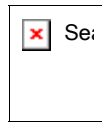


# Four-Day Planet

by H. Beam Piper



**SF**

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## DEDICATION

**For Betty and Vall, with  
loving remembrance**



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## Four-Day Planet

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### 1

### THE SHIP FROM TERRA



I went through the gateway, towing my equipment in a contragravity hamper over my head. As usual, I was wondering what it would take, short of a revolution, to get the city of Port Sandor as clean and tidy and well lighted as the spaceport area. I knew Dad's editorials and my sarcastic news stories wouldn't do it. We'd been trying long enough.

The two girls in bikinis in front of me pushed on, still gabbling about the fight one of them had had with her boy friend, and I closed up behind the half dozen monster-hunters in long trousers, ankle boots and short boat-jackets, with big knives on their belts. They must have all been from the same crew, because they weren't arguing about whose ship was fastest, had the toughest skipper, and made the most money. They were talking about the price of tallow-wax, and they seemed to have picked up a rumor that it was going to be cut another ten centisols a pound. I eavesdropped shamelessly, but it was the same rumor I'd picked up, myself, a little earlier.

"Hi, Walt," somebody behind me called out. "Looking for some news that's fit to print?"

I turned my head. It was a man of about thirty-five with curly brown hair and a wide grin. Adolf Lautier, the entertainment promoter. He and Dad each owned a share in the Port Sandor telecast station, and split their time between his music and drama-films and Dad's newscasts.

"All the news is fit to print, and if it's news the *Times* prints it," I told him. "Think you're going to get some good thrillers this time?"

He shrugged. I'd just asked that to make conversation; he never had any way of knowing what sort of films would come in. The ones the *Peenemünde* was bringing should be fairly new, because she was outbound from Terra. He'd go over what was aboard, and trade one for one for the old films he'd shown already.

"They tell me there's a real Old-Terran-style Western been showing on Völund that ought to be coming our way this time," he said. "It was filmed in South America, with real horses."

That would go over big here. Almost everybody thought horses were as extinct as dinosaurs. I've seen so-called Westerns with the cowboys riding Freyan *oukry*. I mentioned that, and then added:

"They'll think the old cattle towns like Dodge and Abilene were awful sissy places, though."

"I suppose they were, compared to Port Sandor," Lautier said. "Are you going aboard to interview the distinguished visitor?"

"Which one?" I asked. "Glenn Murell or Leo Belsher?"

Lautier called Leo Belsher something you won't find in the dictionary but which nobody needs to look up. The hunters, ahead of us, heard him and laughed. They couldn't possibly have agreed more. He was going to continue with the fascinating subject of Mr. Leo Belsher's ancestry and personal characteristics, and then bit it off short. I followed his eyes, and saw old Professor Hartzenbosch, the principal of the school, approaching.

"Ah, here you are, Mr. Lautier," he greeted. "I trust that I did not keep you waiting."



Then he saw me. "Why, it's Walter Boyd. How is your father, Walter?"

I assured him as to Dad's health and inquired about his own, and then asked him how things were going at school. As well as could be expected, he told me, and I gathered that he kept his point of expectation safely low. Then he wanted to know if I were going aboard to interview Mr. Murell.

"Really, Walter, it is a wonderful thing that a famous author like Mr. Murell should come here to write a book about our planet," he told me, very seriously, and added, as an afterthought: "Have you any idea where he intends staying while he is among us?"

"Why, yes," I admitted. "After the *Peenemünde* radioed us their passenger list, Dad talked to him by screen, and invited him to stay with us. Mr. Murell accepted, at least until he can find quarters of his own."

There are a lot of good poker players in Port Sandor, but Professor Jan Hartzenbosch is not one of them. The look of disappointment would have been comical if it hadn't been so utterly pathetic. He'd been hoping to lasso Murell himself.

"I wonder if Mr. Murell could spare time to come to the school and speak to the students," he said, after a moment.

"I'm sure he could. I'll mention it to him, Professor," I promised.

Professor Hartzenbosch bridled at that. The great author ought to be coming to his school out of respect for him, not because a seventeen-year-old cub reporter sent him. But then, Professor Hartzenbosch always took the attitude that he was conferring a favor on the *Times* when he had anything he wanted publicity on.

The elevator door opened, and Lautier and the professor joined in the push to get into it. I hung back, deciding to wait for the next one so that I could get in first and get back to the rear, where my hamper wouldn't be in people's way. After a while, it came back empty and I got on, and when the crowd pushed off on the top level, I put my hamper back on contragravity and towed it out into the outdoor air, which by this time had gotten almost as cool as a bake-oven.

I looked up at the sky, where everybody else was looking. The *Peenemünde* wasn't visible; it was still a few thousand miles off-planet. Big ragged clouds were still blowing in from the west, very high, and the sunset was even brighter and redder than when I had seen it last, ten hours before. It was now about 1630.

Now, before anybody starts asking just who's crazy, let me point out that this is not on Terra, nor on Baldur nor Thor nor Odin nor Freya, nor any other rational planet. This is Fenris, and on Fenris the sunsets, like many other things, are somewhat peculiar.

Fenris is the second planet of a G<sub>4</sub> star, six hundred and fifty light-years to the Galactic southwest of the Sol System. Everything else equal, it should have been pretty much Terra type; closer to a cooler primary and getting about the same amount of radiation. At least, that's what the book says. I was born on Fenris, and have never been off it in the seventeen years since.

Everything else, however, is not equal. The Fenris year is a trifle shorter than the



Terran year we use for Atomic Era dating, eight thousand and a few odd Galactic Standard hours. In that time, Fenris makes almost exactly four axial rotations. This means that on one side the sun is continuously in the sky for a thousand hours, pouring down unceasing heat, while the other side is in shadow. You sleep eight hours, and when you get up and go outside—in an insulated vehicle, or an extreme-environment suit—you find that the shadows have moved only an inch or so, and it's that much hotter. Finally, the sun crawls down to the horizon and hangs there for a few days—periods of twenty-four G.S. hours—and then slides slowly out of sight. Then, for about a hundred hours, there is a beautiful unfading sunset, and it's really pleasant outdoors. Then it gets darker and colder until, just before sunrise, it gets almost cold enough to freeze CO<sub>2</sub>. Then the sun comes up, and we begin all over again.

You are picking up the impression, I trust, that as planets go, Fenris is nobody's bargain. It isn't a real hell-planet, and spacemen haven't made a swear word out of its name, as they have with the name of fluorine-atmosphere Niffenheim, but even the Reverend Hiram Zilker, the Orthodox-Monophysite preacher, admits that it's one of those planets the Creator must have gotten a trifle absent-minded with.

The chartered company that colonized it, back at the end of the Fourth Century A.E., went bankrupt in ten years, and it wouldn't have taken that long if communication between Terra and Fenris hadn't been a matter of six months each way. When the smash finally came, two hundred and fifty thousand colonists were left stranded. They lost everything they'd put into the company, which, for most of them, was all they had. Not a few lost their lives before the Federation Space Navy could get ships here to evacuate them.

But about a thousand, who were too poor to make a fresh start elsewhere and too tough for Fenris to kill, refused evacuation, took over all the equipment and installations the Fenris Company had abandoned, and tried to make a living out of the planet. At least, they stayed alive. There are now twenty-odd thousand of us, and while we are still very poor, we are very tough, and we brag about it.

There were about two thousand people—ten per cent of the planetary population—on the wide concrete promenade around the spaceport landing pit. I came out among them and set down the hamper with my telecast cameras and recorders, wishing, as usual, that I could find some ten or twelve-year-old kid weak-minded enough to want to be a reporter when he grew up, so that I could have an apprentice to help me with my junk.

As the star—and only—reporter of the greatest—and only—paper on the planet, I was always on hand when either of the two ships on the Terra-Odin milk run, the *Peenemünde* and the *Cape Canaveral*, landed. Of course, we always talk to them by screen as soon as they come out of hyperspace and into radio range, and get the passenger list, and a speed-recording of any news they are carrying, from the latest native uprising on Thor to the latest political scandal on Venus. Sometime the natives of Thor won't be fighting anybody at all, or the Federation Member Republic of Venus will have some nonscandalous politics, and either will be the man-bites-dog story to end man-bites-dog stories. All the news is at least six months old, some more than a year. A spaceship can log a light-year in sixty-odd hours, but radio waves still crawl along at the same old 186,000 mps.

I still have to meet the ships. There's always something that has to be picked up



personally, usually an interview with some VIP traveling through. This time, though, the big story coming in on the *Peenemünde* was a local item. Paradox? Dad says there is no such thing. He says a paradox is either a verbal contradiction, and you get rid of it by restating it correctly, or it's a structural contradiction, and you just call it an impossibility and let it go at that. In this case, what was coming in was a real live author, who was going to write a travel book about Fenris, the planet with the four-day year. Glenn Murell, which sounded suspiciously like a nom de plume, and nobody here had ever heard of him.

That was odd, too. One thing we can really be proud of here, besides the toughness of our citizens, is our public library. When people have to stay underground most of the time to avoid being fried and/or frozen to death, they have a lot of time to kill, and reading is one of the cheaper and more harmless and profitable ways of doing it. And travel books are a special favorite here. I suppose because everybody is hoping to read about a worse place than Fenris. I had checked on Glenn Murell at the library. None of the librarians had ever heard of him, and there wasn't a single mention of him in any of the big catalogues of publications.

The first and obvious conclusion would be that Mr. Glenn Murell was some swindler posing as an author. The only objection to that was that I couldn't quite see why any swindler would come to Fenris, or what he'd expect to swindle the Fenrisians out of. Of course, he could be on the lam from somewhere, but in that case why bother with all the cover story? Some of our better-known citizens came here dodging warrants on other planets.

I was still wondering about Murell when somebody behind me greeted me, and I turned around. It was Tom Kivelson.

Tom and I are buddies, when he's in port. He's just a shade older than I am; he was eighteen around noon, and my eighteenth birthday won't come till midnight, Fenris Standard Sundial Time. His father is Joe Kivelson, the skipper of the *Javelin*; Tom is sort of junior engineer, second gunner, and about third harpooner. We went to school together, which is to say a couple of years at Professor Hartzenbosch's, learning to read and write and put figures together. That is all the schooling anybody on Fenris gets, although Joe Kivelson sent Tom's older sister, Linda, to school on Terra. Anybody who stays here has to dig out education for himself. Tom and I were still digging for ours.

Each of us envied the other, when we weren't thinking seriously about it. I imagined that sea-monster hunting was wonderfully thrilling and romantic, and Tom had the idea that being a newsman was real hot stuff. When we actually stopped to think about it, though, we realized that neither of us would trade jobs and take anything at all for boot. Tom couldn't string three sentences—no, one sentence—together to save his life, and I'm just a town boy who likes to live in something that isn't pitching end-for-end every minute.

Tom is about three inches taller than I am, and about thirty pounds heavier. Like all monster-hunters, he's trying to grow a beard, though at present it's just a blond chin-fuzz. I was surprised to see him dressed as I was, in shorts and sandals and a white shirt and a light jacket. Ordinarily, even in town, he wears boat-clothes. I looked around behind him, and saw the brass tip of a scabbard under the jacket. Any time a hunter-ship man doesn't have his knife on, he isn't wearing anything else. I wondered about his being in port now. I knew Joe Kivelson wouldn't bring his ship



in just to meet the *Peenemünde*, with only a couple of hundred hours' hunting left till the storms and the cold.

"I thought you were down in the South Ocean," I said.

"There's going to be a special meeting of the Co-op," he said. "We only heard about it last evening," by which he meant after 1800 of the previous Galactic Standard day. He named another hunter-ship captain who had called the *Javelin* by screen. "We screened everybody else we could."

That was the way they ran things in the Hunters' Co-operative. Steve Ravick would wait till everybody had their ships down on the coast of Hermann Reuch's Land, and then he would call a meeting and pack it with his stooges and hooligans, and get anything he wanted voted through. I had always wondered how long the real hunters were going to stand for that. They'd been standing for it ever since I could remember anything outside my own playpen, which, of course, hadn't been too long.

I was about to say something to that effect, and then somebody yelled, "There she is!" I took a quick look at the radar bowls to see which way they were pointed and followed them up to the sky, and caught a tiny twinkle through a cloud rift. After a moment's mental arithmetic to figure how high she'd have to be to catch the sunlight, I relaxed. Even with the telephoto, I'd only get a picture the size of a pinhead, so I fixed the position in my mind and then looked around at the crowd.

Among them were two men, both well dressed. One was tall and slender, with small hands and feet; the other was short and stout, with a scrubby gray-brown mustache. The slender one had a bulge under his left arm, and the short-and-stout job bulged over the right hip. The former was Steve Ravick, the boss of the Hunters' Co-operative, and his companion was the Honorable Morton Hallstock, mayor of Port Sandor and consequently the planetary government of Fenris.

They had held their respective positions for as long as I could remember anything at all. I could never remember an election in Port Sandor, or an election of officers in the Co-op. Ravick had a bunch of goons and triggermen—I could see a couple of them loitering in the background—who kept down opposition for him. So did Hallstock, only his wore badges and called themselves police.

Once in a while, Dad would write a blistering editorial about one or the other or both of them. Whenever he did, I would put my gun on, and so would Julio Kubanoff, the one-legged compositor who is the third member of the Times staff, and we would take turns making sure nobody got behind Dad's back. Nothing ever happened, though, and that always rather hurt me. Those two racketeers were in so tight they didn't need to care what the Times printed or 'cast about them.

Hallstock glanced over in my direction and said something to Ravick. Ravick gave a sneering laugh, and then he crushed out the cigarette he was smoking on the palm of his left hand. That was a regular trick of his. Showing how tough he was. Dad says that when you see somebody showing off, ask yourself whether he's trying to impress other people, or himself. I wondered which was the case with Steve Ravick.

Then I looked up again. The *Peenemünde* was coming down as fast as she could without over-heating from atmosphere friction. She was almost buckshot size to the naked eye, and a couple of tugs were getting ready to go up and meet her. I got the telephoto camera out of the hamper, checked it, and aimed it. It has a shoulder stock



and handgrips and a trigger like a submachine gun. I caught the ship in the finder and squeezed the trigger for a couple of seconds. It would be about five minutes till the tugs got to her and anything else happened, so I put down the camera and looked around.

Coming through the crowd, walking as though the concrete under him was pitching and rolling like a ship's deck on contragravity in a storm, was Bish Ware. He caught sight of us, waved, overbalanced himself and recovered, and then changed course to starboard and bore down on us. He was carrying about his usual cargo, and as usual the manifest would read, *Baldur honey-rum, from Harry Wong's bar.*

Bish wasn't his real name. Neither, I suspected, was Ware. When he'd first landed on Fenris, some five years ago, somebody had nicknamed him the Bishop, and before long that had gotten cut to one syllable. He looked like a bishop, or at least like what anybody who's never seen a bishop outside a screen-play would think a bishop looked like. He was a big man, not fat, but tall and portly; he had a ruddy face that always wore an expression of benevolent wisdom, and the more cargo he took on the wiser and more benevolent he looked.

He had iron-gray hair, but he wasn't old. You could tell that by the backs of his hands; they weren't wrinkled or crepy and the veins didn't protrude. And drunk or sober—though I never remembered seeing him in the latter condition—he had the fastest reflexes of anybody I knew. I saw him, once, standing at the bar in Harry Wong's, knock over an open bottle with his left elbow. He spun half around, grabbed it by the neck and set it up, all in one motion, without spilling a drop, and he went on talking as though nothing had happened. He was quoting Homer, I remembered, and you could tell that he was thinking in the original ancient Greek and translating to Lingua Terra as he went.

He was always dressed as he was now, in a conservative black suit, the jacket a trifle longer than usual, and a black neckcloth with an Uller organic-opal pin. He didn't work at anything, but quarterly—once every planetary day—a draft on the Banking Cartel would come in for him, and he'd deposit it with the Port Sandor Fidelity & Trust. If anybody was unmannerly enough to ask him about it, he always said he had a rich uncle on Terra.

When I was a kid—well, more of a kid than I am now—I used to believe he really was a bishop—unfrocked, of course, or ungaitered, or whatever they call it when they give a bishop the heave-ho. A lot of people who weren't kids still believed that, and they blamed him on every denomination from Anglicans to Zen Buddhists, not even missing the Satanists, and there were all sorts of theories about what he'd done to get excommunicated, the mildest of which was that somewhere there was a cathedral standing unfinished because he'd hypered out with the building fund. It was generally agreed that his ecclesiastical organization was paying him to stay out there in the boondocks where he wouldn't cause them further embarrassment.

I was pretty sure, myself, that he was being paid by somebody, probably his family, to stay out of sight. The colonial planets are full of that sort of remittance men.

Bish and I were pretty good friends. There were certain old ladies, of both sexes and all ages, of whom Professor Hartzenbosch was an example, who took Dad to task occasionally for letting me associate with him. Dad simply ignored them. As long as I was going to be a reporter, I'd have to have news sources, and Bish was a dandy. He knew all the disreputable characters in town, which saved me having to associate





with all of them, and it is sad but true that you get very few news stories in Sunday school. Far from fearing that Bish would be a bad influence on me, he rather hoped I'd be a good one on Bish.

I had that in mind, too, if I could think of any way of managing it. Bish had been a good man, once. He still was, except for one thing. You could tell that before he'd started drinking, he'd really been somebody, somewhere. Then something pretty bad must have happened to him, and now he was here on Fenris, trying to hide from it behind a bottle. Something ought to be done to give him a shove up on his feet again. I hate waste, and a man of the sort he must have been turning himself into the rumpot he was now was waste of the worst kind.

It would take a lot of doing, though, and careful tactical planning. Preaching at him would be worse than useless, and so would simply trying to get him to stop drinking. That would be what Doc Rojansky, at the hospital, would call treating the symptoms. The thing to do was make him want to stop drinking, and I didn't know how I was going to manage that. I'd thought, a couple of times, of getting him to work on the Times, but we barely made enough money out of it for ourselves, and with his remittance he didn't need to work. I had a lot of other ideas, now and then, but every time I took a second look at one, it got sick and died. [15]

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## 2

### REPORTER WORKING

Bish came over and greeted us solemnly.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen. Captain Ahab, I believe," he said, bowing to Tom, who seemed slightly puzzled; the education Tom had been digging out for himself was technical rather than literary. "And Mr. Pulitzer. Or is it Horace Greeley?"

"Lord Beaverbrook, your Grace," I replied. "Have you any little news items for us from your diocese?"

Bish teetered slightly, getting out a cigar and inspecting it carefully before lighting it.

"We-el," he said carefully, "my diocese is full to the hatch covers with sinners, but that's scarcely news." He turned to Tom. "One of your hands on the *Javelin* got into a fight in Martian Joe's, a while ago. Lumped the other man up pretty badly." He named the Javelin crewman, and the man who had been pounded. The latter was one of Steve Ravick's goons. "But not fatally, I regret to say," Bish added. "The local Gestapo are looking for your man, but he made it aboard Nip Spazoni's *Bulldog*, and by this time he's halfway to Hermann Reuch's Land."

"Isn't Nip going to the meeting, tonight?" Tom asked.

Bish shook his head. "Nip is a peace-loving man. He has a well-founded suspicion



that peace is going to be in short supply around Hunters' Hall this evening. You know, of course, that Leo Belsher's coming in on the *Peenemünde* and will be there to announce another price cut. The new price, I understand, will be thirty-five centisols a pound."

Seven hundred sols a ton, I thought; why, that would barely pay ship expenses.

"Where did you get that?" Tom asked, a trifle sharply.

"Oh, I have my spies and informers," Bish said. "And even if I hadn't, it would figure. The only reason Leo Belsher ever comes to this Eden among planets is to negotiate a new contract, and who ever heard of a new contract at a higher price?"

That had all happened before, a number of times. When Steve Ravick had gotten control of the Hunters' Co-operative, the price of tallow-wax, on the loading floor at Port Sandor spaceport, had been fifteen hundred sols a ton. As far as Dad and I could find out, it was still bringing the same price on Terra as it always had. It looked to us as if Ravick and Leo Belsher, who was the Co-op representative on Terra, and Mort Hallstock were simply pocketing the difference. I was just as sore about what was happening as anybody who went out in the hunter-ships. Tallow-wax is our only export. All our imports are paid for with credit from the sale of wax.

It isn't really wax, and it isn't tallow. It's a growth on the Jarvis's sea-monster; there's a layer of it under the skin, and around organs that need padding. An average-sized monster, say a hundred and fifty feet long, will yield twelve to fifteen tons of it, and a good hunter kills about ten monsters a year. Well, at the price Belsher and Ravick were going to cut from, that would run a little short of a hundred and fifty thousand sols for a year. If you say it quick enough and don't think, that sounds like big money, but the upkeep and supplies for a hunter-ship are big money, too, and what's left after that's paid off is divided, on a graduated scale, among ten to fifteen men, from the captain down. A hunter-boat captain, even a good one like Joe Kivelson, won't make much more in a year than Dad and I make out of the *Times*.

Chemically, tallow-wax isn't like anything else in the known Galaxy. The molecules are huge; they can be seen with an ordinary optical microscope, and a microscopically visible molecule is a curious-looking object, to say the least. They use the stuff to treat fabric for protective garments. It isn't anything like collapsium, of course, but a suit of waxed coveralls weighing only a couple of pounds will stop as much radiation as half an inch of lead.

Back when they were getting fifteen hundred a ton, the hunters had been making good money, but that was before Steve Ravick's time.

It was slightly before mine, too. Steve Ravick had showed up on Fenris about twelve years ago. He'd had some money, and he'd bought shares in a couple of hunter-ships and staked a few captains who'd had bad luck and got them in debt to him. He also got in with Morton Hallstock, who controlled what some people were credulous enough to take for a government here. Before long, he was secretary of the Hunters' Co-operative. Old Simon MacGregor, who had been president then, was a good hunter, but he was no businessman. He came to depend very heavily on Ravick, up till his ship, the *Claymore*, was lost with all hands down in Fitzwilliam Straits. I think that was a time bomb in the magazine, but I have a low and suspicious mind. Professor Hartzenbosch has told me so repeatedly. After that, Steve Ravick was president of the Co-op. He immediately began a drive to increase the membership.



Most of the new members had never been out in a hunter-ship in their lives, but they could all be depended on to vote the way he wanted them to.

First, he jacked the price of wax up, which made everybody but the wax buyers happy. Everybody who wasn't already in the Co-op hurried up and joined. Then he negotiated an exclusive contract with Kapstaad Chemical Products, Ltd., in South Africa, by which they agreed to take the entire output for the Co-op. That ended competitive wax buying, and when there was nobody to buy the wax but Kapstaad, you had to sell it through the Co-operative or you didn't sell it at all. After that, the price started going down. The Co-operative, for which read Steve Ravick, had a sales representative on Terra, Leo Belsher. He wrote all the contracts, collected all the money, and split with Ravick. What was going on was pretty generally understood, even if it couldn't be proven, but what could anybody do about it?

Maybe somebody would try to do something about it at the meeting this evening. I would be there to cover it. I was beginning to wish I owned a bullet-proof vest.

Bish and Tom were exchanging views on the subject, some of them almost printable. I had my eyes to my binoculars, watching the tugs go up to meet the *Peenemünde*.

"What we need for Ravick, Hallstock and Belsher," Tom was saying, "is about four fathoms of harpoon line apiece, and something to haul up to."

That kind of talk would have shocked Dad. He is very strong for law and order, even when there is no order and the law itself is illegal. I'd always thought there was a lot of merit in what Tom was suggesting. Bish Ware seemed to have his doubts, though.

"Mmm, no; there ought to be some better way of doing it than that."

"Can you think of one?" Tom challenged.

I didn't hear Bish's reply. By that time, the tugs were almost to the ship. I grabbed up the telephoto camera and aimed it. It has its own power unit, and transmits directly. In theory, I could tune it to the telecast station and put what I was getting right on the air, and what I was doing was transmitting to the *Times*, to be recorded and 'cast later. Because it's not a hundred per cent reliable, though, it makes its own audiovisual record, so if any of what I was sending didn't get through, it could be spliced in after I got back.

I got some footage of the tugs grappling the ship, which was now completely weightless, and pulling her down. Through the finder, I could see that she had her landing legs extended; she looked like a big overfed spider being hauled in by a couple of gnats. I kept the butt of the camera to my shoulder, and whenever anything interesting happened, I'd squeeze the trigger. The first time I ever used a real submachine gun had been to kill a blue slasher that had gotten into one of the ship pools at the waterfront. I used three one-second bursts, and threw bits of slasher all over the place, and everybody wondered how I'd gotten the practice.

A couple more boats, pushers, went up to help hold the ship against the wind, and by that time she was down to a thousand feet, which was half her diameter. I switched from the shoulder-stock telephoto to the big tripod job, because this was the best part of it. The ship was weightless, of course, but she had mass and an awful lot of it. If anybody goofed getting her down, she'd take the side of the landing pit out, and about ten per cent of the population of Fenris, including the ace reporter for



the Times, along with it.

At the same time, some workmen and a couple of spaceport cops had appeared, taken out a section of railing and put in a gate. The *Peenemünde* settled down, turned slowly to get her port in line with the gate, and lurched off contragravity and began running out a bridge to the promenade. I got some shots of that, and then began packing my stuff back in the hamper.

"You going aboard?" Tom asked. "Can I come along? I can carry some of your stuff and let on I'm your helper."

Glory be, I thought; I finally got that apprentice.

"Why, sure," I said. "You tow the hamper; I'll carry this." I got out what looked like a big camera case and slung it over my shoulder. "But you'll have to take me out on the *Javelin*, sometime, and let me shoot a monster."

He said it was a deal, and we shook on it. Then I had another idea.

"Bish, suppose you come with us, too," I said. "After all, Tom and I are just a couple of kids. If you're with us, it'll look a lot more big-paperish."

That didn't seem to please Tom too much. Bish shook his head, though, and Tom brightened.

"I'm dreadfully sorry, Walt," Bish said. "But I'm going aboard, myself, to see a friend who is en route through to Odin. A Dr. Watson; I have not seen him for years."

I'd caught that name, too, when we'd gotten the passenger list. Dr. John Watson. Now, I know that all sorts of people call themselves Doctor, and Watson and John aren't too improbable a combination, but I'd read *Sherlock Holmes* long ago, and the name had caught my attention. And this was the first, to my knowledge, that Bish Ware had ever admitted to any off-planet connections.

We started over to the gate. Hallstock and Ravick were ahead of us. So was Sigurd Ngozori, the president of the Fidelity & Trust, carrying a heavy briefcase and accompanied by a character with a submachine gun, and Adolf Lautier and Professor Hartzenbosch. There were a couple of spaceport cops at the gate, in olive-green uniforms that looked as though they had been sprayed on, and steel helmets. I wished we had a city police force like that. They were Odin Dock & Shipyard Company men, all former Federation Regular Army or Colonial Constabulary. The spaceport wasn't part of Port Sandor, or even Fenris; the Odin Dock & Shipyard Company was the government there, and it was run honestly and efficiently.

They knew me, and when they saw Tom towing my hamper they cracked a few jokes about the new *Times* cub reporter and waved us through. I thought they might give Bish an argument, but they just nodded and let him pass, too. We all went out onto the bridge, and across the pit to the equator of the two-thousand-foot globular ship.

We went into the main lounge, and the captain introduced us to Mr. Glenn Murell. He was fairly tall, with light gray hair, prematurely so, I thought, and a pleasant, noncommittal face. I'd have pegged him for a businessman. Well, I suppose authoring is a business, if that was his business. He shook hands with us, and said:



"Aren't you rather young to be a newsman?"

I started to burn on that. I get it all the time, and it burns me all the time, but worst of all on the job. Maybe I am only going-on-eighteen, but I'm doing a man's work, and I'm doing it competently.

"Well, they grow up young on Fenris, Mr. Murell," Captain Marshak earned my gratitude by putting in. "Either that or they don't live to grow up."

Murell unhooked his memophone and repeated the captain's remark into it. Opening line for one of his chapters. Then he wanted to know if I'd been born on Fenris. I saw I was going to have to get firm with Mr. Murell, right away. The time to stop that sort of thing is as soon as it starts.

"Who," I wanted to know, "is interviewing whom? You'll have at least five hundred hours till the next possible ship out of here; I only have two and a half to my next deadline. You want coverage, don't you? The more publicity you get, the easier your own job's going to be."

Then I introduced Tom, carefully giving the impression that while I handled all ordinary assignments, I needed help to give him the full VIP treatment. We went over to a quiet corner and sat down, and the interview started.

The camera case I was carrying was a snare and a deceit. Everybody knows that reporters use recorders in interviews, but it never pays to be too obtrusive about them, or the subject gets recorder-conscious and stiffens up. What I had was better than a recorder; it was a recording radio. Like the audiovisuals, it not only transmitted in to the *Times*, but made a recording as insurance against transmission failure. I reached into a slit on the side and snapped on the switch while I was fumbling with a pencil and notebook with the other hand, and started by asking him what had decided him to do a book about Fenris.

After that, I fed a question every now and then to keep him running, and only listened to every third word. The radio was doing a better job than I possibly could have. At the same time, I was watching Steve Ravick, Morton Hallstock and Leo Belsher at one side of the room, and Bish Ware at the other. Bish was within ear-straining range. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw another man, younger in appearance and looking like an Army officer in civvies, approach him.

"My dear Bishop!" this man said in greeting.

As far as I knew, that nickname had originated on Fenris. I made a mental note of that.

"How are you?" Bish replied, grasping the other's hand. "You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive."

That did it. I told you I was an old *Sherlock Holmes* reader; I recognized that line. This meeting was prearranged, neither of them had ever met before, and they needed a recognition code. Then I returned to Murell, and decided to wonder about Bish Ware and "Dr. Watson" later.

It wasn't long before I was noticing a few odd things about Murell, too, which confirmed my original suspicions of him. He didn't have the firm name of his alleged publishers right, he didn't know what a literary agent was and, after claiming



to have been a newsman, he consistently used the expression "news service." I know, everybody says that—everybody but newsmen. They always call a news service a "paper," especially when talking to other newsmen.

Of course, there isn't any paper connected with it, except the pad the editor doodles on. What gets to the public is photoprint, out of a teleprinter. As small as our circulation is, we have four or five hundred of them in Port Sandor and around among the small settlements in the archipelago, and even on the mainland. Most of them are in bars and cafes and cigar stores and places like that, operated by a coin in a slot and leased by the proprietor, and some of the big hunter-ships like Joe Kivelson's *Javelin* and Nip Spazoni's *Bulldog* have them.

But long ago, back in the First Centuries, Pre-Atomic and Atomic Era, they were actually printed on paper, and the copies distributed and sold. They used printing presses as heavy as a spaceship's engines. That's why we still call ourselves the Press. Some of the old papers on Terra, like *La Prensa* in Buenos Aires, and the Melbourne *Times*, which used to be the London *Times* when there was still a London, were printed that way originally.

Finally I got through with my interview, and then shot about fifteen minutes of audiovisual, which would be cut to five for the 'cast. By this time Bish and "Dr. Watson" had disappeared, I supposed to the ship's bar, and Ravick and his accomplices had gotten through with their conspiracy to defraud the hunters. I turned Murell over to Tom, and went over to where they were standing together. I'd put away my pencil and pad long ago with Murell; now I got them out ostentatiously as I approached.

"Good day, gentlemen," I greeted them. "I'm representing the Port Sandor *Times*."

"Oh, run along, sonny; we haven't time to bother with you," Hallstock said.

"But I want to get a story from Mr. Belsher," I began.

"Well, come back in five or six years, when you're dry behind the ears, and you can get it," Ravick told me.

"Our readers aren't interested in the condition of my ears," I said sweetly. "They want to read about the price of tallow-wax. What's this about another price cut? To thirty-five centisols a pound, I understand."

"Oh, Steve, the young man's from the news service, and his father will publish whatever he brings home," Belsher argued. "We'd better give him something." He turned to me. "I don't know how this got out, but it's quite true," he said. He had a long face, like a horse's. At least, he looked like pictures of horses I'd seen. As he spoke, he pulled it even longer and became as doleful as an undertaker at a ten-thousand-sol funeral.

"The price has gone down, again. Somebody has developed a synthetic substitute. Of course, it isn't anywhere near as good as real Fenris tallow-wax, but try and tell the public that. So Kapstaad Chemical is being undersold, and the only way they can stay in business is cut the price they have to pay for wax...."

It went on like that, and this time I had real trouble keeping my anger down. In the first place, I was pretty sure there was no substitute for Fenris tallow-wax, good, bad or indifferent. In the second place, it isn't sold to the gullible public, it's sold to



equipment manufacturers who have their own test engineers and who have to keep their products up to legal safety standards. He didn't know this balderdash of his was going straight to the *Times* as fast as he spouted it; he thought I was taking it down in shorthand. I knew exactly what Dad would do with it. He'd put it on telecast in Belsher's own voice.

Maybe the monster-hunters would start looking around for a rope, then.

When I got through listening to him, I went over and got a short audiovisual of Captain Marshak of the *Peenemünde* for the 'cast, and then I rejoined Tom and Murell.

"Mr. Murell says he's staying with you at the *Times*," Tom said. He seemed almost as disappointed as Professor Hartzenbosch. I wondered, for an incredulous moment, if Tom had been trying to kidnap Murell away from me. "He wants to go out on the *Javelin* with us for a monster-hunt."

"Well, that's swell!" I said. "You can pay off on that promise to take me monster-hunting, too. Right now, Mr. Murell is my big story." I reached into the front pocket of my "camera" case for the handpone, to shift to two-way. "I'll call the *Times* and have somebody come up with a car to get us and Mr. Murell's luggage."

"Oh, I have a car. Jeep, that is," Tom said. "It's down on the Bottom Level. We can use that."

Funny place to leave a car. And I was sure that he and Murell had come to some kind of an understanding, while I was being lied to by Belsher. I didn't get it. There was just too much going on around me that I didn't get, and me, I'm supposed to be the razor-sharp newshawk who gets everything.

### BOTTOM LEVEL

It didn't take long to get Murell's luggage assembled. There was surprisingly little of it, and nothing that looked like photographic or recording equipment. When he returned from a final gathering-up in his stateroom, I noticed that he was bulging under his jacket, too, on the left side at the waist. About enough for an 8.5-mm pocket automatic. Evidently he had been briefed on the law-and-order situation in Port Sandor.

Normally, we'd have gone off onto the Main City Level, but Tom's jeep was down on the Bottom Level, and he made no suggestion that we go off and wait for him to bring it up. I didn't suggest it, either. After all, it was his jeep, and he wasn't our hired pilot. Besides, I was beginning to get curious. An abnormally large bump of curiosity is part of every newsman's basic equipment.

We borrowed a small handling-lifter and one of the spaceport roustabouts to tow it



for us, loaded Murell's luggage and my things onto it, and started down to the bottomside cargo hatches, from which the ship was discharging. There was no cargo at all to go aboard, except mail and things like Adolf Lautier's old film and music tapes. Our only export is tallow-wax, and it all goes to Terra. It would be picked up by the Cape *Canaveral* when she got in from Odin five hundred hours from now. But except for a few luxury items from Odin, everything we import comes from Terra, and the *Peenemünde* had started discharging that already. We rode down on a contragravity skid loaded with ammunition. I saw Murell looking curiously at the square cases, marked TERRAN FEDERATION ARMED FORCES, and 50-MM, MK. 608, ANTIVEHICLE AND ANTIPERSONNEL, 25 ROUNDS, and OVERAGE. PRACTICE ONLY. NOT TO BE ISSUED FOR SERVICE, and INSPECTED AND CONDEMNED. The hunters bought that stuff through the Co-op. It cost half as much as new ammo, but that didn't help them any. The difference stopped with Steve Ravick. Murell didn't comment, and neither did Tom or I.

We got off at the bottom of the pit, a thousand feet below the promenade from which I had come aboard, and stopped for a moment. Murell was looking about the great amphitheater in amazement.

"I knew this spaceport would be big when I found out that the ship landed directly on the planet," he said, "but I never expected anything like this. And this serves a population of twenty thousand?"

"Twenty-four thousand, seven hundred and eight, if the man who got pounded in a barroom fight around 1330 hasn't died yet," I said. "But you have to remember that this place was built close to a hundred years ago, when the population was ten times that much." I'd gotten my story from him; now it was his turn to interview me. "You know something about the history of Fenris, I suppose?"

"Yes. There are ample sources for it on Terra, up to the collapse of the Fenris Company," he said. "Too much isn't known about what's been happening here since, which is why I decided to do this book."

"Well, there were several cities built, over on the mainland," I told him. "They're all abandoned now. The first one was a conventional city, the buildings all on the surface. After one day-and-night cycle, they found that it was uninhabitable. It was left unfinished. Then they started digging in. The Chartered Fenris Company shipped in huge quantities of mining and earth-moving equipment—that put the company in the red more than anything else—and they began making burrow-cities, like the ones built in the Northern Hemisphere of Terra during the Third and Fourth World Wars, or like the cities on Luna and Mercury Twilight Zone and Titan. There are a lot of valuable mineral deposits over on the mainland; maybe in another century our grandchildren will start working them again.

"But about six years before the Fenris Company went to pieces, they decided to concentrate in one city, here in the archipelago. The sea water stays cooler in the daytime and doesn't lose heat so rapidly in the nighttime. So they built Port Sandor, here on Oakleaf Island."

"And for convenience in monster-hunting?"

I shook my head. "No. The Jarvis's sea-monster wasn't discovered until after the city was built, and it was years after the company had gone bankrupt before anybody found out about what tallow-wax was good for."





I started telling him about the native life-forms of Fenris. Because of the surface temperature extremes, the marine life is the most highly developed. The land animals are active during the periods after sunset and after sunrise; when it begins getting colder or hotter, they burrow, or crawl into caves and crevices among the rocks, and go into suspended animation. I found that he'd read up on that, and not too much of his information was incorrect.

He seemed to think, though, that Port Sandor had also been mined out below the surface. I set him right on that.

"You saw what it looked like when you were coming down," I said. "Just a flat plateau, with a few shaft-head domes here and there, and the landing pit of the spaceport. Well, originally it was a valley, between two low hills. The city was built in the valley, level by level, and then the tops of the hills were dug off and bulldozed down on top of it. We have a lot of film at the public library of the construction of the city, step by step. As far as I know, there are no copies anywhere off-planet."

He should have gotten excited about that, and wanted to see them. Instead, he was watching the cargo come off—food-stuffs, now—and wanted to know if we had to import everything we needed.

"Oh, no. We're going in on the Bottom Level, which is mainly storage, but we have hydroponic farms for our vegetables and carniculture plants for meat on the Second and Third Levels. That's counting down from the Main City Level. We make our own lumber, out of reeds harvested in the swamps after sunrise and converted to pulpwood, and we get some good hardwood from the native trees which only grow in four periods of two hundred hours a year. We only use that for furniture, gunstocks, that sort of thing. And there are a couple of mining camps and smelters on the mainland; they employ about a thousand of our people. But every millisol that's spent on this planet is gotten from the sale of tallow-wax, at second or third hand if not directly."

That seemed to interest him more. Maybe his book, if he was really writing one, was going to be an economic study of Fenris. Or maybe his racket, whatever it was, would be based on something connected with our local production. I went on telling him about our hydroponic farms, and the carniculture plant where any kind of animal tissue we wanted was grown—Terran pork and beef and poultry, Freyan *zhoumy* meat, Zarathustran veldtbeest.... He knew, already, that none of the native life-forms, animal or vegetable, were edible by Terrans.

"You can get all the *paté de foie gras* you want here," I said. "We have a chunk of goose liver about fifty feet in diameter growing in one of our vats."

By this time, we'd gotten across the bottom of the pit, Murell's luggage and my equipment being towed after us, and had entered the Bottom Level. It was cool and pleasant here, lighted from the ceiling fifty feet overhead, among the great column bases, two hundred feet square and two hundred yards apart, that supported the upper city and the thick roof of rock and earth that insulated it. The area we were entering was stacked with tallow-wax waiting to be loaded onto the *Cape Canaveral* when she came in; it was vacuum-packed in plastic skins, like big half-ton Bologna sausages, each one painted with the blue and white emblem of the Hunters' Co-operative. He was quite interested in that, and was figuring, mentally, how much wax there was here and how much it was worth.



"Who does this belong to?" he wanted to know. "The Hunters' Co-operative?"

Tom had been letting me do the talking up to now, but he answered that question, very emphatically.

"No, it doesn't. It belongs to the hunters," he said. "Each ship crew owns the wax they bring in in common, and it's sold for them by the Co-op. When the captain gets paid for the wax he's turned over to the Co-op, he divides the money among the crew. But every scrap of this belongs to the ships that took it, up till it's bought and paid for by Kapstaad Chemical."

"Well, if a captain wants his wax back, after it's been turned over for sale to the Co-op, can he get it?" Murell asked.

"Absolutely!"

Murell nodded, and we went on. The roustabout who had been following us with the lifter had stopped to chat with a couple of his fellows. We went on slowly, and now and then a vehicle, usually a lorry, would pass above us. Then I saw Bish Ware, ahead, sitting on a sausage of wax, talking to one of the Spaceport Police. They were both smoking, but that was all right. Tallow-wax will burn, and a wax fire is something to get really excited about, but the ignition point is 750° C., and that's a lot hotter than the end of anybody's cigar. He must have come out the same way we did, and I added that to the "wonder-why" file. Pretty soon, I'd have so many questions to wonder about that they'd start answering each other. He saw us and waved to us, and then suddenly the spaceport cop's face got as white as my shirt and he grabbed Bish by the arm. Bish didn't change color; he just shook off the cop's hand, got to his feet, dropped his cigar, and took a side skip out into the aisle.

"Murell!" he yelled. "Freeze! On your life; don't move a muscle!"

Then there was a gun going off in his hand. I didn't see him reach for it, or where he drew it from. It was just in his hand, firing, and the empty brass flew up and came down on the concrete with a jingle on the heels of the report. We had all stopped short, and the roustabout who was towing the lifter came hurrying up. Murell simply stood gaping at Bish.

"All right," Bish said, slipping his gun back into a shoulder holster under his coat. "Step carefully to your left. Don't move right at all."

Murell, still in a sort of trance, obeyed. As he did I looked past his right shin and saw what Bish had been shooting at. It was an irregular gray oval, about sixteen inches by four at its widest and tapering up in front to a cone about six inches high, into which a rodlike member, darker gray, was slowly collapsing and dribbling oily yellow stuff. The bullet had gone clear through and made a mess of dirty gray and black and green body fluids on the concrete.

It was what we call a tread-snail, because it moves on a double row of pads like stumpy feet and leaves a trail like a tractor. The fishpole-aerial thing it had erected out of its head was its stinger, and the yellow stuff was venom. A tenth of a milligram of it in your blood and it's "Get the Gate open, St. Peter; here I come."

Tom saw it as soon as I did. His face got the same color as the cop's. I don't suppose mine looked any better. When Murell saw what had been buddying up to him, I will



swear, on a warehouse full of Bibles, Korans, Torah scrolls, Satanist grimoires, Buddhist prayer wheels and Thoran Grandfather-God images, that his hair literally stood on end. I've heard that expression all my life; well, this time I really saw it happen. I mentioned that he seemed to have been reading up on the local fauna.

I looked down at his right leg. He hadn't been stung—if he had, he wouldn't be breathing now—but he had been squirted, and there were a couple of yellow stains on the cloth of his trouser leg. I told him to hold still, used my left hand to pull the cloth away from his leg, and got out my knife and flipped it open with the other hand, cutting away the poisoned cloth and dropping it on the dead snail.

Murell started making an outcry about cutting up his trousers, and said he could have had them cleaned. Bish Ware, coming up, told him to stop talking like an imbecile.

"No cleaner would touch them, and even if they were cleaned, some of the poison would remain in the fabric. Then, the next time you were caught in the rain with a scratch on your leg, Walt, here, would write you one of his very nicest obituaries."

Then he turned to the cop, who was gabbling into his belt radio, and said: "Get an ambulance, quick. Possible case of tread-snail skin poisoning." A moment later, looking at Murell's leg, he added, "Omit 'possible.'"

There were a couple of little spots on Murell's skin that were beginning to turn raw-liver color. The raw poison hadn't gotten into his blood, but some of it, with impurities, had filtered through the cloth, and he'd absorbed enough of it through his skin to make him seriously ill. The cop jabbered some more into the radio, and the laborer with the lifter brought it and let it down, and Murell sat down on his luggage. Tom lit a cigarette and gave it to him, and told him to remain perfectly still. In a couple of minutes, an ambulance was coming, its siren howling.

The pilot and his helper were both jackleg medics, at least as far as first aid. They gave him a drink out of a flask, smeared a lot of gunk on the spots and slapped plasters over them, and helped him into the ambulance, after I told him we'd take his things to the *Times* building.

By this time, between the shot and the siren, quite a crowd had gathered, and everybody was having a nice little recrimination party. The labor foreman was chewing the cop out. The warehouse superintendent was chewing him out. And somebody from the general superintendent's office was chewing out everybody indiscriminately, and at the same time mentioning to me that Mr. Fieschi, the superintendent, would be very much pleased if the *Times* didn't mention the incident at all. I told him that was editorial policy, and to talk to Dad about it. Nobody had any idea how the thing had gotten in, but that wasn't much of a mystery. The Bottom Level is full of things like that; they can stay active all the time because the temperature is constant. I supposed that eventually they'd pick the dumbest day laborer in the place and make him the patsy.

Tom stood watching the ambulance whisk Murell off, dithering in indecision. The poisoning of Murell seemed like an unexpected blow to him. That fitted what I'd begun to think. Finally, he motioned the laborer to pick up the lifter, and we started off toward where he had parked his jeep, outside the spaceport area.

Bish walked along with us, drawing his pistol and replacing the fired round in the



magazine. I noticed that it was a 10-mm Colt-Argentine Federation Service, commercial type. There aren't many of those on Fenris. A lot of 10-mm's, but mostly South African Sterbergs or Vickers-Bothas, or Mars-Consolidated Police Specials. Mine, which I wasn't carrying at the moment, was a Sterberg 7.7-mm Olympic Match.

"You know," he said, sliding the gun back under his coat, "I would be just as well pleased as Mr. Fieschi if this didn't get any publicity. If you do publish anything about it, I wish you'd minimize my own part in it. As you have noticed, I have some slight proficiency with lethal hardware. This I would prefer not to advertise. I can usually avoid trouble, but when I can't, I would like to retain the advantage of surprise."

We all got into the jeep. Tom, not too graciously, offered to drop Bish wherever he was going. Bish said he was going to the *Times*, so Tom lifted the jeep and cut in the horizontal drive. We got into a busy one-way aisle, crowded with lorries hauling food-stuffs to the refrigeration area. He followed that for a short distance, and then turned off into a dimly lighted, disused area.

Before long, I began noticing stacks of tallow-wax, put up in the regular outside sausage skins but without the Co-op markings. They just had the names of hunter-ships—*Javelin*, *Bulldog*, *Helldiver*, *Slasher*, and so on.

"What's that stuff doing in here?" I asked. "It's a long way from the docks, and a long way from the spaceport."

"Oh, just temporary storage," Tom said. "It hasn't been checked in with the Co-op yet."

That wasn't any answer—or maybe it was. I let it go at that. Then we came to an open space about fifty feet square. There was a jeep, with a 7-mm machine gun mounted on it, and half a dozen men in boat-clothes were playing cards at a table made out of empty ammunition boxes. I noticed they were all wearing pistols, and when a couple of them saw us, they got up and grabbed rifles. Tom let down and got out of the jeep, going over and talking with them for a few minutes. What he had to tell them didn't seem to bring any noticeable amount of sunlight into their lives. After a while he came back, climbed in at the controls, and lifted the jeep again.

## MAIN CITY LEVEL

The ceiling on Main City Level is two hundred feet high; in order to permit free circulation of air and avoid traffic jams, nothing is built higher than a hundred and fifty feet except the square buildings, two hundred yards apart, which rest on foundations on the Bottom Level and extend up to support the roof. The *Times* has one of these pillar-buildings, and we have the whole thing to ourselves. In a city



built for a quarter of a million, twenty thousand people don't have to crowd very closely on one another. Naturally, we don't have a top landing stage, but except for the buttresses at the corners and solid central column, the whole street floor is open.

Tom hadn't said anything after we left the stacks of wax and the men guarding them. We came up a vehicle shaft a few blocks up Broadway, and he brought the jeep down and floated it in through one of the archways. As usual, the place was cluttered with equipment we hadn't gotten around to repairing or installing, merchandise we'd taken in exchange for advertising, and vehicles, our own and everybody else's. A couple of mechanics were tinkering on one of them. I decided, for the oomptieth time, to do something about cleaning it up. Say in another two or three hundred hours, when the ships would all be in port and work would be slack, and I could hire a couple of good men to help.

We got Murell's stuff off the jeep, and I hunted around till I found a hand-lifter.

"Want to stay and have dinner with us, Tom?" I asked.

"Uh?" It took him a second or so to realize what I'd said. "Why, no, thanks, Walt. I have to get back to the ship. Father wants to see me before the meeting."

"How about you, Bish? Want to take potluck with us?"

"I shall be delighted," he assured me.

Tom told us good-by absent-mindedly, lifted the jeep, and floated it out into the street. Bish and I watched him go; Bish looked as though he had wanted to say something and then thought better of it. We floated Murell's stuff and mine over to the elevator beside the central column, and I ran it up to the editorial offices on the top floor.

We came out in a big room, half the area of the floor, full of worktables and radios and screens and photoprinting machines. Dad, as usual, was in a gray knee-length smock, with a pipe jutting out under his ragged mustache, and, as usual, he was stopping every minute or so to relight it. He was putting together the stuff I'd transmitted in for the audiovisual newscast. Over across the room, the rest of the *Times* staff, Julio Kubanoff, was sitting at the composing machine, his peg leg propped up and an earphone on, his fingers punching rapidly at the keyboard as he burned letters onto the white plastic sheet with ultraviolet rays for photographing. Julio was an old hunter-ship man who had lost a leg in an accident and taught himself his new trade. He still wore the beard, now white, that was practically the monster-hunters' uniform.

"The stuff come in all right?" I asked Dad, letting down the lifter.

"Yes. What do you think of that fellow Belsher?" he asked. "Did you ever hear such an impudent string of lies in your life?" Then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw the lifter full of luggage, and saw somebody with me. "Mr. Murell? Please excuse me for a moment, till I get this blasted thing together straight." Then he got the film spliced and the sound record matched, and looked up. "Why, Bish? Where's Mr. Murell, Walt?"

"Mr. Murell has had his initiation to Fenris," I said. "He got squirted by a tread-snail almost as soon as he got off the ship. They have him at the spaceport hospital; it'll be 2400 before they get all the poison sweated out of him."



I went on to tell him what had happened. Dad's eyes widened slightly, and he took the pipe out of his mouth and looked at Bish with something very reasonably like respect.

"That was mighty sharp work," he said. "If you'd been a second slower, we'd be all out of visiting authors. That would have been a nice business; story would have gotten back to Terra, and been most unfortunate publicity for Fenris. And, of course," he afterthoughted, "most unfortunate for Mr. Murell, too."

"Well, if you give this any publicity, I would rather you passed my own trifling exploit over in silence," Bish said. "I gather the spaceport people wouldn't be too happy about giving the public the impression that their area is teeming with tread-snails, either. They have enough trouble hiring shipping-floor help as it is."

"But don't you want people to know what you did?" Dad demanded, incredulously. Everybody wanted their names in print or on 'cast; that was one of his basic articles of faith. "If the public learned about this—" he went on, and then saw where he was heading and pulled up short. It wouldn't be tactful to say something like, "Maybe they wouldn't think you were just a worthless old soak."

Bish saw where Dad was heading, too, but he just smiled, as though he were about to confer his episcopal blessing.

"Ah, but that would be a step out of character for me," he said. "I must not confuse my public. Just as a favor to me, Ralph, say nothing about it."

"Well, if you'd rather I didn't.... Are you going to cover this meeting at Hunters' Hall, tonight, Walt?" he asked me.

"Would I miss it?"

He frowned. "I could handle that myself," he said. "I'm afraid this meeting's going to get a little rough."

I shook my head. "Let's face it, Dad," I said. "I'm a little short of eighteen, but you're sixty. I can see things coming better than you can, and dodge them quicker."

Dad gave a rueful little laugh and looked at Bish.

"See how it goes?" he asked. "We spend our lives shielding our young and then, all of a sudden, we find they're shielding us." His pipe had gone out again and he relit it. "Too bad you didn't get an audiovisual of Belsher making that idiotic statement."

"He didn't even know I was getting a voice-only. All the time he was talking, I was doodling in a pad with a pencil."

"Synthetic substitutes!" Dad snorted. "Putting a synthetic tallow-wax molecule together would be like trying to build a spaceship with a jackknife and a tack hammer." He puffed hard on his pipe, and then excused himself and went back to his work.

Editing an audiovisual telecast is pretty much a one-man job. Bish wanted to know if he could be of assistance, but there was nothing either of us could do, except sit by and watch and listen. Dad handled the Belsher thing by making a film of himself playing off the recording, and interjecting sarcastic comments from time to time.



When it went on the air, I thought, Ravick wasn't going to like it. I would have to start wearing my pistol again. Then he made a tape on the landing of the *Peenemünde* and the arrival of Murell, who he said had met with a slight accident after leaving the ship. I took that over to Julio when Dad was finished, along with a tape on the announced tallow-wax price cut. Julio only grunted and pushed them aside. He was setting up the story of the fight in Martian Joe's—a "local bar," of course; nobody ever gets shot or stabbed or slashed or slugged in anything else. All the news *is* fit to print, sure, but you can't give your advertisers and teleprinter customers any worse name than they have already. A paper has to use some judgment.

Then Dad and Bish and I went down to dinner. Julio would have his a little later, not because we're too good to eat with the help but because, around 1830, the help is too busy setting up the next paper to eat with us. The dining room, which is also the library, living room, and general congregating and loafing place, is as big as the editorial room above. Originally, it was an office, at a time when a lot of Fenris Company office work was being done here. Some of the furniture is original, and some was made for us by local cabinetmakers out of native hardwood. The dining table, big enough for two ships' crews to eat at, is an example of the latter. Then, of course, there are screens and microbook cabinets and things like that, and a refrigerator to save going a couple of hundred feet to the pantry in case anybody wants a snack.

I went to that and opened it, and got out a bulb of concentrated fruit juice and a bottle of carbonated water. Dad, who seldom drinks, keeps a few bottles around for guests. Seems most of our "guests" part with information easier if they have something like the locally made hydroponic potato schnapps inside them for courage.

"You drink Baldur honey-rum, don't you, Bish?" he said, pawing among the bottles in the liquor cabinet next to the refrigerator. "I'm sure I have a bottle of it. Now wait a minute; it's here somewhere."

When Dad passes on and some medium claims to have produced a spirit communication from him, I will not accept it as genuine without the expression: "Now wait a minute; it's here somewhere."

Bish wanted to know what I was fixing for myself, and I told him.

"Never mind the rum, Ralph. I believe," he said, "that I shall join Walt in a fruit fizz."

Well, whattaya know! Maybe my stealthy temperance campaign was having results. Dad looked positively startled, and then replaced the bottle he was holding.

"I believe I'll make it unanimous," he said. "Fix me up a fruit fizz, too, Walt."

I mixed two more fruit fizzes, and we carried them over to the table. Bish sipped at his critically.

"Palatable," he pronounced it. "Just a trifle on the mild side, but definitely palatable."

Dad looked at him as though he still couldn't believe the whole thing. Dinner was slow coming. We finished our fizzes, and Bish and I both wanted repeats, and Dad



felt that he had to go along. So I made three more. We were finishing them when Mrs. Laden started bringing in the dinner. Mrs. Laden is a widow; she has been with us since my mother died, the year after I was born. She is violently anti-liquor. Reluctantly, she condones Dad taking a snort now and then, but as soon as she saw Bish Ware, her face started to stiffen.

She put the soup on the table and took off for the kitchen. She always has her own dinner with Julio. That way, while they're eating he can tell her all the news that's fit to print, and all the gossip that isn't.

For the moment, the odd things I'd been noticing about our distinguished and temporarily incapacitated visitor came under the latter head. I told Dad and Bish about my observations, beginning with the deafening silence about Glenn Murell at the library. Dad began popping immediately.

"Why, he must be an impostor!" he exclaimed. "What kind of a racket do you think he's up to?"

"Mmm-mm; I wouldn't say that, not right away," Bish said. "In the first place, Murell may be his true name and he may publish under a nom de plume. I admit, some of the other items are a little suspicious, but even if he isn't an author, he may have some legitimate business here and, having heard a few stories about this planetary Elysium, he may be exercising a little caution. Walt, tell your father about that tallow-wax we saw, down in Bottom Level Fourth Ward."

I did, and while I was talking Dad sat with his soup spoon poised halfway to his mouth for at least a minute before he remembered he was holding it.

"Now, that is funny," he said when I was through. "Why do you suppose...?"

"Somebody," Bish said, "some group of ship captains, is holding wax out from the Co-operative. There's no other outlet for it, so my guess is that they're holding it for a rise in price. There's only one way that could happen, and that, literally, would be over Steve Ravick's dead body. It could be that they expect Steve's dead body to be around for a price rise to come in over."

I was expecting Dad to begin spouting law-and-order. Instead, he hit the table with his fist; not, fortunately, the one that was holding the soup spoon.

"Well, I hope so! And if they do it before the *Cape Canaveral* gets in, they may fix Leo Belsher, too, and then, in the general excitement, somebody might clobber Mort Hallstock, and that'd be grand slam. After the triple funeral, we could go to work on setting up an honest co-operative and an honest government."

"Well, I never expected to hear you advocating lynch law, Dad," I said.

He looked at me for a few seconds.

"Tell the truth, Walt, neither did I," he admitted. "Lynch law is a horrible thing; don't make any mistake about that. But there's one thing more horrible, and that's no law at all. And that is the present situation in Port Sandor.

"You know what the trouble is, here? We have no government. No legal government, anyhow; no government under Federation law. We don't even have a Federation Resident-Agent. Before the Fenris Company went broke, it was the government here; when the Space Navy evacuated the colonists, they evacuated the





government along with them. The thousand who remained were all too busy keeping alive to worry about that. They didn't even care when Fenris was reclassified from Class III, uninhabited but inhabitable, to Class II, inhabitable only in artificial environment, like Mercury or Titan. And when Mort Hallstock got hold of the town-meeting pseudo government they put together fifty years ago and turned it into a dictatorship, nobody realized what had happened till it was too late. Lynch law's the only recourse we have."

"Ralph," Bish told him, "if anything like that starts, Belsher and Hallstock and Ravick won't be the only casualties. Between Ravick's goons and Hallstock's police, they have close to a hundred men. I won't deny that they could be cleaned out, but it wouldn't be a lynching. It would be a civil war."

"Well, that's swell!" Dad said. "The Federation Government has never paid us any attention; the Federation planets are scattered over too many million cubic light-years of space for the Government to run around to all of them wiping everybody's noses. As long as things are quiet here, they'll continue to do nothing for us. But let a story hit the big papers on Terra, *Revolution Breaks Out on Fenris*—and that'll be the story I'll send to Interworld News—and watch what happens."

"I will tell you what will happen," Bish Ware said. "A lot of people will get killed. That isn't important, in itself. People are getting killed all the time, in a lot worse causes. But these people will all have friends and relatives who will take it up for them. Start killing people here in a faction fight, and somebody will be shooting somebody in the back out of a dark passage a hundred years from now over it. You want this planet poisoned with blood feuds for the next century?"

Dad and I looked at one another. That was something that hadn't occurred to either of us, and it should have. There were feuds, even now. Half the little settlements on the other islands and on the mainland had started when some group or family moved out of Port Sandor because of the enmity of some larger and more powerful group or family, and half our shootings and knife fights grew out of old grudges between families or hunting crews.

"We don't want it poisoned for the next century with the sort of thing Mort Hallstock and Steve Ravick started here, either," Dad said.

"Granted." Bish nodded. "If a civil war's the only possible way to get rid of them, that's what you'll have to have, I suppose. Only make sure you don't leave a single one of them alive when it's over. But if you can get the Federation Government in here to clean the mess up, that would be better. Nobody starts a vendetta with the Terran Federation."

"But how?" Dad asked. "I've sent story after story off about crime and corruption on Fenris. They all get the file-and-forget treatment."

Mrs. Laden had taken away the soup plates and brought us our main course. Bish sat toying with his fork for a moment.

"I don't know what you can do," he said slowly. "If you can stall off the blowup till the *Cape Canaveral* gets in, and you can send somebody to Terra...."

All of a sudden, it hit me. Here was something that would give Bish a purpose; something to make him want to stay sober.



"Well, don't say, 'If *you* can,'" I said. "Say, 'If *we* can.' You live on Fenris, too, don't you?"

## 5

[51]

### MEETING OUT OF ORDER

Dad called the spaceport hospital, after dinner, and talked to Doc Rojansky. Murell was asleep, and in no danger whatever. They'd given him a couple of injections and a sedative, and his system was throwing off the poison satisfactorily. He'd be all right, but they thought he ought to be allowed to rest at the hospital for a while.

By then, it was time for me to leave for Hunters' Hall. Julio and Mrs. Laden were having their dinner, and Dad and Bish went up to the editorial office. I didn't take a car. Hunters' Hall was only a half dozen blocks south of the Times, toward the waterfront. I carried my radio-under-false-pretense slung from my shoulder, and started downtown on foot.

The business district was pretty well lighted, both from the ceiling and by the stores and restaurants. Most of the latter were in the open, with small kitchen and storage buildings. At a table at one of them I saw two petty officers from the *Peenemünde* with a couple of girls, so I knew the ship wasn't leaving immediately. Going past the Municipal Building, I saw some activity, and an unusually large number of police gathered around the vehicle port. Ravick must have his doubts about how the price cut was going to be received, and Mort Hallstock was mobilizing his storm troopers to give him support in case he needed it. I called in about that, and Dad told me fretfully to be sure to stay out of trouble.

Hunters' Hall was a four-story building, fairly substantial as buildings that don't have to support the roof go, with a landing stage on top and a vehicle park underneath. As I came up, I saw a lot of cars and jeeps and ships' boats grounded in and around it, and a crowd of men, almost all of them in boat-clothes and wearing whiskers, including quite a few characters who had never been out in a hunter-ship in their lives but were members in the best of good standing of the Co-operative. I also saw a few of Hallstock's uniformed thugs standing around with their thumbs in their gun belts or twirling their truncheons.

I took an escalator up to the second floor, which was one big room, with the escalators and elevators in the rear. It was the social room, decorated with photos and models and solidigraphs of hunter-ships, photos of record-sized monsters lashed alongside ships before cutting-up, group pictures of ships's crews, monster tusks, dried slashers and halberd fish, and a whole monster head, its tusked mouth open. There was a big crowd there, too, at the bar, at the game machines, or just standing around in groups talking.

I saw Tom Kivelson and his father and Oscar Fujisawa, and went over to join them.



Joe Kivelson is just an outsize edition of his son, with a blond beard that's had thirty-five years' more growth. Oscar is skipper of the *Pequod*—he wouldn't have looked baffled if Bish Ware called him Captain Ahab—and while his family name is Old Terran Japanese, he had blue eyes and red hair and beard. He was almost as big as Joe Kivelson.

"Hello, Walt," Joe greeted me. "What's this Tom's been telling me about Bish Ware shooting a tread-snail that was going to sting Mr. Murell?"

"Just about that," I said. "That snail must have crawled out from between two stacks of wax as we came up. We never saw it till it was all over. It was right beside Murell and had its stinger up when Bish shot it."

"He took an awful chance," Kivelson said. "He might of shot Mr. Murell."

I suppose it would look that way to Joe. He is the planet's worst pistol shot, so according to him nobody can hit anything with a pistol.

"He wouldn't have taken any chance not shooting," I said. "If he hadn't, we'd have been running the Murell story with black borders."

Another man came up, skinny, red hair, sharp-pointed nose. His name was Al Devis, and he was Joe Kivelson's engineer's helper. He wanted to know about the tread-snail shooting, so I had to go over it again. I hadn't anything to add to what Tom had told them already, but I was the *Times*, and if the *Times* says so it's true.

"Well, I wouldn't want any drunk like Bish Ware shooting around me with a pistol," Joe Kivelson said.

That's relative, too. Joe doesn't drink.

"Don't kid yourself, Joe," Oscar told him. "I saw Bish shoot a knife out of a man's hand, one time, in One Eye Swanson's. Didn't scratch the guy; hit the blade. One Eye has the knife, with the bullet mark on it, over his back bar, now."

"Well, was he drunk then?" Joe asked.

"Well, he had to hang onto the bar with one hand while he fired with the other." Then he turned to me. "How is Murell, now?" he asked.

I told him what the hospital had given us. Everybody seemed much relieved. I wouldn't have thought that a celebrated author of whom nobody had ever heard before would be the center of so much interest in monster-hunting circles. I kept looking at my watch while we were talking. After a while, the *Times* newscast came on the big screen across the room, and everybody moved over toward it.

They watched the *Peenemünde* being towed down and berthed, and the audiovisual interview with Murell. Then Dad came on the screen with a record player in front of them, and gave them a play-off of my interview with Leo Belsher.

Ordinary bad language I do not mind. I'm afraid I use a little myself, while struggling with some of the worn-out equipment we have at the paper. But when Belsher began explaining about how the price of wax had to be cut again, to thirty-five centisols a pound, the language those hunters used positively smelled. I noticed, though, that a lot of the crowd weren't saying anything at all. They would be Ravick's boys, and they would have orders not to start anything before the meeting.



"Wonder if he's going to try to give us that stuff about substitutes?" Oscar said.

[55]

"Well, what are you going to do?" I asked.

"I'll tell you what we're not going to do," Joe Kivelson said. "We're not going to take his price cut. If he won't pay our price, he can use his [deleted by censor] substitutes."

"You can't sell wax anywhere else, can you?"

"Is that so, we can't?" Joe started.

Before he could say anything else, Oscar was interrupting:

"We can eat for a while, even if we don't sell wax. Sigurd Ngozori'll carry us for a while and make loans on wax. But if the wax stops coming in, Kapstaad Chemical's going to start wondering why...."

By this time, other *Javelin* men came drifting over—Ramón Llewellyn, the mate, and Abdullah Monnahan, the engineer, and Abe Clifford, the navigator, and some others. I talked with some of them, and then drifted off in the direction of the bar, where I found another hunter captain, Mohandas Gandhi Feinberg, whom everybody simply called the Mahatma. He didn't resemble his namesake. He had a curly black beard with a twisted black cigar sticking out of it, and nobody, after one look at him, would have mistaken him for any apostle of nonviolence.

He had a proposition he was enlisting support for. He wanted balloting at meetings to be limited to captains of active hunter-ships, the captains to vote according to expressed wishes of a majority of their crews. It was a good scheme, though it would have sounded better if the man who was advocating it hadn't been a captain himself. At least, it would have disenfranchised all Ravick's permanently unemployed "unemployed hunters." The only trouble was, there was no conceivable way of getting it passed. It was too much like trying to curtail the powers of Parliament by act of Parliament.

The gang from the street level started coming up, and scattered in twos and threes around the hall, ready for trouble. I'd put on my radio when I'd joined the Kivelsons and Oscar, and I kept it on, circulating around and letting it listen to the conversations. The Ravick people were either saying nothing or arguing that Belsher was doing the best he could, and if Kapstaad wouldn't pay more than thirty-five centisols, it wasn't his fault. Finally, the call bell for the meeting began clanging, and the crowd began sliding over toward the elevators and escalators.

The meeting room was on the floor above, at the front of the building, beyond a narrow hall and a door at which a couple of Ravick henchmen wearing guns and sergeant-at-arms brassards were making everybody check their knives and pistols. They passed me by without getting my arsenal, which consisted of a sleep-gas projector camouflaged as a jumbo-sized lighter and twenty sols in two rolls of forty quarter sols each. One of these inside a fist can make a big difference.

Ravick and Belsher and the secretary of the Co-op, who was a little scrawny henpecked-husband type who never had an opinion of his own in his life, were all sitting back of a big desk on a dais in front. After as many of the crowd who could had found seats and the rest, including the Press, were standing in the rear, Ravick



pounded with the chunk of monster tusk he used for a gavel and called the meeting to order.

"There's a bunch of old business," he said, "but I'm going to rule that aside for the moment. We have with us this evening our representative on Terra, Mr. Leo Belsher, whom I wish to present. Mr. Belsher."

Belsher got up. Ravick started clapping his hands to indicate that applause was in order. A few of his zombies clapped their hands; everybody else was quiet. Belsher held up a hand.

"Please don't applaud," he begged. "What I have to tell you isn't anything to applaud about."

"You're tootin' well right it isn't!" somebody directly in front of me said, very distinctly.

"I'm very sorry to have to bring this news to you, but the fact is that Kapstaad Chemical Products, Ltd., is no longer able to pay forty-five centisols a pound. This price is being scaled down to thirty-five centisols. I want you to understand that Kapstaad Chemical wants to give you every cent they can, but business conditions no longer permit them to pay the old price. Thirty-five is the absolute maximum they can pay and still meet competition—"

"Aaah, knock it off, Belsher!" somebody shouted. "We heard all that rot on the screen."

"How about our contract?" somebody else asked. "We do have a contract with Kapstaad, don't we?"

"Well, the contract will have to be re-negotiated. They'll pay thirty-five centisols or they'll pay nothing."

"They can try getting along without wax. Or try buying it somewhere else!"

"Yes; those wonderful synthetic substitutes!"

"Mr. Chairman," Oscar Fujisawa called out. "I move that this organization reject the price of thirty-five centisols a pound for tallow-wax, as offered by, or through, Leo Belsher at this meeting."

Ravick began clamoring that Oscar was out of order, that Leo Belsher had the floor.

"I second Captain Fujisawa's motion," Mohandas Feinberg said.

"And Leo Belsher doesn't have the floor; he's not a member of the Co-operative," Tom Kivelson declared. "He's our hired employee, and as soon as this present motion is dealt with, I intend moving that we fire him and hire somebody else."

"I move to amend Captain Fujisawa's motion," Joe Kivelson said. "I move that the motion, as amended, read, '—and stipulate a price of seventy-five centisols a pound.'"

"You're crazy!" Belsher almost screamed.

Seventy-five was the old price, from which he and Ravick had been reducing until they'd gotten down to forty-five.



Just at that moment, my radio began making a small fuss. I unhooked the handphne and brought it to my face.

"Yeah?"

It was Bish Ware's voice: "Walt, get hold of the Kivelsons and get them out of Hunters' Hall as fast as you can," he said. "I just got a tip from one of my ... my parishioners. Ravick's going to stage a riot to give Hallstock's cops an excuse to raid the meeting. They want the Kivelsons."

"Roger." I hung up, and as I did I could hear Joe Kivelson shouting:

"You think we don't get any news on this planet? Tallow-wax has been selling for the same price on Terra that it did eight years ago, when you two crooks started cutting the price. Why, the very ship Belsher came here on brought the quotations on the commodity market—"

I edged through the crowd till I was beside Oscar Fujisawa. I decided the truth would need a little editing; I didn't want to use Bish Ware as my source.

"Oscar, Dad just called me," I told him. "A tip came in to the Times that Ravick's boys are going to fake a riot and Hallstock's cops are going to raid the meeting. They want Joe and Tom. You know what they'll do if they get hold of them."

"Shot while resisting arrest. You sure this is a good tip, though?"

Across the room, somebody jumped to his feet, kicking over a chair.

"That's a double two-em-dashed lie, you etaoin shrdlu so-and-so!" somebody yelled.

"Who are you calling a so-and-so, you thus-and-so-ing such-and-such?" somebody else yelled back, and a couple more chairs got smashed and a swirl of fighting started.

"Yes, it is," Oscar decided. "Let's go."

We started plowing through the crowd toward where the Kivelsons and a couple more of the *Javelin* crew were clumped. I got one of the rolls of quarter sols into my right fist and let Oscar go ahead. He has more mass than I have.

It was a good thing I did, because before we had gone ten feet, some character got between us, dragged a two-foot length of inch-and-a-half high-pressure hose out of his pant leg, and started to swing at the back of Oscar's head. I promptly clipped him behind the ear with a fist full of money, and down he went. Oscar, who must have eyes in the back of his head, turned and grabbed the hose out of his hand before he dropped it, using it to clout somebody in front of him. Somebody else came pushing toward us, and I was about to clip him, too, when he yelled, "Watch it, Walt; I'm with it!" It was Cesário Vieira, another *Javelin* man; he's engaged to Linda Kivelson, Joe's daughter and Tom's sister, the one going to school on Terra.

Then we had reached Tom and Joe Kivelson. Oscar grabbed Joe by the arm.

"Come on, Joe; let's get moving," he said. "Hallstock's Gestapo are on the way. They have orders to get you dead or alive."

"Like blazes!" Joe told him. "I never chickened out on a fight yet, and—"



That's what I'd been afraid of. Joe is like a Zarathustra veldtbeest; the only tactics he knows is a headlong attack.

"You want to get your crew and your son killed, and yourself along with them?" Oscar asked him. "That's what'll happen if the cops catch you. Now are you coming, or will I have to knock you senseless and drag you out?"

Fortunately, at that moment somebody took a swing at Joe and grazed his cheek. It was a good thing that was all he did; he was wearing brass knuckles. Joe went down a couple of feet, bending at the knees, and caught this fellow around the hips with both hands, straightening and lifting him over his head. Then he threw him over the heads of the people in front of him. There were yells where the human missile landed.

"That's the stuff, Joe!" Oscar shouted. "Come on, we got them on the run!"

That, of course, converted a strategic retreat into an attack. We got Joe aimed toward the doors and before he knew it, we were out in the hall by the elevators. There were a couple of Ravick's men, with sergeant-at-arms arm bands, and two city cops. One of the latter got in Joe's way. Joe punched him in the face and knocked him back about ten feet in a sliding stagger before he dropped. The other cop grabbed me by the left arm.

I slugged him under the jaw with my ten-sol right and knocked him out, and I felt the wrapping on the coin roll break and the quarters come loose in my hand. Before I could drop them into my jacket pocket and get out the other roll, one of the sergeants at arms drew a gun. I just hurled the handful of coins at him. He dropped the pistol and put both hands to his face, howling in pain.

I gave a small mental howl myself when I thought of all the nice things I could have bought for ten sols. One of Joe Kivelson's followers stooped and scooped up the fallen pistol, firing a couple of times with it. Then we all rushed Joe into one of the elevators and crowded in behind him, and as I turned to start it down I could hear police sirens from the street and also from the landing stage above. In the hall outside the meeting room, four or five of Ravick's free-drink mercenaries were down on all fours scabbling for coins, and the rest of the pursuers from the meeting room were stumbling and tripping over them. I wished I'd brought a camera along, too. The public would have loved a shot of that. I lifted the radio and spoke into it:

"This is Walter Boyd, returning you now to the regular entertainment program."

A second later, the thing whistled at me. As the car started down and the doors closed I lifted the handphone. It was Bish Ware again.

"We're going down in the elevator to Second Level Down," I said. "I have Joe and Tom and Oscar Fujisawa and a few of the *Javelin* crew with me. The place is crawling with cops now."

"Go to Third Level Down and get up on the catwalk on the right," Bish said. "I'll be along to pick you up."

"Roger. We'll be looking for you."

The car stopped at Second Level Down. I punched a button and sent it down another level. Joe Kivelson, who was dabbing at his cheek with a piece of handkerchief



tissue, wanted to know what was up.

"We're getting a pickup," I told him. "Vehicle from the *Times*."

I thought it would save arguments if I didn't mention who was bringing it.

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## 6

### ELEMENTARY, MY DEAR KIVELSON

Before we left the lighted elevator car, we took a quick nose count. Besides the Kivelsons, there were five *Javelin* men—Ramón Llewellyn, Abdullah Monnahan, Abe Clifford, Cesário Vieira, and a whitebeard named Piet Dumont. Al Devis had been with us when we crashed the door out of the meeting room, but he'd fallen by the way. We had a couple of flashlights, so, after sending the car down to Bottom Level, we picked our way up the zigzag iron stairs to the catwalk, under the seventy-foot ceiling, and sat down in the dark.

Joe Kivelson was fretting about what would happen to the rest of his men.

"Fine captain I am, running out and leaving them!"

"If they couldn't keep up, that's their tough luck," Oscar Fujisawa told him. "You brought out all you could. If you'd waited any longer, none of us would have gotten out."

"They won't bother with them," I added. "You and Tom and Oscar, here, are the ones they want."

Joe was still letting himself be argued into thinking he had done the right thing when we saw the lights of a lorry coming from uptown at ceiling level. A moment later, it backed to the catwalk, and Bish Ware stuck his head out from the pilot's seat.

"Where do you gentlemen wish to go?" he asked.

"To the *Javelin*," Joe said instantly.

"Huh-uh," Oscar disagreed. "That's the first place they'll look. That'll be all right for Ramón and the others, but if they catch you and Tom, they'll shoot you and call it self-defense, or take you in and beat both of you to a jelly. This'll blow over in fifteen or twenty hours, but I'm not going anywhere near my ship, now."

"Drop us off on Second Level Down, about Eighth Street and a couple of blocks from the docks," the mate, Llewellyn, said. "We'll borrow some weapons from Patel the Pawnbroker and then circulate around and see what's going on. But you and Joe and Oscar had better go underground for a while."

"The *Times*," I said. "We have a whole pillar-building to ourselves; we could hide half the population."





That was decided upon. We all piled into the lorry, and Bish took it to an inconspicuous place on the Second Level and let down. Ramón Llewellyn and the others got out. Then we went up to Main City Level. We passed within a few blocks of Hunters' Hall. There was a lot of noise, but no shooting.

Joe Kivelson didn't have anything to say, on the trip, but he kept looking at the pilot's seat in perplexity and apprehension. I think he expected Bish to try to ram the lorry through every building we passed by or over.

We found Dad in the editorial department on the top floor, feeding voice-tape to Julio while the latter made master sheets for teleprinting. I gave him a quick rundown on what had happened that he hadn't gotten from my radio. Dad cluck-clucked in disapproval, either at my getting into a fight, assaulting an officer, or, literally, throwing money away.

Bish Ware seemed a little troubled. "I think," he said, "that I shall make a circuit of my diocese, and see what can be learned from my devoted flock. Should I turn up anything significant, I will call it in."

With that, he went tottering over to the elevator, stumbling on the way and making an unepiscopal remark. I watched him, and then turned to Dad.

"Did he have anything to drink after I left?" I asked.

"Nothing but about five cups of coffee."

I mentally marked that: *Add oddities, Bish Ware*. He'd been at least four hours without liquor, and he was walking as unsteadily as when I'd first seen him at the spaceport. I didn't know any kind of liquor that would persist like that.

Julio had at least an hour's tape to transcribe, so Dad and Joe and Tom and Oscar and I went to the living room on the floor below. Joe was still being bewildered about Bish Ware.

"How'd he manage to come for us?" he wanted to know.

"Why, he was here with me all evening," Dad said. "He came from the spaceport with Walt and Tom, and had dinner with us. He called a few people from here, and found out about the fake riot and police raid Ravick had cooked up. You'd be surprised at how much information he can pick up around town."

Joe looked at his son, alarmed.

"Hey! You let him see—" he began.

"The wax on Bottom Level, in the Fourth Ward?" I asked. "He won't blab about that. He doesn't blab things where they oughtn't be blabbed."

"That's right," Dad backed me up. He was beginning to think of Bish as one of the *Times* staff, now. "We got a lot of tips from him, but nothing we give him gets out." He got his pipe lit again. "What about that wax, Joe?" he asked. "Were you serious when you made that motion about a price of seventy-five centisols?"

"I sure was!" Joe declared. "That's the real price, and always has been, and that's what we get or Kapstaad doesn't get any more wax."



"If Murell can top it, maybe Kapstaad won't get any more wax, period," I said. "Who's he with—Interstellar Import-Export?"

Anybody would have thought a barbwire worm had crawled onto Joe Kivelson's chair seat under him.

"Where'd you hear that?" he demanded, which is the Galaxy's silliest question to ask any newsman. "Tom, if you've been talking—"

"He hasn't," I said. "He didn't need to. It sticks out a parsec in all directions." I mentioned some of the things I'd noticed while interviewing Murell, and his behavior after leaving the ship. "Even before I'd talked to him, I wondered why Tom was so anxious to get aboard with me. He didn't know we'd arranged to put Murell up here; he was going to take him to see that wax, and then take him to the *Javelin*. You were going to produce him at the meeting and have him bid against Belsher, only that tread-snail fouled your lines for you. So then you thought you had to stall off a new contract till he got out of the hospital."

The two Kivelsons and Oscar Fujisawa were looking at one another; Joe and Tom in consternation, and Oscar in derision of both of them. I was feeling pretty good. Brother, I thought, Sherlock Holmes never did better, himself.

That, all of a sudden, reminded me of Dr. John Watson, whom Bish perceived to have been in Afghanistan. That was one thing Sherlock H. Boyd hadn't deduced any answers for. Well, give me a little more time. And more data.

"You got it all figured out, haven't you?" Joe was asking sarcastically. The sarcasm was as hollow as an empty oil drum.

"The *Times*," Dad was saying, trying not to sound too proud, "has a very sharp reportorial staff, Joe."

"It isn't Interstellar," Oscar told me, grinning. "It's Argentine Exotic Organics. You know, everybody thought Joe, here, was getting pretty high-toned, sending his daughter to school on Terra. School wasn't the only thing she went for. We got a letter from her, the last time the Cape Canaveral was in, saying that she'd contacted Argentine Organics and that a man was coming out on the *Peenemünde*, posing as a travel-book author. Well, he's here, now."

"You'd better keep an eye on him," I advised. "If Steve Ravick gets to him, he won't be much use to you."

"You think Ravick would really harm Murell?" Dad asked.

He thought so, too. He was just trying to comfort himself by pretending he didn't.

"What do you think, Ralph?" Oscar asked him. "If we get competitive wax buying, again, seventy-five a pound will be the starting price. I'm not spending the money till I get it, but I wouldn't be surprised to see wax go to a sol a pound on the loading floor here. And you know what that would mean."

"Thirty for Steve Ravick," Dad said. That puzzled Oscar, till I explained that "thirty" is newsese for "the end." "I guess Walt's right. Ravick would do anything to prevent that." He thought for a moment. "Joe, you were using the wrong strategy. You should have let Ravick get that thirty-five centisol price established for the Co-



operative, and then had Murell offer seventy-five or something like that."

"You crazy?" Joe demanded. "Why, then the Co-op would have been stuck with it."

"That's right. And as soon as Murell's price was announced, everybody would drop out of the Co-operative and reclaim their wax, even the captains who owe Ravick money. He'd have nobody left but a handful of thugs and barflies."

"But that would smash the Co-operative," Joe Kivelson objected. "Listen, Ralph; I've been in the Co-operative all my life, since before Steve Ravick was heard of on this planet. I've worked hard for the Co-operative, and—"

You didn't work hard enough, I thought. You let Steve Ravick take it away from you. Dad told Joe pretty much the same thing:

"You don't have a Co-operative, Joe. Steve Ravick has a racket. The only thing you can do with this organization is smash it, and then rebuild it with Ravick and his gang left out."

Joe puzzled over that silently. He'd been thinking that it was the same Co-operative his father and Simon MacGregor and the other old hunters had organized, and that getting rid of Ravick was simply a matter of voting him out. He was beginning to see, now, that parliamentary procedure wasn't any weapon against Ravick's force and fraud and intimidation.

"I think Walt has something," Oscar Fujisawa said. "As long as Murell's in the hospital at the spaceport, he's safe, but as soon as he gets out of Odin Dock & Shipyard territory, he's going to be a clay pigeon."

Tom hadn't been saying anything. Now he cleared his throat.

"On the *Peenemünde*, I was talking about taking Mr. Murell for a trip in the *Javelin*," he said. "That was while we were still pretending he'd come here to write a book. Maybe that would be a good idea, anyhow."

"It's a cinch we can't let him get killed on us," his father said. "I doubt if Exotic Organics would send anybody else out, if he was."

"Here," Dad said. "We'll run the story we have on him in the morning edition, and then correct it and apologize to the public for misleading them and explain in the evening edition. And before he goes, we can have him make an audiovisual for the 'cast, telling everybody who he is and announcing the price he's offering. We'll put that on the air. Get enough publicity, and Steve Ravick won't dare do anything to him."

Publicity, I thought, is the only weapon Dad knows how to use. He thinks it's invincible. Me, I wouldn't bet on what Steve Ravick wouldn't dare do if you gave me a hundred to one. Ravick had been in power too long, and he was drunker on it than Bish Ware ever got on Baldur honey-rum. As an intoxicant, rum is practically a soft drink beside power.

"Well, do you think Ravick's gotten onto Murell yet?" Oscar said. "We kept that a pretty close secret. Joe and I knew about him, and so did the Mahatma and Nip Spazoni and Corkscrew Finnegan, and that was all."

"I didn't even tell Tom, here, till the *Peenemünde* got into radio range," Joe Kivelson



said. "Then I only told him and Ramón and Abdullah and Abe and Hans Cronje."

"And Al Devis," Tom added. "He came into the conning tower while you were telling the rest of us."

The communication screen began buzzing, and I went and put it on. It was Bish Ware, calling from a pay booth somewhere.

"I have some early returns," he said. "The cops cleared everybody out of Hunters' Hall except the Ravick gang. Then Ravick reconvened the meeting, with nobody but his gang. They were very careful to make sure they had enough for a legal quorum under the bylaws, and then they voted to accept the new price of thirty-five centisols a pound."

[71]

"That's what I was afraid of," Joe Kivelson said. "Did they arrest any of my crew?"

"Not that I know of," Bish said. "They made a few arrests, but turned everybody loose later. They're still looking for you and your son. As far as I know, they aren't interested in anybody else." He glanced hastily over his shoulder, as though to make sure the door of the booth was secure. "I'm with some people, now. I'll call you back later."

"Well, that's that, Joe," Oscar said, after Bish blanked the screen. "The Ravick Cop's stuck with the price cut. The only thing left to do is get everybody out of it we can, and organize a new one."

"I guess that's so," Joe agreed. "I wonder, though if Ravick has really got wise to Murell."

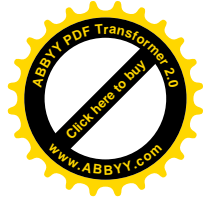
"Walt figured it out since the ship got in," Oscar said. "Belsher's been on the ship with Murell for six months. Well, call it three; everything speeds up about double in hyperspace. But in three months he ought to see as much as Walt saw in a couple of hours."

"Well, maybe Belsher doesn't know what's suspicious, the way Walt does," Tom said.

"I'm sure he doesn't," I said. "But he and Murell are both in the wax business. I'll bet he noticed dozens of things I never even saw."

"Then we'd better take awfully good care of Mr. Murell," Tom said. "Get him aboard as fast as we can, and get out of here with him. Walt, you're coming along, aren't you?"

That was what we'd agreed, while Glenn Murell was still the famous travel-book author. I wanted to get out of it, now. There wouldn't be anything happening aboard the *Javelin*, and a lot happening here in Port Sandor. Dad had the same idea, only he was one hundred per cent for my going with Murell. I think he wanted me out of Port Sandor, where I wouldn't get in the way of any small high-velocity particles of lead that might be whizzing around.



## ABOARD THE *JAVELIN*

We heard nothing more from Bish Ware that evening. Joe and Tom Kivelson and Oscar Fujisawa slept at the *Times* Building, and after breakfast Dad called the spaceport hospital about Murell. He had passed a good night and seemed to have thrown off all the poison he had absorbed through his skin. Dad talked to him, and advised him not to leave until somebody came for him. Tom and I took a car—and a pistol apiece and a submachine gun—and went to get him. Remembering, at the last moment, what I had done to his trousers, I unpacked his luggage and got another suit for him.

He was grateful for that, and he didn't lift an eyebrow when he saw the artillery we had with us. He knew, already, what the score was, and the rules, or absence thereof, of the game, and accepted us as members of his team. We dropped to the Bottom Level and went, avoiding traffic, to where the wax was stored. There were close to a dozen guards there now, all heavily armed.

We got out of the car, I carrying the chopper, and one of the gang there produced a probe rod and microscope and a testing kit and a microray scanner. Murell took his time going over the wax, jabbing the probe rod in and pulling samples out of the big plastic-skinned sausages at random, making chemical tests, examining them under the microscope, and scanning other cylinders to make sure there was no foreign matter in them. He might not know what a literary agent was, but he knew tallow-wax. [74]

I found out from the guards that there hadn't been any really serious trouble after we left Hunter's Hall. The city police had beaten a few men up, natch, and run out all the anti-Ravick hunters, and then Ravick had reconvened the meeting and acceptance of the thirty-five centisol price had been voted unanimously. The police were still looking for the Kivelsons. Ravick seemed to have gotten the idea that Joe Kivelson was the mastermind of the hunters' cabal against him. I know if I'd found that Joe Kivelson and Oscar Fujisawa were in any kind of a conspiracy together, I wouldn't pick Joe for the mastermind. It was just possible, I thought, that Oscar had been fostering this himself, in case anything went wrong. After all, self-preservation is the first law, and Oscar is a self-preserving type.

After Murell had finished his inspection and we'd gotten back in the car and were lifting, I asked him what he was going to offer, just as though I were the skipper of the biggest ship out of Port Sandor. Well, it meant as much to us as it did to the hunters. The more wax sold for, the more advertising we'd sell to the merchants, and the more people would rent teleprinters from us.

"Eighty centisols a pound," he said. Nice and definite; quite a difference from the way he stumbled around over listing his previous publications. "Seventy-five's the Kapstaad price, regardless of what you people here have been getting from that crook of a Belsher. We'll have to go far enough beyond that to make him have to run like blazes to catch up. You can put it in the *Times* that the day of monopolistic marketing on Fenris is over." [75]



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When we got back to the *Times*, I asked Dad if he'd heard anything more from Bish.

"Yes," he said unhappily. "He didn't call in, this morning, so I called his apartment and didn't get an answer. Then I called Harry Wong's. Harry said Bish had been in there till after midnight, with some other people." He named three disreputables, two female and one male. "They were drinking quite a lot. Harry said Bish was plastered to the ears. They finally went out, around 0130. He said the police were in and out checking the crowd, but they didn't make any trouble."

I nodded, feeling very badly. Four and a half hours had been his limit. Well, sometimes a ninety per cent failure is really a triumph; after all, it's a ten per cent success. Bish had gone four and a half hours without taking a drink. Maybe the percentage would be a little better the next time. I was surely old enough to stop expecting miracles.

The mate of the *Pequod* called in, around noon, and said it was safe for Oscar to come back to the ship. The mate of the *Javelin*, Ramón Llewellyn, called in with the same report, that along the waterfront, at least, the heat was off. However, he had started an ambitious-looking overhaul operation, which looked as though it was good for a hundred hours but which could be dropped on a minute's notice, and under cover of this he had been taking on supplies and ammunition.

We made a long audiovisual of Murell announcing his price of eighty centisols a pound for wax on behalf of Argentine Exotic Organics, Ltd. As soon as that was finished, we loaded the boat-clothes we'd picked up for him and his travel kit and mine into a car, with Julio Kubanoff to bring it back to the *Times*, and went to the waterfront. When we arrived, Ramón Llewellyn had gotten things cleared up, and the *Javelin* was ready to move as soon as we came aboard.

On the Main City Level, the waterfront is a hundred feet above the ship pools; the ships load from and discharge onto the First Level Down. The city roof curves down all along the south side of the city into the water and about fifty feet below it. That way, even in the post-sunset and post-dawn storms, ships can come in submerged around the outer breakwater and under the roof, and we don't get any wind or heavy seas along the docks.

Murell was interested in everything he saw, in the brief time while we were going down along the docks to where the *Javelin* was berthed. I knew he'd never actually seen it before, but he must have been studying pictures of it, because from some of the remarks he made, I could tell that he was familiar with it.

Most of the ships had lifted out of the water and were resting on the wide concrete docks, but the *Javelin* was afloat in the pool, her contragravity on at specific-gravity weight reduction. She was a typical hunter-ship, a hundred feet long by thirty abeam, with a squat conning tower amidships, and turrets for 50-mm guns and launchers for harpoon rockets fore and aft. The only thing open about her was the air-and-water lock under the conning tower. Julio, who was piloting the car, set it down on the top of the aft gun turret. A couple of the crewmen who were on deck grabbed our bags and hurried them inside. We followed, and as soon as Julio lifted



away, the lock was sealed.

Immediately, as the contragravity field dropped below the specific gravity of the ship, she began submerging. I got up into the conning tower in time to see the water of the boat pool come up over the armor-glass windows and the outside lights come on. For a few minutes, the *Javelin* swung slowly and moved forward, feeling her way with fingers of radar out of the pool and down the channel behind the breakwater and under the overhang of the city roof. Then the water line went slowly down across the windows as she surfaced. A moment later she was on full contragravity, and the ship which had been a submarine was now an aircraft.

Murell, who was accustomed to the relatively drab sunsets of Terra, simply couldn't take his eyes from the spectacle that covered the whole western half of the sky—high clouds streaming away from the daylight zone to the west and lighted from below by the sun. There were more clouds coming in at a lower level from the east. By the time the *Javelin* returned to Port Sandor, it would be full dark and rain, which would soon turn to snow, would be falling. Then we'd be in for it again for another thousand hours.

Ramón Llewellyn was saying to Joe Kivelson: "We're one man short; Devis, Abdullah's helper. Hospital."

"Get hurt in the fight, last night? He was right with us till we got out to the elevators, and then I missed him."

"No. He made it back to the ship about the same time we did, and he was all right then. Didn't even have a scratch. Strained his back at work, this morning, trying to lift a power-unit cartridge by hand."

I could believe that. Those things weighed a couple of hundred pounds. Joe Kivelson swore.

"What's he think this is, the First Century Pre-Atomic? Aren't there any lifters on the ship?"

Llewellyn shrugged. "Probably didn't want to bother taking a couple of steps to get one. The doctor told him to take treatment and observation for a day or so."

"That's Al Devis?" I asked. "What hospital?" Al Devis's strained back would be good for a two-line item; he'd feel hurt if we didn't mention it.

"Co-op hospital."

That was all right. They always sent in their patient lists to the *Times*. Tom was griping because he'd have to do Devis's work and his own.

"You know anything about engines, Walt?" he asked me.

"I know they generate a magnetic current and convert rotary magnetic current into one-directional repulsion fields, and violate the daylight's out of all the old Newtonian laws of motion and attraction," I said. "I read that in a book. That was as far as I got. The math got a little complicated after that, and I started reading another book."

"You'd be a big help. Think you could hit anything with a 50-mm?" Tom asked. "I know you're pretty sharp with a pistol or a chopper, but a cannon's different."



"I could try. If you want to heave over an empty packing case or something, I could waste a few rounds seeing if I could come anywhere close to it."

"We'll do that," he said. "Ordinarily, I handle the after gun when we sight a monster, but somebody'll have to help Abdullah with the engines."

He spoke to his father about it. Joe Kivelson nodded.

"Walt's made some awful lucky shots with that target pistol of his, I know that," he said, "and I saw him make hamburger out of a slasher, once, with a chopper. Have somebody blow a couple of wax skins full of air for targets, and when we get a little farther southeast, we'll go down to the surface and have some shooting."

I convinced Murell that the sunset would still be there in a couple of hours, and we took our luggage down and found the cubbyhole he and I would share with Tom for sleeping quarters. A hunter-ship looks big on the outside, but there's very little room for the crew. The engines are much bigger than would be needed on an ordinary contragravity craft, because a hunter-ship operates under water as well as in the air. Then, there's a lot of cargo space for the wax, and the boat berth aft for the scout boat, so they're not exactly built for comfort. They don't really need to be; a ship's rarely out more than a hundred and fifty hours on any cruise.

Murell had done a lot of reading about every phase of the wax business, and he wanted to learn everything he could by actual observation. He said that Argentine Exotic Organics was going to keep him here on Fenris as a resident buyer and his job was going to be to deal with the hunters, either individually or through their cooperative organization, if they could get rid of Ravick and set up something he could do business with, and he wanted to be able to talk the hunters' language and understand their problems.

So I took him around over the boat, showing him everything and conscripting any crew members I came across to explain what I couldn't. I showed him the scout boat in its berth, and we climbed into it and looked around. I showed him the machine that packed the wax into skins, and the cargo holds, and the electrolytic gills that extracted oxygen from sea water while we were submerged, and the ship's armament. Finally, we got to the engine room, forward. He whistled when he saw the engines.

"Why, those things are big enough for a five-thousand-ton freighter," he said.

"They have to be," I said. "Running submerged isn't the same as running in atmosphere. You ever done any swimming?"

He shook his head. "I was born in Antarctica, on Terra. The water's a little too cold to do much swimming there. And I've spent most of my time since then in central Argentine, in the pampas country. The sports there are horseback riding and polo and things like that."

Well, whattaya know! Here was a man who had not only seen a horse, but actually ridden one. That in itself was worth a story in the *Times*.

Tom and Abdullah, who were fussing around the engines, heard that. They knocked off what they were doing and began asking him questions—I suppose he thought they were awfully silly, but he answered all of them patiently—about horses and





riding. I was looking at a couple of spare power-unit cartridges, like the one Al Devis had strained his back on, clamped to the deck out of the way.

They were only as big as a one-liter jar, rounded at one end and flat at the other where the power cable was connected, but they weighed close to two hundred pounds apiece. Most of the weight was on the outside; a dazzlingly bright plating of collapsium—collapsed matter, the electron shell collapsed onto the nucleus and the atoms in actual physical contact—and absolutely nothing but nothing could get through it. Inside was about a kilogram of strontium-90; it would keep on emitting electrons for twenty-five years, normally, but there was a miniature plutonium reactor, itself shielded with collapsium, which, among other things, speeded that process up considerably. A cartridge was good for about five years; two of them kept the engines in operation.

The engines themselves converted the electric current from the power cartridges into magnetic current, and lifted the ship and propelled it. Abdullah was explaining that to Murell and Murell seemed to be getting it satisfactorily.

Finally, we left them; Murell wanted to see the sunset some more and went up to the conning tower where Joe and Ramón were, and I decided to take a nap while I had a chance.

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## 8

### PRACTICE, 50-MM GUN

It seemed as though I had barely fallen asleep before I was wakened by the ship changing direction and losing altitude. I knew there were clouds coming in from the east, now, on the lower air currents, and I supposed that Joe was taking the *Javelin* below them to have a look at the surface of the sea. So I ran up to the conning tower, and when I got there I found that the lower clouds were solid over us, it was growing dark, and another hunter-ship was approaching with her lights on.

"Who is she?" I asked.

"*Bulldog*, Nip Spazoni," Joe told me. "Nip's bringing my saloon fighter aboard, and he wants to meet Mr. Murell."

I remembered that the man who had roughed up the Ravick goon in Martian Joe's had made his getaway from town in the *Bulldog*. As I watched, the other ship's boat dropped out from her stern, went end-over-end for an instant, and then straightened out and came circling around astern of us, matching our speed and ejecting a magnetic grapple.

Nip Spazoni and another man climbed out with life lines fast to their belts and crawled along our upper deck, catching life lines that were thrown out to them and snapping onto them before casting loose the ones from their boat. Somebody at the lock under the conning tower hauled them in.



Nip Spazoni's name was Old Terran Italian, but he had slanted Mongoloid eyes and a sparse little chin-beard, which accounted for his nickname. The amount of intermarriage that's gone on since the First Century, any resemblance between people's names and their appearances is purely coincidental. Oscar Fujisawa, who looks as though his name ought to be Lief Ericsson, for example.

"Here's your prodigal, Joe," he was saying, peeling out of his parka as he came up the ladder. "I owe him a second gunner's share on a monster, fifteen tons of wax."

"Hey, that was a good one. You heading home, now?" Then he turned to the other man, who had followed Nip up the ladder. "You didn't do a very good job, Bill," he said. "The so-and-so's out of the hospital by now."

"Well, you know who takes care of his own," the crewman said. "Give me something for effort; I tried hard enough."

"No, I'm not going home yet," Nip was answering. "I have hold-room for the w