance, "is that imitation of Father's Lensed thoughts that lured Worsel and me into the ambush here. I suppose I should have been more on my guard,... but, Kit, I've always assumed that nobody can lie through a Lens."

"They can't. But that zwilnik was capable of doing an almost perfect imitation of Lensed telepathy."

"Yes, I know that now. But still.... Kit, don't you realize that now we don't dare trust a Lensed thought without double-checking it. And if that's true, then—"

"Now hold on just a moment there," Kit interrupted quickly. "Let's go back and review that piece of reasoning in slow motion. True, you got fooled once. But that's mainly because you weren't expecting it. Run through your memory of that message again and see if you don't recognize any points where the imitation wears thin, particularly here and here," and he indicated two high frequency resonance bands."

There was silence for a few minutes, then Constance said, "I see what you mean. Yes, once we're on our guard, even the first stagers should be capable of recognizing a real from a fake Lensing. I'll see that they all get the information. Thanks for putting my mind at rest, Kit. If it weren't for you, I don't know how I'd be able to still carry on." She changed the subject abruptly. "Where are you going now?"

"Thrale. They're holding a ceremonial press conference in four days to reassure the frantic populace. Somebody's started some pretty frightening rumors all through the Second Galaxy, and the planets that used to belong to the Onlonian-Thralian Empire are getting jumpy. Tregonsee asked me to put in an appearance at the festivities to lend them whatever magic the Kinnison name may carry. Clear ether, Con."

"Clear ether, Kit." The girl kissed him goodbye, then hastily turned and left his speedster to return to

her own personal ship.

Kit was still two hours out from Thrallis and had just awakened from a much-needed eight hours sleep when he was contacted by Tregonsee. "Christopher," the Rigelian Lensed, "something new has just occurred which makes this forthcoming press conference much more important than I had anticipated."

"What's up now?" queried Kit, who had already established the authenticity of this Lensed communication.

"About two hours ago," thought Tregonsee, "every world in this sector received the following message:

"People of the former Thralian Empire: The time for the re-establishment of Boskone has come. Though you have been willing slaves to the Galactic Patrol for the last twenty years, you still have one last chance to return to your true allegiance. Your governing bodies must formally renew their allegiance to Boskone. All those planets who do not do so by the end of seven days will be considered traitors. Choose wisely and, while you choose, remember the fate of Klovia.

"Surgat, speaking for Boskone."

"Did you manage to trace the message?" asked Kit.

"We traced it as far as a relay station on Phlestyn IV, but that's as far as we've gotten so far. The original source could have been anywhere in the Two Galaxies. The key issue now is to prevent any further panic. So arrangements have been made to have the press conference broadcast through the entire sector."

"My reasoning checks with yours 101%," Kit said. Once the conversation was finished, he turned his attention to Lens Camilla. "Cam, what do you make of this 'Surgat, speaker for Boskone,' message?"

"The message was broadcast as audio-visual, not thought, so there's no way to determine the sender's species from thought bands. The last so-called 'Speaker for Boskone,' of course, was Helmuth of Kalonia, but he confined his operations to the First Galaxy. There's a slight possibility that this Surgat belonged at one time to Helmuth's organization, but I doubt it. It can, however, safely be assumed that Surgat is somehow tied up with the organization that planned the Klovia operation but probably wasn't the prime operator behind it. The enemy, call him X, who destroyed Klovia wouldn't bother with propaganda messages; he'd just start systematically destroying planets. And I very much doubt if that seven day deadline is really going to be followed by any full-scale, galaxy-wide war of annihilation. I think Surgat is just trying to raise the panic level."

"So we're dealing with two different personality types now," Kit said. "I think I'll ask Nadreck and Kay to try unscrewing these inscrutables and determine just how Surgat and X relate to each other. Maybe they can come up with some deductions the rest of us haven't been able to."

"Good idea. See you soon, Kit." And with that, the two broke contact.

The press conference the next day was at first fairly uneventful. Tregonsee repeated his earlier assurances that the tragic destruction of Klovia by Boskonian forces could not possibly be repeated now that the Patrol was on full alert.

"Then you think the Boskonian message received yesterday was just a bluff?" asked a reporter.

"Essentially, yes," the new Galactic Coordinator replied. A great wave of relief spread through the room, and throughout the billions of people following the broadcast of the interview — some as an audio-visual signal, others by direct perception accompanied by telepathy, and still others through the starkly indescribable signals used by the four-dimensional lifeforms of such ultra-cold worlds as Palain V|I and Sol IX.

And then a Universal Telenews reporter was recognized. "I have," he said, "a number of questions which I would like to address to Unattached Lensman Christopher Kinnison."

The young red-haired Lensman stepped forward.

"Lensman Kinnison, in view of the current galaxy-wide unrest, I would like to ask you some questions which I feel would basically clarify Civilization's present predicament. I ask that you give your reply by Lens as well as by voice, with all present in this room hearing both and able to testify if there is any discrepancy between the two."

"QX," Kit said. "Ask away." In the audience, a number of reporters switched off their thought screens to allow hearing the Lensed reply.

"Is it true that the Galactic Patrol was created not as a peace-keeping organization but as an instrument of the Arisian military?" The crowd of reporters became restless, some of them whispering to one another, others communicating silently. The Universal Telenews reporter went on more loudly. "Is it true that you have concealed the identity of the true targets of the Patrol's last battle from the people of Civilization? That neither you nor your sisters are members of the species homo sapiens but are instead products of an Arisian breeding experiment? That you and your sisters have secretly taken over control of the Patrol even though your only official position is that of a Gray Lensman, and your sisters are not even officially Lensmen at all? Are these charges true?"

There was dead silence in the hall, as the reporters waited for Kit to reply.

And now the reporter continued, "You cannot deny these charges on your Lens, can you? Surely you owe the people of Civilization the truth!"

"I owe the people of Civilization what I have always tried to give them," came the reply. "My strength to protect them against their enemies. My life, if necessary, to keep them safe. As for your charges, they are ambiguous, slanted—"

"Do you deny them?"

"I do not deny them. I scorn them."

"Thank you, Lensman Kinnison. I have no more questions for you." And the reporter sat down.

And half an hour later, on Tellus, a carefully edited version of the interview was being broadcast on every channel of audio-visual communications. It was, said the newscasters, a clear case of subversion, of treason, of would-be usurpation. And the people of Tellus heard and believed.

Why, it may be asked, did the Patrol take no steps to counter this flood of innuendo? And the answer is that many Patrolmen did indeed try to do so. Most of them, however, at first directed their efforts

toward the formerly Boskonian planets, taking that to be the chief target of the propaganda. And when the Patrolmen based on Tellus did begin to act locally, they found themselves able to reassure only a small number of the people. For the mass media, most of which were secretly under the direct or indirect control of the Briggs machine, refused the Patrolmen the right to be heard. Nor were the Lensmen able, as they once had been, to Lens a rebuttal to the people. Too many Tellurians were wearing thought screens for any Lensed message to be successfully directed to the masses. And so there was no effective opposition to the Briggs' machine's propaganda.

And in the planetary Senate, Majority Leader Carl Wallis, Senator from New England, claimed the floor and offered a bill that declared that the people of Tellus would that day formally withdraw from the Galactic Patrol's league of planets. "It is true, Mr. President," he said, "that this Galactic Patrol is in a certain sense a Tellurian product. It is our child. It is a willful child that lies to its own parents. A wicked child that has fallen into the ways of sin. It is a child, Mr. President, that must be disowned lest disgrace be attached to the whole family."

And the Senate of Earth agreed. Not unanimously, of course. Even on that dark day there were still some stalwart men too loyal to the Patrol to be shaken by propaganda. But the rest were swayed by the persuasive rhetoric of the news media, by the telegrams sent by their panicking constituents, by the messages from their major contributors.

And so Tellus, birthplace of the First Lensmen, became the first world ever to voluntarily withdraw from the ranks of Civilization.

And in Jake Briggs' private office, DuQuesne told the tycoon, "From now on, everything's as simple as shooting fish in a barrel. They're happy now about having thrown out the perfidious Patrol. Give them a few more days before you start playing up the stories about how the Patrol is evacuating its people from Tellus, and they'll start feeling defenseless."

"And then you step forward and proclaim that Tellurian Enterprises, Inc. has contacted a beneficent outsider who guarantees to protect Tellus on a strictly business basis, no fancy Patrol talk about ideals and altruism. They'll fall all over themselves trying to say yes. And of course the business negotiations will be handled through Tellurian Enterprises, Inc. Given your usual lack of efficiency, it should take you roughly a week to become world dictator."

The projection abruptly vanished, as Briggs began to reply. It reappeared a few minutes later, just as he was about to send a policy statement to the news services that he controlled. "Sorry for disappearing on you like that," DuQuesne told him "but a new factor's just appeared in my calculations, and I wanted to investigate it in person. Pluto's disappeared."

"It what?"

"That's right," DuQuesne confirmed with a sardonic smile. "And that means that Tellus is going to get panicky a little quicker than I'd anticipated. You should be able to make world dictator in two to three days if you get to work on it right now. Better start taking advantage of your good luck." And the projection vanished once more.

Chapter 7: ANOTHER ONE OF OUR PLANETS IS MISSING

On Thrale, the Patrol press conference had just concluded. Galactic Coordinator Tregonsee of Rigel IV still seemed his usual imperturbable self, despite the alarming surprises of the past few hours. Calmly he Lensed Kit Kinnison, "I'd like you to come back to the Directrix with me, if you've got time

for a conference." Kit assented, and silently followed the stocky Rigelian to the ship.

In his ears still rang the mocking questions of the Universal Telenews reporter: "Is it true that the Galactic Patrol was created not as a peace-keeping organization but as an instrument of the Arisian military? Is it true that you have concealed the identity of the true targets of the Patrol's last battle from the people of Civilization? That neither you nor your sisters are members of the species homo sapiens but are instead products of an Arisian breeding experiment? That you and your sisters have secretly taken over control of the Patrol even though your only official position is that of a Gray Lensman, and your sisters are not even officially Lensmen at all? "

Christopher Kinnison knew that in truth he could not deny those charges. But still less could he have answered them fully and truthfully. He could never forget Mentor's frequent warnings that Civilization must never learn the truth about the millennia-old conflict of Arisia and Eddore lest the revelation of how those two powers had manipulated the course of history produce an inferiority complex which would inevitably destroy both the Galactic Patrol and Civilization. Even the second-stage Lensmen had never been told that their true enemy, the true leaders of Boskone, were not the Ploorans but the inhabitants of yet another planet, one that they had never even heard of, the now totally obliterated world of Eddore.

Of all the citizens of Civilization, only the five young Kinnisons, the Children of the Lens, had even so much as heard the name of Eddore or knew the malefic reality it stood for. Now someone else had apparently become privy to that ultra-secret information. Who? And how?

One thing was clear: Universal Telenews was somehow involved. Kit's probe of the reporter's mind had clearly revealed that the man's questions had come directly from his home office on Tellus — with strict accompanying instructions not to change a single word.

Kit had Lensed Kathryn, who was already in the First Galaxy, to investigate the Tellurian office of the corporation in order to determine how much it knew about Eddore and what its source of information had been. He knew that the chief officers of Interstellar Telenews would undoubtedly be wearing mind screens powerful enough to block out even the probing a second stage Lensman. But he was also fully aware that his sisters, like himself, had minds of such force that they could think above, below or — by sufficient effort — straight through any thought screen known to the science of Civilization. Kathryn would have no problem in obtaining the desired information.

No other reporter had chosen to follow up the Telenews man's line of questioning, and so Kit had spent the rest of the conference in seeming idleness. Actually, every aspect of his mind had been galvanized into action as he had joined his fellow Lensmen in helping to quell the panic that his answers had caused throughout the Second Galaxy. The planets of the former Thralian Empire needed particularly delicate handling, unnerved as they already were by the ultimatum from Surgat, self-styled speaker for Boskone.

Now, as he followed Tregonsee to the Directrix, Kit again Lensed his oldest sister. "Kat, get any results yet?"

Her answering thought came in diamond-clear. "Yes, but not very satisfactory ones. Nobody at Universal Telenews knows anything about it, except Jake Briggs, the chairman of the board. And he doesn't know very much. He got the questions from a mysterious stranger called DuQuesne who claims to be from a Third Galaxy — and who says he's a 'licensed conquistador,' authorized by his home galaxy to take over the entire First Galaxy. The first step in his plan has already succeeded. By working through Briggs' organization, he's succeeded in getting Tellus to officially withdraw from the Patrol's protection."

"Tellus is withdrawing from Civilization on the side of Boskone?"

"No,... that's the puzzling thing about the situation. It's just withdrawing to become a neutral party."

Her brother considered that for a long moment of mental silence, then said, "DuQuesne sounds like a French name. What does he look like?"

"The data's incomplete. What Briggs saw could have been a hallucination. If it wasn't, then DuQuesne's pure humanoid, AAAA straight to twenty decimal places. He spoke accentless English. In fact, there's only one thing that makes me willing to believe that he's not really either a Boskonian agent of Tellurian stock or a high level hallucination: he's got a device called a projector that couldn't have been invented by any Boskonian without having been put in use long ago and on a large scale." Rapidly she gave her brother all the details that she had been able to glean from Briggs' mind on that extraordinary device.

"There's just one hole in your analysis," Kit commented. "Maybe the device is a recent invention. Remember the Battle against Helmuth when that Boskonian tech jury rigged a standard energy beam projector to overload and produce a super needle-ray destructive beam?"

"If DuQuesne used to be part of a Boskonian organization," returned Kathryn, "then he's definitely decided not to continue working for them. Why else would he have told Briggs that he sided neither with Boskone nor with the Patrol? His action pattern reveals no links with recent Boskonian activities. His plot to make Tellus withdraw from Civilization in no way accords with the strategy or tactics typical of the unknown enemy who headed the attack on Klovia and the ambush of Worsel at Dunster."

"Isn't there a possible tie-in between his actions on Tellus and this recent ultimatum from Surgat?"

"Perhaps, but the evidence available leads me to doubt it. If Surgat had had the projector, then he could have made that ultimatum in person in every capital of every world in the former Thralian Empire — and really scared the people out of their wits. No, I'm very much inclined to think that DuQuesne is acting on his own."

"As a 'licensed galactic conquistador'?"

"I rather doubt that he has been authorized to do this, but there's not enough information to rule it out entirely. He's supposed to get in touch with Briggs some time day, and I'll be watching to see what he does. Then maybe there'll be enough data to get some solid conclusions."

"QX." Kit broke off communications with his far-away sister. He and Tregonsee had now reached the Galactic Coordinator's private suite of rooms aboard the Directrix. Kit remembered growing up playing here, but they were his family's home no more. Tregonsee waited a moment for Kit to sit down, then asked bluntly, "Were the reporter's charges true?"

"True,... but incredibly distorted."

"The last one seemed to me to be fairly inconsequential, though probably effective enough for propaganda purposes," Tregonsee said with the calm characteristic of his species. "I mean the charge that you and your sisters had secretly taken over command of the Patrol. It is true that we have not given you sufficient official position in the Patrol hierarchy — and that we have failed to regularize

the status of your sisters. The public does not even know the extent of the role they played in the Defense of Arisia. We should have attended to these things before, but they can certainly be dealt with now.

"The next to last charge was that you children are products of an Arisian breeding experiment and not true members of the species homo sapiens. This also seems to be fairly inconsequential. Even most of the humanoid members of Civilization will probably be unconcerned by it. However, the implications of this charge are more serious: does it mean that Kimball Kinnison and Clarissa MacDougal were not your actual parents?"

"No, not at all. It's true the Arisians did foresee us in their Visualization of the Cosmic All. It's even true that Mentor played invisible matchmaker a couple of times in order to make sure that Mom and Dad would get born and thus be able to cause us to get born. That's why Mentor told Dad that his marriage was not merely permissible but necessary. We're not homo sapiens because as the children of two second stage Lensmen we have practically no genes carrying any traits of weakness. Mentor said that we carried the genes of every trait of strength ever known to any member of the human race, and therefore couldn't be classed as standard human."

"It should be relatively simple to explain these things to the people," Tregonsee observed. "The first two charges, however, are more serious. Who could have been the true target of the Patrol's last battle if it was not Ploor, the head of Boskone?"

Kit did not hesitate. The die was now cast. The Galactic Coordinator must be told the truth, or at least as much of it as he could take. "The target of the Patrol's last battle was the head of Boskone," he told Tregonsee. "But it wasn't Ploor. Ploor was only the second level of command. The Patrol's true last battle occurred not when we smashed Ploor but afterwards, in the attack on what Mentor called 'a residuum of non-material malignancy' left behind after the destruction of Ploor."

"Do you mean that the Arisians have lied to us?" asked Tregonsee. His four horn-lipped mouths snapped open and shut; his cabled arms writhed in astonishment.

"Not really," replied Kit. "The things we attacked then — the Eddorians, they called themselves — were evil all right. And they were also, in a sense, non-material. They could take material form easily enough by energizing a form of flesh, but if one of them was attacked while doing so, even if his body was totally destroyed, he himself wouldn't be a bit hurt. The Eddorians were incapable of being harmed by any physical force, however applied. The only way they could be destroyed was through the combined mental attack of the Arisians and the Galactic Patrol."

Tregonsee did not reply for several moments, then asked, "But why didn't the Arisians tell us? It seems rather illogical to expect people to fight effectively against an unknown enemy.... No, don't try to answer, Kit; you couldn't know. I'd better try again to get in touch with Mentor."

Kit groaned inwardly. Hurriedly he Lensed Constance, "Con, you're the hallucination expert. Can you help me fool Tregonsee into thinking he's talking with Mentor? Right now? It's necessary." Then he asked Tregonsee, "Did you say 'try again'?"

"Yes," the new Galactic Coordinator replied. "I naturally attempted to contact him at the time of the Klovia disaster. It seemed to contradict his earlier assurance of Civilization's future safety and security. He did not choose to answer. Now, however, I believe I shall try again."

And Kit, while receiving the Rigelian's Lensed thoughts, simultaneously heard his sister Constance

reply, "It shouldn't be too difficult for us to do, Kit. I've checked with Cam, and she's going to help too; after all, she does know him better than either of us do, I don't like the idea of deceiving Uncle Trig, but you're right; it's necessary. We can't let him realize the Arisians are gone."

"Actually, we're not really deceiving him by taking on the name of Mentor," he brother replied. "We are Mentor — at least to the same extent that the Arisians Nedanillor, Kriedigan, Drounli and Brolenteen were. We have inherited their position as Guardians of Civilization, and are entitled to use the name just as they did."

And then, without further ado, the three linked. It was not, of course the Unit — all the Children of the Lens were needed to produce that awesome fusion of minds — but it was a fusion so overwhelmingly effective that Tregonsee was never to suspect at that time or any later date that it was not Mentor with whom he was then exchanging thoughts. And, since he thus knew beyond any shadow of a doubt that his apparent conversation with Mentor was absolutely, undoubtedly genuine, it will be so described.

Tregonsee then broke off his conference with Kit, and focused his thoughts on distant Arisia and Mentor the sage. "I apologize for intruding," he thought calmly. "There is reliable evidence that you have intentionally led us to arrive at false conclusions in respect to the nature of our enemies. I do not at present see the reasons that justify you in doing so. Why did you lead us to believe that Floor and not Eddore was the head of Boskone?"

And Mentor's answering thought was equally cold. "That information has been withheld from you because you do not have the scope to comprehend the true nature of the Eddorians any more than — as a three-dimensional being — you can, no matter how intelligent, how mature, fully comprehend the true nature of a four-dimensional being."

"But Christopher Kinnison does have that ability, to fathom the Eddorians?"

"Yes. You are a second stage Lensman. He and his sisters have minds capable of enduring yet a third level of stress."

Well was it for the Patrol in that hour of trial that the Galactic Coordinator was Tregonsee, the only one of the second stage Lensmen capable of receiving such news without experiencing traumatic shock. He alone had realized that the children whom he and the other second stage Lensmen had helped to train had long since passed their tutors. It was a gesture of the stocky Rigelian's sense of values that this realization brought into his tranquil soul no tinge of envy or rancor but only wonder.

Now he absorbed this new information without conscious shock. For a brief moment he considered its implications, then asked one last question. "I also do not understand why you told us after the attack on...Eddore that there was no longer any weapon of power left with which Boskone could threaten Civilization."

Mentor's reply came quickly. "Know, youth, that my Visualization of the Cosmic All extends itself in relatively fine detail only to the events that have occurred and will occur within the First and Second Galaxies. It has recently come to my attention that a mind of power has entered into these regions from yet a third galaxy. This being with the mental capacity of an Arisian is dominated chiefly by desire for power, not for knowledge as the Arisians are. He has recently acted in opposition to the forces of Civilization. His arrival was unforeseeable, and his actions were at first equally unpredictable because of his unknown background. However, even on the basis of the little data I now have, I find no doubt that you, with the help of the young Kinnisons, will be able to ultimately defeat the plans of this being." And with that assurance, Mentor snapped the telepathic link.

For several minutes thereafter, Tregonsee was silent; then he turned once more to the young red-thatched Lensman in the room with him. In a series of flashing thoughts he spread before the youth all the details of his just-finished conversation with Mentor, then said, "Christopher, as an Unattached Lensman, you can no longer be officially given any assignment, but I believe there is no breach in protocol in my saying that I would greatly appreciate it if you would head the investigation of this Third Galaxy intruder who is responsible for the recent setbacks to the force of Civilization."

"I'd be glad to take on that project," and with that Kit prepared to take his leave.

But, as his hand touched the doorknob, the young Lensman was stopped dead in his tracks by Tregonsee's thought. "Stop, Christopher." Then the Galactic Coordinator continued more temperately to the captain of the Directrix, "Would you mind starting over again, Captain Von Doub, and directing your account to Lensman Kinnison as well as myself. I believe your message is going to touch on the field of his present investigation."

"Gladly, Coordinator," then to both Kit and Tregonsee, "Two minutes ago we received the following message:

"People of Civilization: The time for the re-establishment of Boskone has come. To prevent unnecessary hostilities, Sol IX has been taken hostage and transported by hyper-spatial tube to Boskone-controlled territory. It will not be returned until the re-establishment of Boskone has been fully completed. The Palainian colonists upon it, however, may be ransomed.

"The ransoming will be conducted as follows: One Lensman who surrenders himself as a prisoner of war will ransom two thousand Plutonians. Lensmen desirous of ransoming Plutonians must be unarmed. They must present themselves in three days time upon Lyrane IX." The message went on to specify geographical and chronological coordinates. "If no Lensman has appeared in three days time, the offer for ransom will be withdrawn. Uncooperative Plutonians who are not ransomed back will be disposed of in the event of any hostilities between Boskone and the Galactic Patrol. — Surgat, speaking for Boskone.'

"We have already had reports," the captain of the Directrix continued, "that indicate that this same message has also been received by the planetary governments on a large number of worlds in both the First and Second Galaxies."

Second stage Lensman Tregonsee of Rigel IV did not give any immediate orders for Patrol action in response to this new ultimatum. To hurry was not Tregonsee's way. He could move quickly if occasion warranted it and if he had made his plans, but first before he could move at all, he had to know exactly how, where and why he should move. And so it was therefore Kit Kinnison who undertook the task of investigating the ultimate in person. It was Kit who, almost immediately after the ultimatum had been received, left the Directrix, boarded a speedster, and drove it at top speed toward far-off Lyrane.

He was only half an hour out in space when he received a thought from Kathryn. "Kit, have you heard about Surgat's latest move?"

"I'm off to Lyrane to investigate it. Any other news?"

"DuQuesne put in his reappearance on schedule, but by projector again, not in person." In a series of flashing thoughts, she gave him the details of the recent DuQuesne-Briggs meeting. "As of now," she

went on somberly, "I can't see any way to locate DuQuesne except by scanning the entire Sol system, foot by foot."

"Can't you trace the source of the projection?"

"Brother mine, I can't even perceive yet how the projected image propagates itself, let alone its source. We're going to have to develop a whole new technology to deal with DuQuesne effectively, and we'd better not tackle him until we do. At the moment, he's willing to fight Boskone as well as us, which means he's a potential ally, and we shouldn't concentrate on locating him unless we've got the stuff to pin his ears back. I'd advise concentrating on Surgat of Boskone and on the Unknown Enemy, and putting DuQuesne on a lower level of priority."

"QX, but there's no sense in ceding him the whole Sol system. Talk to the Council and see that we build an alternate Prime Base on Mars, and switch First Galaxy Patrol Headquarters to it. That way Tellus will still be defended but without defying the planetary government's lawful eviction order."

"QX, clear ether, Kit."

"Clear ether." And the two broke contact.

Less than a day later Kit had made the long intergalactic voyage from the Thralian solar system to Dunstan's Region, a minor spiral arm of the First Galaxy. Soon his tiny speedster approached the Lyranian system and went into orbit around the ninth planet, an uninhabited world whose sole importance up to now in the Boskone-Patrol conflict had been to serve as a place where Eddorians would train their Black Lensmen. Had any significant changes occurred since that time?

Kit scanned the bleak planet with painstaking care for some time, then sent out a call to his four sisters. "Kay, Kay, Cam Con — are you free?" They were for a while. "Lyrane IX hasn't been touched since the Battle of Ploor. I'm going to do a routine check on the system's other worlds for Boskonian agents who might be involved in the present scheme. But as of now it seems pretty apparent that the proposed ransom-by-exchange will be made by hyper-spatial tube, same as the way they got Pluto originally. If I can't find some other link between Lyrane and the Surgat-Unknown axis between now and the deadline, I'm going to go in as the first ransomer."

"What!" "But you can't." "No!" "Don't be foolhardy, Kit!" Four objections came as one.

"I've got to. If I don't go, some of the first stagers are bound to volunteer for the job, and get killed — and not accomplish anything in the process. If I go, the Galactic Council can reasonably forbid any other volunteers until we see whether Surgat's Boskonians honor their pledge."

"Yes, but, Kit, why go by yourself? Let's all go — as the Unit," suggested Constance.

"We can't. You're all needed where you are. Do you want to leave the Two Galaxies unprotected?"

"But you don't have to go," cut in Kay stormily. "We can refuse their offer entirely. We could send them a recorded message that we don't plan to exchange anybody. After all, there are over fifty million Plutonians. It would take over twenty-five thousand Lensmen to ransom them all."

"We can't refuse their offer entirely. Not with honor," Kit replied with equal heat. "Lensmen always go in, remember," he quoted their father. "Besides, there's no other quick way to get a line on their location. Which is where you come in, Con. Skulk out on the outskirts of Dunstan's Region, analyze

the tube when and if it forms, and follow it. Don't worry about me; I can take care of myself. But find out where that tube goes to."

"QX, Kit."

"What about the rest of us," asked Karen mutinously. "Are we just supposed to sit around and nothing to help?"

"Kathryn's got DuQuesne on her hands; that should take up most of her time. Karen, I'd like you and Kat to work together on trying to figure out just what DuQuesne is up to. Also try to identify the personality action patterns of Surgat and the Unknown Enemy so we can set up a few traps for them once I get back. QX?"

"QX," from both girls.

"And I concentrate on watching out for Tregonsee," thought Cam.

"Right. Also,... We've got only two second stage Lensmen left, Cam. We need more. I want you to get them."

"More second stagers? Where?"

"Have you forgotten that the Arisians developed eight lines of select breeding, two each on Rigel IV, Palain VII, Velantia III and Sol III. Only five second stagers were trained. Three of them are now dead, true. But there are still four other potential second stagers alive: the beings carefully bred to serve as mates for Tregonsee, Worsel and Nadreck. The Arisians decided that the human stock was best, so the other trained second stage Lensmen were never allowed to meet their complements. Nevertheless, those three beings are almost certainly potentially second stagers. I want you to find them, recruit them, and train them. We're going to need them in the days ahead."

"QX, Kit." And after only a little further discussion, the conference was ended.

A little more than two days later, Kit Kinnison landed his speedster on the desolate planet of Lyrane IX, a world so forbidding that even the frigid-blooded Eich had preferred to settle on the system's next inward planet.

And on the outskirts of Dunstan's Region, Constance waited in her own undetectable speedster. Waited and saw Kit step out on the world's icy surface. Waited and saw him pulled by a tractor beam into a ship that was lurking at the mouth of a hyper-spatial tube, and knew that her brother was at least temporarily a prisoner of Boskone. Waited until the ship had retreated once more wholly within the hyper-spatial tube and begun to speed back through the tube to its destination. And then, and only then, Kathryn Kinnison, third stage Lensman, ceased waiting and went into action. Carefully she brought her ship into the barest contact with the outside surface of the hyper-spatial tube and followed its course, racing ahead of the ship inside, to the tube's far-off point of origin.

And inside the hyper-spatial tube, aboard the swiftly speeding spaceship, D'zillich, High Tyrant of Nergal, looked up from the controls and turned to his aide. "Go, fetch the Lensman, Borkle," he said, "and bring him here at once. Gharlane is waiting to see him."

Chapter 8: JOURNEY'S END

From the control room of his ship, hidden on the back side of the Moon, Dr. Marc C. DuQuesne watched with grim satisfaction the evacuation and dismantling of the Galactic Patrol's First Galaxy Grand Headquarters. His plans for panicking Tellus into withdrawing from the ranks of Civilization had worked to perfection. It was true that the ousted Patrol was not withdrawing very far — only to Mars. But that, DuQuesne reflected, would hardly make much difference in the long run.

Already he had succeeded in becoming master of Tellus by taking over the powerful political and economic combine set up by Jake Briggs, Chairman of the Board for Universal Telenews, covert owner of Central Spaceways and heir to the fabulous fortune of Tellurian billionaire Alexander Edmundson. Even now, ten of Central Spaceways' precision manufacturing plants were retooling, and would soon begin turning out simplified projectors at the rate of over five hundred a day.

Nor was there any danger that the Patrol or Boskone might spy on those plants and learn the secret of the projector. For they were protected by special mind screens — screens that DuQuesne was confident would withstand the probing of even a third stage mentality. In his own plenum, they had been found proof against the prying of even more powerful minds, those of the Intellectuals of Margholl.

At that thought, DuQuesne's countenance lost for a moment its look of sardonic satisfaction. He was remembering the time when he had once been one of that group of pure intellectuals — a bodiless intelligence, immaterial and immortal, capable of creating and manipulating matter at will, destroyable only by contact with a sixth order screen. He had experienced that state, however, for only a few short minutes after a cloud of hydrogen gas had destroyed the capsule in which his arch-foe Richard Seaton had imprisoned him, along with seven Margholians, the last survivors of their once mighty culture. Almost immediately after the Intellectuals had thus regained their freedom, One — the chief of the Margholians — had ejected DuQuesne from the group, deciding that his excessive concern for such a trivial matter as that of revenge against Seaton showed that he was not sufficiently advanced to become a worthy companion to them.

"You have failed," One had told him, "and I now know that no member of your race can ever become a true Scholar. You will be rematerialized and allowed to do whatever you please. Furthermore, since you should have precisely the same chance as before of living out your normal instant of life in a normal fashion, I will construct a vessel for you that will be the replica of your former one except that it will have a sixth order drive so that you can return to your home galaxy in comparatively few of your days."

And even as the entity finished speaking, it had been done, and DuQuesne had found himself once more embodied, seated before what appeared to be the familiar control board of the mighty craft he had formerly owned.

Naturally his first thought had been to recapture the ideal state of existence that he had just lost. He had known, of course, that the power of his recreated ship was in no way superior to that of Seaton's Skylark. And he was equally aware that his own previous discorporation had been accomplished not by Seaton but by the Margholians. Nevertheless DuQuesne was well aware that he did possess one advantage that Seaton had lacked: he knew the properties of being a pure intellectual from personal experience, not merely from theoretical speculation.

He also had another advantage which might prove equally significant: his long study of Oriental philosophy. When he and Seaton had first encountered the Intellectuals, they had advised him to continue his study of those Eastern mystics if he wished to develop himself so that he could someday become one of their number. He had done so for several years, concentrating particularly on astral projection, the art of projecting one's soul outside of one's body. It was in this way, DuQuesne

believed, that the Margholians must have originally dematerialized themselves.

His own powers of concentration were not sufficient to achieve such a result. With the aid of a certain amount of material help from the ship, however, it should be quite possible for him to set himself free once again from the confines of his material body.

It had taken DuQuesne nearly twenty hours of concentrated work to investigate his new ship thoroughly enough to determine how its present functions might be modified to produce the results he desired. It had then been the work of only a few minutes to program the computer to produce the intricate pattern of fifth and sixth order forces that he had finally decided would do the trick. Then DuQuesne had dropped his hands from the control board and immersed himself in thought, concentrating on his memories of being a disembodied intelligence and on his desire to regain the state he had so briefly known.

The attempt had not been a total failure, but it also not been altogether successful. DuQuesne's conscious personality had indeed succeeded in projecting itself free from his body so that it became a separate, viable entity. His body, however, had not disappeared as when the Margholians had effected his transition. Instead, his body had remained seated before the control board and — without the stimulus of the scientist's driving intelligence — promptly fallen sound asleep.

DuQuesne had spent the new few hours investigating his new state of existence. He had soon discovered that it was almost impossible for him to annihilate one milligram of matter, let alone any larger mass. He was also currently unable to create and manipulate matter with the same ease as had the millennia-old Margholians. It cost him minutes of concentration to create even an atom, hours to bring any more complex structure into being. He had accepted these limitations as a true scientist, without anger or bafflement at the occurrence of the unexpected, although resolved to experiment and see whether a regimen of mental exercise would lead to an increase in his powers.

His next surprise had come when his body awoke once more,... and he had found himself receiving what might be charitably termed its thoughts — its cravings for food and rest. He had listened with detached curiosity as the body used a thought-helmet to create a dinner, ate it ravenously, and then returned to bed and slept once more.

Before the body awakened once more, DuQuesne had succeeded in fully analyzing the strange situation in which he now found himself. He had indeed succeeded in becoming a free mind once again. The essence of his conscious personality had been fully set free from his body. That body had, however, survived the discorporation process completely. Its heart still beat. Its glands still functioned. Its brain cells still remembered all that he had ever learned. And some of his personality undoubtedly still remained within it, remnants not of the conscious part of his psyche but of his libido, his unconscious mind.

It should be quite interesting, DuQuesne had thought, to observe the extent to which his original personality would regenerate itself on the basis of his brain's retained memories and synapses. The fact that the link between himself and his — call it his doppelganger — was close enough to permit him to receive the other's thoughts would make observation of the process quite easy. Once he had determined what to do about the doppelganger, he could then return to his primary purpose: the destruction of Richard Seaton.

For the next few months, then, DuQuesne had observed — with growing distaste — the thoughts and actions of his former body. What had surprised him most was that nobody else seemed to notice the difference in "his" behavior, not even the closest of his Tellurian acquaintances, Dr. Stephanie de Marigny.

The growth in the doppelganger's egoism was, thought DuQuesne, particularly obvious. He himself had never cared particularly about naming things. His first Osnomian spaceship, for instance, would have remained anonymous if his henchman had not decided to name it the Violet on the ironical grounds that the battleship was "such a sweet, harmless, inoffensive little thing." In contrast, one of his doppelganger's first actions had been to christen his new ship — and in honor of himself, the Capital D.

Nor was that the only sign that a different personality was now inhabiting his body. The increasing influence of the sexual drive in the other's psyche was equally noticeable.

Despite these indications that his body's new personality differed greatly from his own in terms of its desires and criteria, DuQuesne was inexpressibly surprised and — for perhaps the first time in his adult life — actually shocked when he became aware that his doppelganger was planning to go back on his word, to break his truce with Seaton.

DuQuesne found himself faced with a dilemma. He was inextricably tied to his doppelganger, bound to receive its thoughts as long as it remained alive, caught in a rapport with a debased mockery of himself that might continue for over half a century. He knew that long before that even his iron control would break — and he would either find his own personality subtly degenerating to reflect his doppelganger's — or else become completely insane.

Worse still, he could not destroy his body and thus put an end to the slow torture. He could not get past the Capital D's sixth order screens, and there was no reason for his doppelganger to ever venture outside them. If that loathsome being wished to observe or affect anything outside the ship, he could always do so by means of the projector.

No, the only practical solution, DuQuesne reluctantly decided was to somehow put so much distance between himself and his doppelganger that the rapport would be broken. But how was he to do it? One thousand galaxies away, the other's thoughts still came in clearly, without seeming to have been in any way affected by the intervening distance. Mere remoteness within the three-dimensional continuum was evidently not enough. He would have to find some more radical means of separation.

The device that seemed likeliest to turn the trick was one that he himself had never used before, but that his doppelganger had recently acquired — the quad, a mechanical teleporter invented by the Jelmi. DuQuesne had intently observed the results of his doppelganger's experiments with the machine. Now he created a quad for himself, building it out of the countless free photons floating about him. By varying a number of parameters, he found that the quad could be set to transport an object not merely from one place to another but also from one plenum to another. He had perfected a means of inter-plenum travel.

Carefully he scanned plena, searching for an inhabited galaxy analogous to the Milky Way but one in which neither he nor Seaton had any analogues. Then he painstakingly created a ship for himself, a virtual duplicate of Seaton's formidable Skylark of Valeron. His last step was to create a new DuQuesne body, place it inside the ship, and enter it. He would have to make the inter-plenum transfer in a corporate state; the quad's power was unfortunately limited to handling material objects.

DuQuesne's one regret was that he was leaving Seaton behind unattended to. But he was comforted by the thought that even if he himself did not return to his native plenum for a century or so, he could still take care of his enemy by proxy. Once he had established himself as a galactic overlord in the new plenum, it would be relatively simple to send back a party of killers with instructions to

locate and dispose of his long-time foe.

And so Dr. Marc C. DuQuesne had left his native plenum and entered a new one. That had been only eleven days ago. In that time, he had already made himself secret master of Tellus. Now, still driven by his unbounded desire for power, he found himself faced with two major competitors for the prize of bi-galactic rule — the Galactic Patrol, headed unofficially by the Children of the Lens — and the divided forces of Boskone, one of them headed by Surgat the Plooran, the other — far fewer in number but yet far more powerful — headed by Gharlane of Eddore. Each of these powers controlled not less than ten million worlds. And yet DuQuesne, master of merely one planet, dared to dream of conquering the Two Galaxies. And the means to do it would soon be his!

And while DuQuesne luxuriated in thoughts of his future triumphs, a ship sped at an incredible velocity through a hyper-spatial tube, its pilot D'zillich, Gharlane of Eddore's craft second-in-command, its cargo Kit Kinnison, eldest Child of the Lens, now a prisoner in the hands of Civilization's deadliest foes. And outside the hyper-spatial tube, Constance Kinnison glided along the tube's surface and followed its course, racing ahead of the Boskonian craft to the tube's point of origin, the far-off planet of Nergal.

"I'm going to go in as the first ransomer," Kit had told his sister two days before. "There's no other way to get a quick line on their location.... Con, analyze the tube when and if it forms and follow it. Don't worry about me; I can take care of myself. But find out where that tube goes."

She had not disputed his assurance that he would be safe. Kit had plenty of jets. He could take anything those Boskonian apes dished out and come back for more. If he couldn't get the job done, Constance had thought, nobody could.

Meanwhile, aboard the Nergalian vessel, Kit Kinnison was beginning to resign himself to the prospect of utter, total defeat.

At first all had gone routinely. The hyper-spatial tube had appeared just as he had expected, and he had been immediately pulled aboard by tractor beams into the ship waiting inside. His captors had instantly immobilized him with a tractor zone, stripped him of the armored spacesuit he had been wearing as a protection against the bitter sub-zero temperatures of Lyrane IX, and methodically frisked him for concealed weapons.

His first sign that he was up against more than he had bargained for came when, after allowing himself to be rendered apparently helpless, he had attempted to take over the mind of one of his captors, driving a solid beam of thought along a channel perceivable only by a third grade mentality. The result was starkly incredible. Nothing happened! The zwilnik was wearing a shield that solidly screened him from the bottom of the spectrum right to the very top.

"Feeling frustrated, Lensman?" a voice asked, but did not wait for a reply. "You have volunteered to become a prisoner of war in order to ransom two thousand Plutonians. A noble deed. But first we must interview you to make sure that you are acting in good faith."

The speaker turned to the crewman operating the tractor zone and gave a series of curt instructions. A few seconds later Kit found himself being towed by the tractor zone out into and through the ship's winding corridors. Doors opened for him and closed behind him until at last he was brought to an abrupt halt in what was evidently the ship's control room. In it there were two beings. One sat with his back to Kit, intent on the ship's control panel. But it was the other being on whom Kit's attention was immediately focused.

Standing impassively in the middle of the room was a gray man. Not only was he dressed entirely in gray but his hair was gray, his eyes were gray, and even his skin was a light gray, as if it had been tinted to its present shade of tan. To Kit, it seemed that he was looking at an obscene burlesque of a Gray Lensman.

"Lensman Christopher Kinnison," the being said quietly but crisply. "You have no idea how much satisfaction it gives me to meet with you under these circumstances. But first let me introduce myself so that you too can appreciate the significance of this meeting. I have been known to your people by many names — Sulla, Marius, Mithradates, Nero,... Roger,... Fossten....

"I am Gharlane of Eddore."

"But.... The Arisians said you were dead. How—"

"We have less than an hour until this ship reaches its destination. I have no intention in wasting that time in explaining my existence to a mentality that will soon cease to exist itself."

And with that, Gharlane attacked. Crescendoing waves of mental force beat agonizingly against Kit's mind shield. The young Lensman valiantly defended himself against the mounting fury of the Eddorian's onslaught, but he soon realized that he was ultimately doomed to lose the contest. And yet, though he felt despair in every atom of his being, Kit doggedly hung on, the Lens on his brawny forearm blazing ever brighter and brighter as he drew on it for more and more energy.

But finally, despite all Kit's efforts, the titanic battle of minds drew towards its inevitable end, and Kit's mind shield gave way before the irresistible force of Gharlane's attack. With a feeling of utter horror, Kit felt the Eddorian gradually take over his mind.

And now on the seemingly helpless mind of the young Lensman, Gharlane began to impose a set of commands. Kit was to return to Thrale, to board the Directrix — the mighty flagship of the Galactic Patrol's Grand Fleet — and to destroy her.

With overwhelming anguish, Kit realized why Gharlane had chosen not to kill him. He, Child of the Lens, had now become merely a tool of the Eddorian. The Guardian of Civilization would become its involuntary executioner.

And then Kit felt that anguish cease. For now Gharlane began to impress a series of false memories on the young Lensman's unresisting mind.

When the Nergalian ship emerged from the hyper-spatial tube, Kit's face was glowing with triumph. Vividly he recalled how he had single-handedly captured the spaceship, probed the mind of its captain and found a vital clue to the whereabouts of Surgat, head of the resurgent Boskonian Empire. With a high heart, he donned his spacesuit again, Lensed his sister Constance to pick him up, left the Boskonian vessel, matched velocities with Constance's ship, and entered it.

Constance immediately spun the speedster around end for end, then set the tiny craft to drive forward at its greatest possible speed. Then she got up from the control chair and ran to her brother's arms. "Oh, Kit. It's so good to see you again."

He held her tightly in his arms, kissed her tenderly, then said, "It's good to see you again too, Con. For awhile, I was scared that I might not be able to do it again; some of those apes were pretty tough monkeys. But it all came out all right after— Or did it?"

"I don't understand what you mean, Kit." Her gold-flecked tawny eyes stared up at him in puzzlement.

"Neither do I." He released her, then said, "Leave me alone for a couple of minutes, Con. I've got some hard thinking to do."

Painstakingly, Kit forced himself to review his recent memories, subjecting each to an excruciatingly minute scrutiny. Finally he came to the soul-stunning conclusion that his memories had somehow been subtly tampered with. But why? And what in truth had happened to him within that hyper-spatial tube?

In that moment of trial, the true strength of Christopher Kinnison's personality fully showed itself. He fought doggedly against the conditioned memories, fought his way to the truth — and won. And knew himself in that moment of victory to be still bound by the commands of Gharlane of Eddore.

And in that moment of mingled triumph and defeat, Kit realized that there was only one way in which he could defeat the Eddorian's plans, one way in which he could prevent himself from destroying the Directrix and thus dooming the forces of Civilization to utter defeat. And he shuddered with every fiber of his being at the thought what he must soon do.

"Con," Kit said quietly, "things didn't go well back there. Not at all. They got me — conditioned me to go back and destroy the Directrix. And I have to do it. I can't stop myself. And you can't stop me. If you tried, I'd... have to destroy you."

"Kit, I still don't understand. Who could lay a compulsion that strong on you, a third stage Lensman?"

"An Eddorian could. An Eddorian did. Gharlane of Eddore is still alive."

The girl gasped with horror. "But Kit, what can we do? The Directrix mustn't be destroyed."

"I know. There's only one way out. I've got to die. I've got to kill myself."

"Kit, no!"

"I've got to. There's no other way. Con, if you love me,... give me your DeLameter."

The girl looked him levelly for several moments, gold-flecked tawny eyes staring steadily into gold-flecked tawny eyes. "QX, Kit," she said at last, "but first, please... kiss me goodbye."

He nodded, then slowly drew her to him again and kissed her tenderly. "Con," he murmured, brokenly, "I think I realize now for the first time what Mentor meant when he said that someday we'd find lifemates who'd truly be our equals. Oh, Con, to have to lose you now, all four of you.... If only there were some other way...." He fell silent, then continued in a changed voice, "I can't keep fighting against these compulsions much longer. Give me the DeLameter, Con."

Silently, she handed him the blaster, then turned away from him and walked slowly back to the control chair. For the rest of the trip, she kept her attention rigidly focused on the viewscreen before her. Finally the tiny speedster reached its journey's end, the spaceport of Thrale. Then at last Constance Kinnison, Child of the Lens, got up from the control chair and left the room,

expressionlessly filing her way past the remains of what had once been her beloved brother.

Chapter 9: THE POWER OF HATE

Once her tiny speedster had finally landed on Thrale, Constance Kinnison's first impulse had been to leave the ship as soon as possible. Her face was expressionless as she got up from the control chair and, without looking down, filed past the remains of what had once been her beloved brother. But behind her lovely and apparently serene countenance, her mind burned with the agony of trying to control the turmoil of grief and rage which throbbed within her.

All through the trip back to Thrale, she had been remembering Kit's words at the time when — less than two weeks ago — the five Children of the Lens had received word that their parents and home planet had been suddenly and utterly destroyed.

"We've got no time for private griefs," Kit had told her then. "We've got two galaxies to take care of. We're the only Guardians that Civilization's got left — and we've got to live up to the responsibility."

Constance Kinnison had now resolved to continue to be equal to that burden — or die in the attempt!

As soon as she had left the ship, she got in touch with her three sisters. Her twin Camilla was also on Thrale, already back from her recent second stage Lensmen hunting trip in the First Galaxy. The two older girls, Kathryn and Karen, were on Tellus, a galaxy away, but their thoughts came in as diamond-clear as those of her twin.

"So, how did the ransom operation go?" Cam asked. "Did they use a hyper-spatial tube for the pick-up?"

"Yes," said Constance. "Kit was right about that." She stopped, trying to summon up her strength to tell them now. But no, there were other facts of importance that they should learn first. Without perceptible pause, she continued her tale. "I followed the tube from the outside in my speedster. It was being projected from a star cluster on the outskirts of the far side of the Second Galaxy. I was there about half an hour before the Boskonian ship came through and I took the chance to look around, without drawing any attention. That cluster is definitely the new Boskonian home base.

"For one thing, it's heavily guarded. The screens are as good as Eddore's were. And — I didn't have enough time to do a full investigation but — there's a planet orbiting one of the stars there whose measurements fit those of Pluto to twenty decimals.

"I'd just finished checking that out when Kit came — and...." At that point Constance's hard-won control nearly deserted her! Then she mastered herself once more and, in a series of flashing thoughts, told her sisters about the tragic events of the last day.

Stunned silence followed. Then Kathryn said slowly, "This calls for Grand Fleet action. We've got to get Gharlane as soon as possible before he disrupts Civilization permanently."

"Mentor himself apparently couldn't do that job," reminded Karen tartly.

"Mentor once told me that our minds had power superior even to that of the Arisians," said Kathryn. "There's no theoretical reason why we couldn't do what was impossible for him. We did it once before, when we helped Mom rescue Dad from the Hell-Hole."

"But potential power still isn't a substitute for experience," Kay promptly returned. "Gharlane is millennia old. We're all still under twenty-one. Do you seriously believe we can destroy him? The Unit might have been able to. But now that Kit's died, the Unit is gone!"

"If we can't destroy Gharlane, we can still destroy his base of operations," said Camilla. "He can't achieve anything significant without an organization to work through. And besides, let's not underestimate ourselves. Even if the Unit is no longer possible, we can still work in fusion; we've done it before. And I'd match our fusion up against a Boskone one any day.

"Kay, you and Kit used to handle the job of driving and directing our five-fold fusion. Do you think you can do it alone for the four of us?"

"Of course," said Kathryn. "That is, if you're all willing. Con and Kay, what about it?"

Constance agreed enthusiastically. Karen's reply came more slowly. "QX, Kat. There's really nothing else we can do anyway — except sit around and wait to see what that sizonified Eddorian will do next. This way maybe we'll fail — but at least we'll fail fighting."

Less than twenty-four hours later, mobilization of the Galactic Patrol's Grand Fleet was complete. Nor did that mobilization leave the ranks of Civilization undefended. The Patrol strategists had not forgotten that the week of grace granted the Thralian Empire in Surgat of Boskone's ultimatum would come to an end within that day.

Therefore, to guard against the possibility of a sneak attack on the Civilized worlds of either the First or the Second Galaxy, the Patrol forces based in the First Galaxy had been divided into two groups. Half of them had remained in the First Galaxy, each assigned the duty of patrolling twice the area of space that they had previously defended. The other half of the First Galaxy fleets had been moved to the Second Galaxy, there ready to defend its Civilized worlds from any surprise Boskonian attack.

And, having been thus set free from its normal defense duties, the entire Patrol force of the Second Galaxy now moved, under the command of Galactic Coordinator Tregonsee, to attack a small star cluster on the far outskirts of the Second Galaxy, the cluster which, according to Constance Kinnison, held the home base of the resurgent Boskone — and the kidnapped Sol IX, Pluto with its over fifty million inhabitants.

Nor were warships the only weapons at the Grand Fleet's disposal. It also brought with it over five hundred loose planets, now flying free but all with tremendous intrinsic inertial velocities, and the same number of negaspheres.

Tregonsee had initially suggested also bringing along a number of planets from Nth space. Camilla, however, had advised against it on the grounds that fitting out the planets for action would give the enemy too much time to prepare for an attack. "As it is, we're cutting it awfully close, Uncle Trig," she had told him. "We don't want to get there and find they've decided to move somewhere else while we weren't looking."

She didn't tell him that her sister Constance had returned to land her personal ship on a deserted portion of Pluto, which Tellurian geographers had dubbed Tartarus, and which Pluto's fourth-dimensional inhabitants who considered a Terran polar winter as unbearably hot called the Stormlands because of its inclement weather. There she waited, prepared to alert her sisters to any military action in the system — and to try to save the people of Pluto from the upcoming Patrol attack.

Tregonsee had eventually agreed to Camilla's proposals. She had listened to him with apparent concentration but actually had paid attention to the Rigelian's cogitations with only a fraction of her mind. Most of it had been engaged in a private conversation with her oldest sister.

"So you see, Kat, we just don't dare let them use a hyperspace projectile. During the Battle of Ploor, it was only Arisian supervision that kept the hyperspace matter's mass from instantaneously becoming some high-order infinity. If it had, all the matter in known space would have coalesced with it in zero time. We just won't be able to take time out for that kind of close order supervision - not and handle Gharlane simultaneously."

Kathryn had agreed, and the matter had thus been settled. The Patrol's Grand Fleet would have to go up against its oldest and deadliest foe deprived of its most formidable weapon.

But still, despite all that, despite the tragic events of the last three weeks, the spirit of the Patrolmen still remained unshaken. Morale ran high throughout the Grand Fleet as that mighty armada steadily forged its way across the galaxy, its thousands of ships kept in perfectly battle formation by command coordinators aboard the Directrix, who were now under the supreme command of Tregonsee, with Nadreck, Kathryn, Karen, and Camilla handling the flagship's big tank.

Also present in the flagship's control room were two recently Enlensed beings, Kwadra of Rigel IV and Surpione of Valentia, whom Camilla had just recruited in her recent trip to the First Galaxy. These two were, as each of the other Kinnison girls immediately recognized, potential second stage Lensmen. And, since minds stable at the second level of stress do not occur by sheer chance, each girl realized at once that here were the potential mates that Mentor had designed for Tregonsee and Worsel.

"What troubles me," Camilla told her sisters, "is that I wasn't able to find either of Nadreck's potential complements. But I suppose they probably emigrated from Palain VII to another world. I just didn't have time to search all the frigid-type worlds in the Two Galaxies. For all I know, they're on Pluto. Con, keep an eye out for them."

"They're not there," said Karen. "They're both dead. Over twenty years dead."

"You remember how secretive Nadreck has always been about the details of his attack on Onlo. I got curious about it and deep probed him surreptitiously."

"It turned out that Onlo wasn't just a military fortress. It was also a central military intelligence base, where difficult prisoners were sent to be interrogated. When Nadreck attacked it, his key objective was, of course, simply to destroy the planet as a military base by making the Onlonians kill one another. With his characteristic single-mindedness, he didn't realize until too late that he was dooming all of the planet's prisoners at the same time. And, as those prisoners died there, Nadreck suddenly found himself in a wide open three-way with two of them. It was just like what happened to Mom and Dad at the Grand Ball, but with three minds, not two. Except for the ending. The other two Palainians died. That's why Nadreck's kept it under Lensman's Seal all these years."

"I'm surprised Mentor didn't intervene to save the two Palainians," said Constance.

"By then Mentor had already decided on the Tellurian line of evolution as the source of the third stage Lensmen he wanted. Therefore, to him, the lives of those two Palainians were of no importance. He started treating Dad and Mom the same way once we five reached mental maturity. Remember when Dad was lost in the Hell-Hole and Mom nearly killed herself trying to save him."

Mentor wasn't a bit worried about the death of either of them. It wasn't until we stepped in to help that he got concerned."

"And right now we'd better get ready to step in again," broke in Kathryn. "We should be touching their outermost scanning screens within the next few minutes. Constance may have sneaked through them, but there's no way a fleet this size can do that — as long as the screens stay up. Let's go into fusion."

She laid out a matrix, and the other three girls came in. There was a brief moment of snuggling and fitting; then each of the girls experienced the same feeling of mingled disappointment and approval. This was in no way like the perfection of the Unit, but it was still a fusion of incredible power and efficiency. Kay spoke for them all when she said, "Maybe we have got a chance of destroying Gharlane at that."

"Let's hit him now and find out," said Constance. "There's no point in waiting any longer."

"QX," Kathryn agreed. And the four-fold fusion struck out. As the four girls flung themselves into that attack, the other beings in the Directrix's big tank room were surprised to note that a Lens, bigger and brighter than that worn by any of the second stage Lensmen, now flamed on Kathryn's wrist; and indeed the very air above those three red-bronze-auburn heads now began to pulsate with that indescribable glow uniquely characteristic of the Lens of Arisia. And in Constance's speedster, the same glow flickered over her head. Mere physical distance did not affect the raw power of that third level fusion or its inbred attunement to the Arisian Lens. The energies released registered on the Plutonians' detectors, and set them to mount an expedition into the wilds of the Stormlands to find out what forces had been unleashed there.

But as that attack struck the mechanical screens that guarded the Nergalian star cluster, it triggered an automatic relay established over twenty years before. The Nergalians had long foreseen the eventual fall of Eddore under Arisian attack and determined that their own world must be even more securely guarded. To that end, they had created a truly diabolical device, an instrument capable of altering the relationship between a Lensman and his Lens so that the Lens ceased to be attuned to its wearer — and therefore instantly reverted to its unsatisfied state, thus killing its wearer and anyone else touching it.

The amount of energy used up by this device was, however, so great that all the Nergalians' resources were sufficient for using it to destroy only a handful of Lensmen. They had therefore reluctantly reserved it for use against second and third stage intelligences only. And they had tied it into their basic defense system, so that any Lensman with a mind powerful enough to be capable of penetrating Nergal's defensive thought screens would be instantaneously destroyed by his own Lens. Constance Kinnison had remained unaffected so far because she hadn't felt any need to materialize a Lens to serve as a focus to her mental powers; it was enough for her that a Lens would appear near her, circling her head like a cornet of coruscating light, whenever she summoned up all her mental strength.

The anti-Lens projector had been used only once before in the entire history of the Two Galaxies. Then it had resulted in the destruction of second stage Lensman Worsel of Velantia. Now it was automatically triggered into action against Tregonsee, Nadreck, and the four Kinnison girls.

Tregonsee and Nadreck died immediately, without knowing even a moment of pain. The Arisians had designed the Lens to be deadly but not an instrument of torture.

In the air over the Kinnison sisters' heads, the pulsating radiance that had glowed with the radiant

color characteristic of the Lens of Arisia in its satisfied form now changed hue, turned dull and deadly. And the same change simultaneously occurred on the Lens encircling Kathryn's wrist!

In that moment, as her sisters stared at her in horror, Kathryn Kinnison, eldest Daughter of the Lens died. And with her death, the fusion which she had been coordinating fell to pieces.

And — at that exact instant — the Nergalians launched their attack against the invading Grand Fleet.

First there came, aimed directly at the advancing armada, what can only be described as a hyper-sunbeam, a bar of quasi-solid lightning into which had been compressed the energy output not of merely one sun but of all the stars in the entire cluster!

The Patrol had found the sunbeam to be a highly destructive weapon, although a clumsy and unwieldy one. This hyper-sunbeam, however, was neither clumsy nor unwieldy, not because it differed in quality from the sunbeam, but because it was being handled and aimed not by mere first level mentalities but by a hand-picked team of Nergalians, the least of whom was on a par with any of the Patrol's second stage Lensmen, with their decisions implemented by the a computer that received their orders not through any slow intermediary of mechanical controls but through direct thought transfer.

So Nergal's counterattack now carefully and meticulously stripped away layer after layer of the Patrol's Grand Fleet, always careful to leave the Directrix unharmed. Gharlane of Eddore did not choose to allow those aboard the Fleet's flagship to die so easily.

Instead, Gharlane himself now attacked, unleashing his full powers for the first time in millennia, fighting with an intensity that he had not used since the last of Eddore's savage internecine wars had ceased. His bolts of thought ripped their way into the Directrix, as if the flagship's screens had not even existed — and then rebounded, temporarily stopped by Karen Kinnison's instinctively flung up shield.

Under the impetus of that ultimately lethal attack, Karen and Camilla linked hands and drew Constance once more into a mental fusion, to launch a counterattack. But it was in vain. Constance's most powerful mental bolts rebounded harmlessly from the Eddorian's hard-held block.

In the Directrix's control room, Karen and Camilla stood there, motionless, heads bent and almost touching, grasping one another's wrists. At their feet lay the lifeless body of their oldest sister. Around them lay scattered other equally lifeless bodies, for already the reverberations, the ricochets, the spent forces of Gharlane's attack had wrought grievously against the bystanders. Those forces were so deadly to all life that even their transformation products affected tremendously the nervous systems of all nearby their targets.

And still the Eddorian's attack continued, never letting up for one moment. Gharlane bored onward, driving a needle of pure force against Karen's supposedly absolutely impenetrable shield. Minute after slow minute, that titanic battle of minds raged on. And ultimately Karen's shield gave way, was punctured — and in the instant of the puncturing it disappeared like a broken bubble and was no more. And so great was the torrent of force cascading into the Directrix that within a moment after Karen's shield had gone down, all life within the flagship of Civilization was utterly snuffed out.

Such was the end of Civilization's Grand Fleet in its last battle against the forces of Boskone.

And on Pluto, nearly a light hour away, Constance's heart still beat, but her mind, her personality,

that vital essence that had made her a force that even Gharlane could not dismiss as negligible, was now utterly gone. It was not Gharlane, not D'zillich, but the aide Borkle who took on the final task of tidying up the Battle of Nergal by taking the living body of Constance Kinnison, the last Child of the Lens, and causing her to leave the warm haven of her ship and go out onto the merciless blasts of Pluto's Tartarus, where death came to her in the moment of her first breath. The next day, the bright red of her hair drew the attention of the Plutonian expedition, who could guess that she had come in a futile attempt to aid them but would never guess how close that attempt had come to success, would have succeeded if only the Grand Fleet had been led not just by the four Kinnison sisters but by the entire Unit, as it would have been if only Kit Kinnison had still been alive.

And on Nergal, Gharlane of Eddore, now that he had permanently disposed of the five Children of the Lens, knew himself to be able to realize his dreams of infinite power, power unhindered by any effective opposition whatsoever. It was with unalloyed satisfaction that the Eddorian turned to his own private extension of Nergal's computer and asked, "What is the probability now that Nergal under my leadership will dominate the Material Cosmic All?"

The computer did not answer.

Instead there came a voice from behind him. "The probability," it said, "is exactly zero."

Gharlane had not been aware that anyone was in the room with him; he could detect no mind, no thoughts, no life force. He whirled about, raging with fury at the insubordinate Nergalian who had chosen this moment to try out a mind screen and attempt a coup d'etat. But the humanoid he now faced was no Nergalian, no minion of Boskone, but a total and absolute stranger!

"If you have come here on behalf of the Patrol to tell me that," said Gharlane coldly, "know that you have come too late. All of Civilization's minds of power are now dead. The Arisians bred only a limited number of second and third stage intelligences, and I have now succeeded in eliminating all of them."

"And I am sincerely thankful to you for doing it," the other replied. "It would have probably taken me several months to manage it. As it is, it has already taken me almost two hours to put out of action all of the Galactic Patrol forces currently operating in the First Galaxy."

"I had thought no one else survived. Just when did you leave the Circle?"

"I never entered it. I am not an Eddorian. But I am similar to your people in one respect. Like you, I was not born in this plenum. The difference is that you arrived here several millennia ago, and it took you this long to come close to conquering it. I've only been here for a little over two weeks.

"My native plenum is quite backward in many areas of scientific investigation compared to this one. No one there, for example, has ever devised a Lens. On the other hand, scientists there have experimented with and learned how to control phenomena which your plenum is totally unfamiliar with.

"One result of this experimentation is the projector, the means by which I am now speaking to you. The image it projects cannot be affected by any physical force. And, as I'm sure you've already noticed, the mind of the person whose image is projected, cannot be read or affected by any mental force directed to the image. A projection thus has all the advantages of personal presence and none of the disadvantages. It's a convenient way for conducting conversations at a distance.

"It's also a very efficient method of attack. I told you before that I've had the Patrol's First Galaxy fleets put out of action. The job was done by two thousand Tellurians, each equipped with a limited projector, capable of materializing a projection only in an inertialess zone. Almost two hours ago, each man projected his image into the engine room of a Patrol vessel — and stuck his finger into the Bergenholm drive, then cut off the projection, reset the controls for another Patrol ship, and so on.

"A very simple method of destruction, wouldn't you agree? I took care of your computer here myself in a similar fashion, using my own unlimited projector — just before I made my presence here known to you."

"All need for the computer is now over," said Gharlane calmly. "Its continued existence would only have tempted some Nergalian to dream of supplanting me.... And so you tell me that all the Patrol's ships in the First Galaxy are now limited to sublight-speed velocities. Have you had any thoughts about their ships in the Second Galaxy?"

"If any of them tries to cross between the galaxies, it'll get wrecked somewhere in intergalactic space. Otherwise, I intend to let the remnants of Boskone and the remnants of the Patrol fight it out here in the Second Galaxy until I have sufficiently consolidated my command of the First Galaxy to be able to take on the Second one. I will, of course, take steps to see that neither side gains any overwhelming victory in that contest."

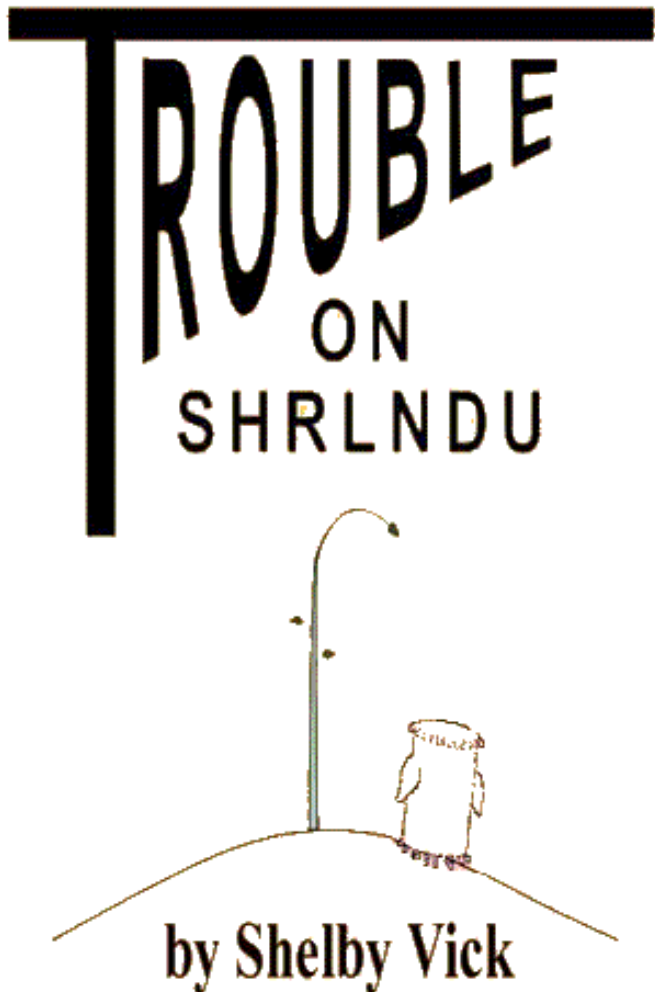
"And what do you intend to do to stop me from wrecking this plan of yours?" Even before he had finished speaking, Gharlane attacked. But the intense mental forces at his command which had previously proved so deadly now had no effect whatsoever. The Eddorian's hardest-driven probes merely passed harmlessly through the space occupied by the other's seeming presence.

The stranger did not counterattack but instead stood there smiling sardonically for several minutes, then said imperturbably, "Despite your present asinine attempt to kill me, I have no particular desire to kill you. Once I would have done so as the only way to ensure that you would not interfere with my plans. Now I have a more effective means than death to get rid of you.

"I am going to transfer you to another plenum. And, anticipating your next question, you will not be able to come back here, because I will — at the moment of your departure — set up a screen about this plenum which will keep out you and any other trespassers who may be wandering around.

"I plan on staying here for some time, at least the next few centuries. And so, to console all the old and dear friends I left behind for my absence, I'm going to send you to my native plenum. I want you to be particularly sure to give my warmest regards to an especially close companion of mine — his name is Richard Ballinger Seaton. Tell him you've got a message for him from Dr. Marc C. DuQuesne. Tell him that I'm only sorry that present conditions make it impossible for me to look him up myself. I'm sure he'll understand."

And with that, DuQuesne set his inter-plenum transporter device into action, and Gharlane vanished from the room, forcibly expelled from the plenum in which for so long he had been one of the most powerful mentalities — and now barred from returning to it. The Eddorian's only consolation in that moment was that the enemies he had fought for so long were no longer alive to triumph at his defeat. Nor would they have rejoiced greatly at the turn of events, even if they had been capable of seeing it. For if Eddore and the Boskonian Empire now seemed inevitably destined to utter defeat, so too was Civilization. Both were now utterly doomed!



A slender tulip tree rose from its mound on the planet Shrlndu. Around it danced a Khorji pup, looking like a small living drum. Tendrils encircled the rims, top and bottom. Purple orbs that were eyes alternated with tendrils at the top; the rapid movement of its bottom tendrils provided motivation as it circled the tree.

The tree, the pup, and the mound were all that was there – until, with a popping sound caused by displaced air molecules, a man stood at the foot of the mound. “Man!” exclaimed the pup. Its top tendrils stroked the drum surface. The vibrations made words. A thin flap lifted from its side and beckoned. “Good! Come! There is trouble!” The pup started away from the mound.

The man, wearing white slacks, a white shirt and white tennis shoes, didn’t move. Seeing he was not following, the pup stopped. “Come!” he declared. “Trouble!”

With a crooked grin, the man said, “Just what a man wants,” he remarked, sarcastically. “Trouble!”

“Come!”

“Not until I find out something,” the man said. He pointed to his chest. “My name is Greg Calkins. Your name?” he asked, pointing at the pup.

“Come!” the pup said, impatiently, tendrils vibrating.

“Your name?” the man repeated.

“Name Thwil, Gregcalkins. Now come!”

Calkins did not move. “Where am I?” he asked. “What is this place?” A sweep of his hand took in the entire area. There were mounds with tulip trees on them for miles around.

“Place Shrlndu,” Thwil said, spinning around. “Come!”

Shrugging, Greg Calkins stepped off the mound and followed Thwil. “Everywhere I pop up there’s trouble,” he thought.

Greg Calkins was not a superstitious man; in fact, if all the scientific degrees he had earned were listed after his name, his name would triple in length. Nonetheless, he had only one explanation for why he ‘popped up’ the way he did: He was cursed!

It started when his wife, Shanna, came down with a new form of cancer. “We’ve found cures for nearly all forms of cancer,” he assured her. “We’ll cure this one, too!”

But weeks went by with no breakthrough. “I need more time!” he thought. Cryogenics would not work; some cancer cells could multiply even in cryogenics; besides, Shanna didn’t like being cold! “I need a stasis field,” he decided. No one had yet developed one, but there had been much speculation about one.

Under the pressure of immediate necessity, Calkins invented one.

It took over a year to perfect the remedy, but he succeeded. Shanna was lying on a table in the stasis field, beautiful in repose. “The cure is ready, my wonderful love,” he said, a broad smile of anticipation on his face. Calkins flipped a switch.

Shanna opened her eyes, smiled at him – then screamed in pain and writhed on the table as her body. . .changed. Time caught up with the field; Shanna’s body underwent over one year’s changes in seconds, and the cancer killed her.

Grabbing a metal bar, Calkins had lashed out at the stasis machine, screaming “Damn science!” He slashed thru some wires and chips. “Damn science!” he repeated, throwing the rod at the machine – and, with an electric flash, the scientist disappeared.

“I damned science,” Calkins reasoned. “That put a curse on me. Science struck back by sticking me away in some dimension where I only come out when there is trouble for me to take care of. But I can’t do anything about my own trouble!”

It later occurred to him that throwing the metal bar into his hastily-created stasis field had created a negative energy temporal field that lingered with him – but, with perverse humor, he preferred thinking of it as a curse.

He followed the Khorji pup. There seemed to be hundreds of tulip tree mounds, some mounds without the tree, and occasional ponds of water. Any time Calkins stopped to examine something, Thwil would spin around a time or two and say, “Come, Gregcalkins! Trouble!”

Calkins chuckled with dry humor. “Trouble was here before I showed up,” he said. “Now that I’m here, it’s suddenly an emergency!”

Without pausing, Thwil thrummed, “You man, Gregcalkins. Man fix.”

In five more minutes, they were on a mound above a small settlement. Five teepee-like structures were in the low space between the mounds. Young Khorji played between the teepees, and a larger Khorji was on his way up the mound to meet them.

“That Jorit, our leader,” Thwil explained. “Jorit!” Thwil exclaimed, louder. “Man here. Man named Gregcalkins!”

As the pup finished talking, Jorit had reached them. Jorit was at least twice Thwil’s size, which made him about five feet tall. “Gregcalkins,” the Khorji leader said. He extended a slender flipper from his side. Calkins bent down to shake his extended tip. “You can fix the troubles?”

“I can try,” Calkins said. “What is the trouble?”

“Let us go to my place,” Jorit said. He started back down the slope. “Thwil, thank you. Now you go home,” he said to the pup. “We have business.”

The pup scooted away and went into a teepee. Jorit led Calkins into a neighboring hut. Inside, the Khorji picked up a candle from the top of a chest in the center of the teepee floor. Beside it was a ‘striker’, an iron-and-flint mechanism with which to light the candle. Lighting it, sparks reflected in the Khorji’s purple eyes. Jorit pointed at a light fixture that hung from the middle of the teepee. “The hanging light no longer works,” he said.

Greg Calkins had seen no wires nor receptors, so he guessed that ‘hanging light’ had been battery operated. “Was the hanging light still operating when man left?” he asked.

“Yes,” Jorit said. “It burned for a very long time after man left. Man also gave us candles and strikers—”

A shrill scream sliced the air.

Calkins tossed back the flap of the teepee – to see the next teepee, where Thwil had gone, in flames. The scream came from inside the flames. The man snatched off his shirt and ran into the flames. Inside, he enveloped Thwil in the shirt and rushed back out.

He put Thwil down. “You okay?” he asked.

The Khorji pup’s tendrils vibrated, then thrummed out, “Thwil okay. Thank Gregcalkins.” He looked at Calkins. “You not burn. Why?”

“It’s part of what happened to me, Thwil,” the scientist answered. “My body always rebuilds itself.” He held up the shirt, still in his hands. “Same with the clothes I was wearing when it happened. Look.” He held the shirttail in both hands and ripped. The material separated. . .then rejoined.

The scientist put his shirt back on and turned to Jorit. “Why the teepees?” he asked. He hadn’t realized how sharply he asked until Jorit withdrew a few inches. “I’m not angry at you,” he explained. “But I was wondering. . . .”
“Man said to,” Jorit said.

“What did you live in before man came along?”

A wave of Jorit’s flipper took in the surrounding mounds. “Here,” he said.

“Apparently you have perfect weather,” Calkins said. “Good average temperature, no rain, no storms – you have no need of shelter. Or,” he added, bitterly, “fires to light their insides. Tear them down!” he ordered.

“But man said –”

“I’m a man!” Greg Calkins said, tightly. “Tear them down!”

After the teepees were dismantled, the man turned to Thwil. “Now, about this trouble you mentioned – where is it?”

“Jorit is leader,” the pup said, hesitantly.

“For this, I am in charge,” Calkins said. “Do you know where the trouble is?”

“Know where start,” Thwil agreed.

“Then let’s go and get this over with!”

After they had been going several minutes, the Khorji pup stopped. “Hear trouble,” he said.

The scientist stood still. He saw nothing, so he assumed that Thwil wasn’t saying the trouble was ‘here’, so the pup must have meant he heard the cause of the trouble. He cocked his head to one side, but wasn’t sure. Then he looked down at Thwil. The pup’s tendrils were all unmoving. Calkins lay down on the ground, ear against the soil. Yes, there was definitely a sound!

“I should have asked,” he said, apologizing. “Just what is the trouble?”

“Digger,” Thwil said. “Started. Is digging.”

Calkins stood up. “By itself?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Great; something went wrong, the digger is out of control.” He thought a moment. “Is it digging deep, or just a little under the surface?”

“Little,” Thwil replied. “Emptied two pools.”

“Ah!” Greg said. “That could be bad. Well, let’s get going.” Then he stopped. “I have an idea,” he said to the Khorji pup. “My legs are much longer than yours; I can cover ground faster. Why don’t I carry you and you give me directions?”

“Carry?” Thwil asked, blankly.

“Pick you up and hold you,” Greg Calkins explained. “I walk; you guide.” The scientist leaned over, slipped his fingers under Thwil, fingers alternating with the Khorji pup’s tendrils. He lifted. The pup was a little heavier than he had thought, but still fairly light. He straightened, and started walking.

“How’s this?” he asked.

“Carry good!” answered the pleased Thwil.

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Soon they came across another Khorji village. Greg Calkins introduced himself to the leader and said, “Take down the huts. They are not needed! Any other Khorji you meet, tell them that man’s new orders are to do away with these things!”

Five minutes after they left there, they found the trouble.

–Well, they found where a large, rather square hole came out of one mound. Opposite that mound, a similar hole went down. “Let’s go after it,” Greg said. He pointed down one passage. “Sound comes from there.”

The digger left tread tracks. They led into a rather square tunnel which the man looked down. He put Thwil down between the tracks. “Let’s go get it, sport,” he said.

“Name Thwil,” the Khorji pup objected.

Greg chuckled. “Joke,” he said.

Together, they moved down the tunnel. When it got too dark to continue, Greg reached into his pocket and pulled out one of the few things that came with him - a one-inch disc about one quarter inch thick. “Light!” the man said, holding the disc between thumb and forefinger and pointing it ahead. Bright light filled the tunnel ahead of them. Then, when they turned a curve and saw lights ahead of them.

The digger!

It moved slowly. The scientist said, “Off!” and the light went away. He put the disc in his pocket and he the pup caught up with the digger quickly. Thru the door windows, Greg could see the control room, filled with flickering lights and switches. “Now!” he said, putting his hand on the slidegrip that opened the door.

Nothing happened.

“Stuck!” Calkins said. He took a step forward as the digger continued moving. “Maybe this will do,” Calkins said. He turned sideways, stood on one leg and, with the other, kicked at the glass using his heel.

Again, nothing happened.

There were no rocks, no sticks – nothing to help him break the glass. Then, a thought came to him. “Thwil,” he said. “I’m going to pick you up and point you at the digger. I want you to scream as loud as you can. Loud, and shrill!” he said. “Okay?”

“Scream loud,” the pup said – but his voice did not reflect any understanding.

The scientist picked up the little Khorji and aimed him at the door. “Now!” he said.

Thwil screamed, and made it loud – but, again, nothing happened.

“Shrill!” Calkins said. “As shrill as you can – and loud. Do it and keep it up!”

The pup’s scream rose in pitch and volume. Greg Calkins wished he could hold Thwil and cover his ears at the same time. Then –

There was a tinkling sound, and the glass in the door cracked.

“More!” Greg insisted. Then –

The glass fell out of the door. The glass covering the instruments inside broke. Instrument lights went out.

The digger stopped.

“That’s enough!” the scientist said. He put the little Khorji down. “You stopped the digger!” he said, exultantly. “You did it yourself, Thwil!”

The Khorji was pleased – but puzzled. “I stop trouble?” he asked. “Just do what Gregcalkins say.”

Greg reached his hand thru the broken door window and opened the door. “Let’s just make certain,” he said, stepping inside and looking around. With the instrument lights out, the only light was from a glowing ceiling. There were no chairs and no entrance going deeper into the digger. Apparently, all the rest of it was machinery.

At each side of the instrument panel, a rod went from the floor to the ceiling – probably for someone to hold onto when they were checking the instruments. Calkins took off his shirt. Using its amazing recuperative powers, he bent down, tore it, held it against the bottom of the rod, then pulled it out when it healed itself. Standing tall, he did the same at the top of the rod.

What fell to the floor had a satisfactory sound of heavy metal. Swinging the bar, the man smashed at the instruments. Until – the ceiling collapsed on him.

“Gregcalkins!” the pup exclaimed. “You hurt?”

The ceiling was heavy, and pressed Greg to the floor. “I’m okay, Thwil,” he said. “Just. . . gotta get out from under this.”

“Thwil get help!” the pup said.

Greg started to object, but then decided it might be good to give the pup something he could do. “Go,” he said. “I’ll be okay.” He watched the small Khorji turn and leave, then dug his shirt out from under the wreckage. Cutting the ceiling into pieces would take a while, but he had time.

Time.

Since his accident, ‘time’ didn’t seem to matter any more. He didn’t age. He wasn’t even sure which ‘time’ he was in – how much time passed between awakenings. . . days, weeks, eons? He might never know; so far, the places he had popped into were inhabited by aliens who were removed from man’s civilization, so he had no way to find out what year or century he might be in.

He cut out another piece of the ceiling and tossed it aside. By the time Thwil returned, he should be free. . . if he was here at all! Once the ‘problem’ is taken care of wherever he appeared, he usually didn’t stay around much longer.

Thwil returned before Greg Calkins was reclaimed by time. He had two adult Khorji with him. The three stopped to watch the scientist push aside the last piece of the ceiling material.

“The others were right,” the nearest Khorji said.

“About what?” Calkins asked.

“Most did not think a man would need help,” the Khorji answered.

Calkins thought quickly. He did not want to reduce Thwil’s stature in the eyes of others of his race. “Thwil misunderstood,” he said. “Not his fault,” he went on. “All the excitement caused it.” He waved a hand at the now-silent digger. “The digger is stopped,” he went on. “With Thwil’s help, I was able to turn it off. I wanted others to see, so they would know.”

“That is good. We will tell others. Come!” The last was to his partner. They started back down the tunnel.

“Glad Gregcalkins. . .okay,” the Khorji pup said, struggling a little with the slang.

Calkins kneeled down to get his eyes more on Thwil’s level. “I cannot be hurt, Thwil,” Greg assured him. “Well,” he amended, “only for a second. This. . .thing that happened to me, my curse, sees to that.”

“Curse good,” the pup said.

“Not really,” the scientist said. “Because of it, I zap all around – with no control of when I go or where I go or when I leave.”

“Not go!” Thwil pleaded.

“I’ve got no control of it,” the man said. Even as he said it, a sleepy feeling crept over him. “I feel it coming on now,” he added. He wanted to leave some good advice for the young pup. “Use your mind, Thwil. Think things thru. Ask questions; always ask questi...”

A dejected Khorji pup stood alone in the tunnel.

FROM THE VIBRATING ETHER

Dear Lovely Luna –

How 'bout this? I'm writing my own mag a letter! The idea behind it is that SOME people might not be aware of the importance letter columns had on fandom back in the pulp days. And others, like me, might have forgotten some details. I dug around some and, with a lot of help from Ted White and rich brown, came up with this:

In the 1940s, lettercolumns in pulp magazines – primarily Planet Stories, Thrilling Wonder Stories and Startling Stories and CAPTAIN FUTURE – were the focus of sf fandom. Because of the war, there was a paper shortage which greatly reduced the number of fanzines available.

PLANET STORIES – The Vizigraph
THRILLING WONDER STORIES
(hereafter TWS) – The Reader Speaks
STARTLING STORIES (hereafter SS) –
The Ether Vibrates
CAPTAIN FUTURE – Under Observation



As many remember, Sarge Saturn ruled in TWS and SS, and was in Captain Future as well. He edited The Ether Vibrates, (in SS) which suggested our lettercol name. (I know, I know; then why is our name Planetary Stories? Good question. Someday, I might have an answer.)

The following taken from Timebinders. Began, I think, about August 5, 2005. Summed up in this letter from Ted White, August 8, 2005:

TWS also had a fanzine review column called "The Frying Pan." I broke down and went upstairs to my collection to research all this. First, Sarge Saturn appeared from the beginning of 1941 and lasted through the end of 1946, and a short bit into 1947 (going by the dates on the magazines). Specifically, he makes his first appearance (in my collection) in CAPTAIN FUTURE #5, dated "Winter 1941" -- but just to give you a better idea of how those magazines were dated, Winter 1941 is *followed* by Spring 1941. That is, it is the first issue dated 1941. (I have the previous four issues of CAPT FUTURE; Sarge Saturn is not in them.) My TWSs and STARTLINGs are spottier in that era, and the first TWS I have with Sarge in it is dated November, 1941 -- but I lack all earlier issues dated 1941. (Interestingly, there's a letter in that November, 1941 issue by "D. W. Boggs" of Minneapolis, whom I sure we all recognize as Redd Boggs.) I assume that Sarge appeared simultaneously in all three magazines around the beginning of 1941. The Sarge was in the February, 1947 issue of TWS. He was *not* in the March, 1947 issue of STARTLING. I assume his last appearance was in issues dated February, 1947.

So there you have it!
ShelVy

Thanx for the complement (AND the info.)

The next isn't a fan letter -- it's a very welcome offer of assistance. You've seen what he can do -- it's this issue's cover!

I saw your note about starting up this modern pulp, and thought I'd offer my services. I enclose some examples of my art, mostly from superhero apazines or RPGs. At present I don't have a lot of other stuff on my comptuer, but if you would like to see otehr examples, I will send some.

Bill Jackson

Now, a letter from a fan who knows what he's talking about. (He likes us; that proves he knows what he's talking about!):

Wow! I really don't think I could express it more clearly than that. I've just finished reading the first issue of Planetary Stories and am very impressed. You've managed (in this youngster's opinion) to recapture the spirit of the Golden Age pulps, bringing back the sensawunda that so much modern SF lacks.

I enjoyed every story, each one more than the last. (Almost literally - with the exception of having prefered "Moult Revolt" to "Neutron McGuirk," the stories are in increasing order of how much I enjoyed them.)

Keep up the good work - I'll be eagerly awaiting the next ish!

Jason K. Burnett
4903 Camden Ave N
Minneapolis MN 55430

Here's a brief one that just came in, from one of our favorite people:

Pulled your latest up and gave it a brief glance. Loved the cover! I am really looking forward to reading it all, because I greatly enjoyed your first issue.

D Gary Grady

WRITE!

It's writing that keeps Planetary Stories going – writing stories and, sometimes, the even more important writing of letters of comment.

STORIES –

As you can tell, we use both serious and flippant material. We want it to help us revive the feeling of the old pulp mags; new ideas that fit the profile, and parodies that make fun of them. We'll look at whatever you send. Send it to shelvy@planetarystories.com.

LETTERS –

Since we charge nothing for Planetary Stories, the only pay we receive is your letters of comment. Don't force a compliment! What we really want is an honest evaluation of what you have read. We take derision as well as compliments. We take suggestions. We like having stories taken apart and commented on.

So –

Please PAY US! It's what keeps us going. Stories. Letters. Whatever! Please write.