

In the spring of 1957, Emerson took on a new look in radio and electronic manufacturing. My boss had quit. The new management disbanded the components engineering department. I was a department manager without a department to manage, and anyone with sense would conclude that this is a delicate position to be in.

Meanwhile, Fletcher had died, and life at the Ipsey Wipsy had lost its get-up-and-go attitude; Inga did not have the diabolical mind that let Fletcher fill the weekend with guests who had some opinions that made the after-dinner talk stimulating. Those who came were either old friends of all of us who came to visit, or a few who were arguing that Inga should give up the Ipsey and move into New York.

The handwriting on the wall was thin, but beginning to show. The business prospects were bad. So with less to do, since the weekends weren't so busy, and eyeballing the future with a dim view, I began to write.

Of course, knowing that John Campbell was a dog person, and that he enjoyed "History Repeats," it hit me that the process of communication between a dog and a man requires something that is not quite available. For example, if the fiendish doctor in Ed Rice Burroughs' *Mastermind of Mars* had put a human brain in the dog's skull, the human brain couldn't talk through the dog's noise-making and control system.

So I wrote "Understanding" and sent it off. But—

Let's let it sit for a moment. I'm quite aware that "Understanding" was printed in *Galaxy* instead of *Analog-Astounding*, but that's another story that must be related at the right moment.

Late in 1957, Emerson and I came to the end. Business was bad, and every plan was cutting right to the bone. I caught it on the bone when my boss pointed out that every department was ordered to cut the payroll by fifteen percent, and that it took quite a number of stenogs and pencil pushers, file clerks and print room operators to make up the loss of one department manager who had no department to manage. He wasn't going to fire me, but he certainly would look upon my resignation as the easier way out for everyone.

It was in this period, quite early in 1958, that I'd adapted "Meddler's Moon" for radio and I'd sold a novel to Ballantine, which has an oddball background.

Those of you who remember Doc Smith's series will recall that Richard Seaton got involved with a teaching machine, and thereafter solved all of his problems looking for advanced cultures and teaching himself how to run their machines, invariably do in one of his cosmic enemies because these advanced cultures he found were plann unwarlike and would mildly brush away a mosquito instead of smashing it the size of a quarter with the flat of the hand. Among other things that occurred to me was a sort-of internal feeling that popping all over the universe to collect the finest technical information might make a fine series of stories in the style that Campbell used to call "super-colossal" but the process, in the real world, might have limitations. Don't ask me my objections; I couldn't argue very hard nor come up with one flat reason.

But more, Seaton's journeys took him everywhere but home, except on the last part of whatever he was up to at the time. So I began to wonder what might happen if this educating machine were to turn up right here on Earth in about the present time. I talked the idea over with John, who shook his head and said that he didn't think the story could be written. I'd had a lot of sideline gimmicks to the story; for example, a revised version of an old story about the air pilot (s?) who used to take the deaf up and dive straight down to things to the ear—mine was to have the hero-inventor fall flat on his face as a story-problem by attempting to use the educating machine in an attempt to raise the level of a moron to normal.

Then, with Emerson no longer taking my time, I started to really plan the idea. John continued to wave his face from left to right, so I went on ahead and sent about the first to Ballantine, who said yes. Actually, it was Fred Pohl who said yes; he was either editing or advising their science fiction at the time.

So far, that was fine. But we ran into a snag. It had occurred to me that the electromechanical educator provided a "Rapid" education, and I wrote the story under the title "The Fourth 'R,'" and it was printed that way, and both were mistakes. For, unknown to us or those of us who were interested, there was an after-midnight television show going by the same name, but the show's ~~R~~ ^Rount ~~R~~eligious Religion. It did not sell like hotcakes. It fell like Humpty Dumpty.

I got the final check from Ballantine on Good Friday 1958. Doña and I celebrated rather late, and on Saturday morning, I was a very sick man. Everyone called it a hangover but as it went on for hours, it made a bit of sense to see a doctor. It turned out to be a coronary. And that's where I was when "Meddler's Moon" went on the air.

To end this, I went through convalescence, eating nitroglycerine pills in a program that started about one per hour at first, and slowly tapered off until late in 1958.

Then in the February of 1959 Robert Ferrar, then the Director of Laboratory Operations for the ITT Complex in Nutley, New Jersey, and an old-time reader of science fiction, decided that their technical documentation might be less obscure if they had

someone there who had experience in both technical engineering and writing.

So if someone really wants to know why I didn't turn up much in the period from to a fairly recent date, let me point out that eight hours a day removing state-of-the-art clichés and off-the-shelf redundancies created by those ~~who have something~~ instead of using it, gets a writer a bit tired of writing. Besides, it is much more fun to get the boat and take a ride when one has free time.

So as I was saying earlier, in the midst of this, during one of the winter weeks when boating isn't much indicated, it occurred to me that John was a dog lover, and that he had liked "History Repeats," which centers around the intelligent dog, Beauregarde.

It came to mind that if the evil surgeon in Edgar Rice ~~Blyden's~~ *Mars* had put a man's brain into the skull of a dog, the man-dog might communicate by pointing his nose or a foot at letters painted on the wall, possibly quite well at such a scheme, but he could not talk. The entire noise-making operation of the dog is wholly un-adapted to forming words. The dog can make understandable sounds, and a few could have been taught to make noises that sound like words, but these are simple and can be made without the agile tongue and lips of the speaking human.

So I wrote "Understanding," and sent it off to John. Now, there was a three-way understanding between John, my agent, Mr. Lurton Blassingame, and I that we'd save postage if I sent my stuff right to John, but when there was a reply, yes or no, it went back to my agent.

John did not like the ending. He sent (returned) the story to Mr. Blassingame with a brief note of objection—but he took off on one of his nine-page letters to me. The gist of the letter was that the villains of the piece were clever conspirators, high in the ranks of the Galactic Empire of Xanabar, who would fight to the death to preserve the superiority of the empire over its neighbors. He might like it if I were to finish the piece with the same clever conspiratorial tone and do the evil villains in by cleverness.

Meanwhile, Mr. Blassingame, having a rejected manuscript on his hands, sent it to *Galaxy*, where Fred Pohl was editor.

Great minds run in the same channel. Fred bought the story, but wrote me that he didn't like the ending, and would I please—

Sure, I would. I re-wrote the ending, but it got lost in ~~the file~~ ~~the file~~, and the story was published with the old ending—

Understanding By George O. Smith

I

Scholar's Cluster is a globular aggregation of about a quarter of a million stars, so you cluster that it has no visible sign of dispersion. Its stars are heavy with the metals created earlier novae, and the stellar population is high with the middle-sequence suns centered around Types F, G, and K.

More important, Scholar's Cluster got its name from its own mysterious environment. Studying there will not make a scholar of a dolt, nor a genius of a straight-A student, but studying there will guarantee that each will be educated to his maximum ability to absorb knowledge. Once this end is reached, there is no point in remaining—for exactly the same reason that one stops pouring when the gallon measure has taken on four quarts. Scholar's Cluster was a going operation when Earth attained the stars and took her place among the galactic cultures; and Earth, like the myriad of other galactic cultures, sends her brightest to her educational colony on one of the pleasanter planets that revolves about a G-3 star much different than Sol.

While this is not an account of Scholar's Cluster, Scholar's Cluster is important to the adventures of young Terence Lincoln, for Scholar's Cluster lies toward the center of the galaxy, a few thousand light-years to the inward side of the sprawling empire of Xanab

It is the existence of Scholar's Cluster that placed young Terence Lincoln on the planet in Xanabar. Otherwise, he would hardly have been so far from home....

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Terry Lincoln skylarked through the streets of Coleban, one of the capital cities of Xanabar, with a babble of his classmates.

They were stopping over in Xanabar on their way home to Mother Earth. They all had finished their fine grades from primary school and were all looking forward to the three-month vacation before returning to enter secondary school: neither success, nor freedom, nor the city of Coleban itself did anything to dampen their exuberance.

Lincoln and his classmates bracketed age fifteen.

So all of them were on the verge of, but none of them had yet crossed, the big line between adolescence and maturity. That is, none of them had gained Understanding.

Without Understanding, the gold and the glitter of Coleban was pure crystal-cut perfection, proof perfect, and the stopover was simply a matter of imperfect spaceline scheduling. With Understanding, they would have labeled Coleban as a tourist trap and realized that the stopover was a condition for interstellar license through Xanabar, so that those who passed through could be parted from a measure of their wealth.

Still, those who disdainfully label Coleban tinsel, and damn the whole of Xanabar for it, are hardly fair.

For the shops of Coleban displayed to their very best the most attractive wares of a thousand worlds. The universal diamond, sapphire, and emerald are commonplace; the second-rate to the star-drop of Manark, the frauland of Selira that shines of its own intense light, or the glorious oyster-pearl of Earth, that is said to lose its luster if it does not lie in the throat of a woman in love. There were fabrics so delicate that they could be worn but once, and others so durable that they would outlast their makers. There were tools for a thousand hands of a thousand worlds, knives that could split the hair or cleave plate armor with ease and facility; instruments with gleaming dial and engraved calibration.

And there were animated displays.

These caught young Terry Lincoln's eye. He was a gamesman. The displays were programmed by master artisans to show the finer points and the flashy parts, and done with an ease that convinced the onlooker that he, too, could gain such skill with a little practice. Time and again, Terry found himself rapt as his companions moved onward.

And each time he had to make his way through a bedlam of humanity to regain his companions.

Humanity came in an assortment of sizes, from a small meter and a half to a stalwart two meters plus, and in a bracket of weights to match the skinny and the gross in each height class. Humanity's color varied from peppermint white to deep chocolate, with shades of flavors of saffron, tints of lemon, and the reds from pale pink to ruddy. There were the superficial differences in the makeup of the hands, and some startling facial arrangements, but they were all of Humanity—and they all had two things in common:

They were all oxygen-breathing, water-based, hydrocarbon life with red blood and omnivorous appetites—and they all had Understanding, for Understanding is the mature way of life for those whose culture has attained the stars.

That Terry Lincoln and his classmates lacked this important common denominator mattered not. His was a people who had attained Understanding, and he and his

companions were on the verge.

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Without Understanding, the babble of tongues about him was babble indeed. This did not bother him. One day he, too, would attain it, and all would become clear. For this moment of celebration, all babble was noise; and Lincoln could not have cared less whether the humanity about him was echoing in their own way his own appreciation of the glitter of Coleban or talking about him as an object of interest.

Lincoln paused to watch a display of a game that combined the intricacy and plot of chess with the speed and precision of hockey played on ice. It was a demonstration skillfully programmed so that even the youths without Understanding could follow the play.

Rapt, young Terry watched until the game, again by skillful program, came to a brilliant climax of high-speed master moves that ended with one player downed in ignominious defeat. The close of this action was followed by a sales pitch in the tongue of Xanabar, which, of course, anyone with Understanding could follow. To Terry, it was beyond him and so he turned to say—

“That was quite a—”

—only to find that his companions had left him, and were now turning the corner far along the street.

Terry turned to follow. As he turned, the sales pitch stopped, and a new demonstration began with appropriate announcements. His move to leave was blocked by a strong centripetal movement toward the exhibition. While he bucked this inward movement, his classmates turned the corner and were gone from sight.

This bothered Terry very lightly; he knew he could make his way through this crowd and rejoin his companions. But the crowd that thronged the streets of Coleban had one more human attribute: they were egocentric. They blocked his path and barked at him with the tongues of the galaxy. They did not step aside or help, or seem to care that he was trying to make haste for a very good reason.

Indeed, there seemed a perverse delight in their operations, as if they found it pleasant to block this rash youth who lacked Understanding. Openings closed as he approached. Strangers paused to speak to one another in the narrowest of ways. Pedestrian traffic, supposed to walk on the left by the law of Xanabar, filled the right-hand pedestrian lanes in the wrong direction. That others, trying to make their way in Terry's direction, were also blocked and frustrated did not make Terry's lot any easier.

Then came the inevitable incident. Terry espied an opening between two walkers

and started through, only to plunge headlong into a saffron-colored man of gross proportions who had filled the gap. Terry hit and bounced backward, to land with a jarring thud on the base of his spine.

The saffron-colored one laughed harshly, displaying a mouth full of disgustingly rotten teeth. To finish this picture, the saffron-colored one had covered his visibly unbathed head with one of the gaudiest costumes to walk the streets of Coleban.

Angered, Terry Lincoln arose and hit the line with a plunge that had gained him nearly a yardage on the playing fields of Scholar's Cluster—and once more bounced. This time the saffron-colored one kicked Terry in the ribs as he stepped over the lad to disappear in the crowd.

This was the last straw. It was time to forget that politeness was a gentlemanly trait and time to get where he was going.

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Starting with a brisk walk, and slowly accelerating into a dogtrot, Terry Lincoln zigged and zagged and darted, making long end runs around phalanxes of people, and driving his way between others that showed no more than half enough space. Soon he was in a semi-gallop, making wide swings here and taking a shortcut through an open alleyway.

He lost his sense of direction and, being young, forgot the name of the game he was out to win because there was a more frantic game at hand. Terry became turned around and continued to plunge through the crowd in the direction away from his local home base, the spaceport and its wall of hotels, conveniently provided by Coleban for the enforced lay-overs.

He did not notice that the high polish was no longer about him, nor that the crowd was less dense. He had passed the unmarked boundary of the center city, and was now plunging through the borderland, that ring that lies between the polish and the blight.

Then came the second incident. Once more, Terry tried to plunge between two people who walked a bit apart, and once more he hit gross weight and bounced.

Once more the same saffron face with its mouth full of rotting teeth laughed at him, but this time the ugly one made a grab for Terry, bear-hugged the youth and smothered Terry's mouth in the foul-smelling gaudy garment. Terry flailed, kicked the other's shin, and broke free. Blindly, Terry swung and missed. Then his training rose to the surface, and he squared away. He led with his left and came forward with a right cross that should have made its mark, but failed to connect. Saffron-face countered with an open-handed chop that Terry blocked with his forearm. It stunned all feeling from lower arm and hand.

Once more saffron-face made his grab, but this time Terry wasn't having any. He managed to connect one shoulder-driven right jab that smashed the saffron mouth, broke a few jagged stumps of the rotten teeth, and brought a quick flow of blood to the stranger's mouth.

Terry turned and ran, then made a wide curve that outdistanced the saffron one's attempt to catch him. Terry proceeded once more in the direction his faulty sense said toward home base: the spaceport and its hotels. Behind him in full chase came the grubby one, surprisingly limber for that much visible flab.

Ultimately, youth outdistanced the man, and Terry paused for breath.

About him was slumland. Trash littered the sidewalks, and filth filled the gutter. Windows were nearly all cracked to some degree, many were broken and stuffed with rags or cloth, others were completely out and covered from within with some sort of reclaimed sheeting or discarded building material.

The air smelled of rancid grease, vegetables that had been cooked far too long, the unclean smell of the blight area. Dusk had begun, and the streetlights had come on to cast a wholly incompetent, wan glow. Under one were street urchins playing at some game of dice. Two girls in too-tight and very sleazy dresses passed Terry and spoke to him in a brashly; he did not need Understanding to know what they had in mind. His silence was greeted by more vulgarities, which attracted the attention of the dice-players. Two, obvious winners, deserted the game for the girls.

Still, Terry plodded on, for he recalled that the transit had passed overhead of some grubby-looking areas on its way from spaceport to center city.

And so he continued, confident that beyond this barrier of blight lay the spaceport he sought.

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His name was Homburg. On the wall before him was an illuminated map of the city, with moving lights to show what action was taking place. Below the map were a series of small videoscreens, with scenes of the city taken from marked vantage points.

The special-colored starred cross that marked the position of Terry Lincoln, and a thin dot-dash line that marked his path, showed him almost diametrically opposite the spaceport and moving away.

Homburg pressed a button on his desk. On the small screen above the instrument

saffron-colored face appeared. Homburg said, "That was well executed, Bod Zimmer

Zimmer said, "Zer Homburg, am I relieved? I wish very much to get out of this fil disguise."

"You are relieved, Bod Zimmer. You will be rewarded."

A snap, and Zimmer's face disappeared.

Homburg eyed the map and noted that the mark which represented Terry was st moving away from center city and the spaceport on the far side. Satisfied, he arose fr desk and went down the hallway outside to another office. He merely nodded to the secretary in the outer office as he stepped briskly across the room to the closed door. was with visible deference that he rapped on the inner door, waited perceptibly, and o after there was no objection turned the knob and entered.

To the man behind the desk, Homburg said, "Zer Martell, phase one is complete

Martell looked up. "Successfully, Bod Homburg?"

"Quite," replied Homburg, concealing his disappointment. He'd hoped that this success would move his superior to drop ~~the title~~ ^{the title} which one used on an inferior. Had this been done, Homburg would no longer be required to address his superior by the t zer, and could address him without title as an equal.

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"Very well," said Martell.

"Now, whether you sleep tonight at all, you will remain on duty until the call come from the Terrestrial spacecraft that one of their number is missing."

"Yes, Zer Martell."

"It will be routed to your office. Take the call just as if your assignment was to tak such calls and act upon them. They need not know—indeed, they must not know mat t are dealing with a member of the personal staff of the Master Peacekeeper of Xanaba

"Yes, Zer Martell."

"And then, Bod Homburg, see that this incident is properly and promptly reporte the Terrestrial Agency at once."

"This will place the agent Peter Hawley and the dog Beauregarde in the operatio

Zer Martell.”

“Precisely.”

“I fail to see—”

“Bod Homburg, that pair have a mutual Understanding that surpasses any that I have ever seen. I hope that we may gain some insight into this superior Understanding by separating them. Once the Terrestrial agent is notified, and the operators move into action, you will give the signal to execute phase two. Understood?”

“I will give the signal as you order, but I fail to understand why all of this is necessary.”

“Were we to separate them by force, there would be repercussions. To slay one of them would only serve to have the slain one replaced by another whose way of operation would be unfamiliar to us, and it would infuriate the remaining one to a degree that only an infuriated Terrestrial can achieve. Now, Bod Homburg, were you able to understand the reason for this complicated operation, you would be sitting in this office instead of me.”

“Zer Martell! I would never think of replacing you.”

“You never will,” said Martell coldly. “The day you enter this office will be the day I appoint you to it, for then I shall sit where Zer Doktor sits today, and I shall still be your superior. So now begone, and prepare for the next phase.”

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In Terrestrial terms, it would have been between two-thirty and three o'clock in the morning. The streets of Coleban were deserted, save for some cleaning women and porters and a very few others. Of the masses of humanity who had come seeking their own particular brand of happiness, some had found it and others had not; in either case they were elsewhere.

The “others” included a sight seldom seen this far from Mother Earth, for no other planet has anything that resembles the Terrestrial canine.

Beauregarde led, his nose close to the ground and his plume waving cheerfully, he plied one of his talents. He was tracking the scent of young Terry Lincoln.

Beauregarde is hard to describe, because he does not resemble any of the star breeds. Dog, short-haired, brown with darker lines around the eyes, well muscled, seventy-eighty pounds. In short, Beauregarde the dog looked like a dog because his parents were dogs, but here the association *canis vulgaris* ceases.

For Beauregarde had the dog's version of Understanding. He was of a long line of dogs bred for Understanding and for the latent intelligence of the canine, instead of size or shape or something equally superficial. Understanding has been a canine trait ever since man and dog shared the campfire and divided the day's kill. As a consequence, it is hardly surprising that Beauregarde's measure of Understanding was greater in any area where Peter Hawley was concerned.

Peter followed the dog at a little distance. He, too, is hard to describe because he, like Beauregarde, is pure mongrel. Still, Peter Hawley carried himself with a jaunty air as he owned the sidewalk where he trod: a lithe and slender thirtyish, with plenty of bounce in his step and a smile on his face. The smile was either cheerful rogue or downright insolence, depending upon which side the observer took with regard to Peter. His hair was dark sandy, and his eyes were blue. His complexion was a healthy wind-burned tan, but mostly artificially induced, since Peter's assigned task was to pursue and apprehend villains, and villainy is mostly done in the dark.

The dog paused, circled tightly, resniffed, and said, "Young Lincoln stood here for quite a while, shuffling back and forth, as if he were watching something."

The dog's voice was far from Oxford. It was a well-controlled whine and whinny, with chest sounds adding bass with a well-modulated growl or a low rumble. The lips and tongue were sufficiently mobile to give fair articulation. Understanding supplied the remainder of Beauregarde's communication system.

Peter looked around. "The kid's school file said that he was a bit of a gamesman. Maybe that one caught him." Peter indicated the game that Lincoln had stopped to watch. It was dormant now that there were no potential customers, but Peter knew of the game and how it was displayed. "Anything else?" he asked Beauregarde.

"Well, the rest didn't wait up for him."

Peter nodded. "I don't suppose that educated sniffer of yours will tell us whether this is where they got separated?"

"No. But I wouldn't be against this as the place," said Beauregarde. "I think I see a few repeaters."

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"Repeaters? Well, now, that makes it a grabbing, instead of a little boy lost, and that makes more sense except for the big puzzler of why."

"Why?" repeated the dog. "Isn't half of our job retrieving either Terrestrial loot or Terrestrials themselves that have been grabbed by the citizens of Xanabar?"

“Yes,” grinned Peter. “But it’s usually toothsome young females that they grab, not fifteen-year-old males, which are a drug on any flesh market.”

“How so?”

“Beauregarde, a youth of fifteen is one hundred and thirty-odd pounds of misdirected energy, walking on two left feet in an uncertain gait in the wrong direction. Its path is marked by a two-year trail of broken glass, dirty shoes, unfinished projects, unread books, and undone homework. He is as cooperative as a mule when anything constructive is needed and filled with burning ambition when what must be done is completely beyond his capability. And—”

“—in other words, who’d want one?”

“That’s about it.”

“Well, there must be some reason. Even the citizens of Xanabar do not grab for the simple sake of grabbing.”

“You’re thinking of ransom?”

“Well?” asked the dog.

Peter shook his head. “Whilst you were getting your snoot full of Lincoln’s scent, I was going through the folder from the kid’s school record. There simply isn’t anything negative in Lincoln’s background. His folks have neither money nor position that would make a kidnapping like this worthwhile. Oh, young Lincoln is bright enough to earn a sponsored ticket to the Scholar’s Cluster, but the citizens of Xanabar aren’t swiping adolescent brains with halfhearted education and no Understanding.”

“Not without some reason,” insisted Beauregarde.

“You’re a bloody pragmatist,” said Peter. “And you’re so right. That’s what bothers me.”

“That I’m right?”

“No. What bothers me is not that you’re right, but that this operation smells highly suspicious, something complicated, with the bait concealed. Jinks, if they wanted to grab him, they’d have got enough characters in this play to fold up the pavement around him and cart him off. Instead—they play games. I don’t get it; what I don’t like is being too dense to see.”

“So?”

“So we walk very carefully, carrying our dish extremely level, making neither wavy surface ripple until we get to the bottom of this mess.”

Beauregarde gave a short bark; in human it would have been a snort.

“Peter,” said the dog, “I lack the imagination to visualize the scene in which Peter Hawley handles the delicate situation with velvet gloves, whilst Beauregarde lies with one paw on fore-paws and watches through heavy-lidded eyes.”

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They went on—and on—and on until Beauregarde snorted and dog-sneezed. “Oof,” he said. “Your opinion of overaged fish is pleasantly aromatic compared to this.”

“What goes?”

“Something—someone—who stinks. Reeks. Awful.”

“Humph. Well, Beau, the caper makes a pattern, but the prize is still hidden.”

“You mean this smelly character makes sense?”

“I’ll bet a nice well-hung raw steak against one charcoal-singed on the outside that this smelly party was also clad in a costume that couldn’t be forgotten in a lifetime.”

“But why?”

“Well, observe that we are nearing the edge of the fancy part of Coleban. Here we will have an incident that marks one of the opposition in the young man’s mind. Not long from now, there will be another, with the same offensive party. This will convince Lincoln that he is not a mere victim of circumstance, but the central figure in a plot. He will therefore take a dead gallop. Subtly, the opposition will change their tactics and start to block his way in the direction they want him to go, leaving their cover loose so that he thinks he is gaining ground while all the time he is going in the direction they want him to go. Catch?”

“Yes, but why?”

“Well, Beau, take a look. We’re about to leave the area of polished metal, reflection-free glass, and marked-up prices. We’re on the edge of the honky-tonk, the vurguzz-mill and the joint with the fifty beautiful hostesses, fifty. Unless the target is not distracted, he will observe this distressing side of City Coleban, and take sensible measures. Distracted, he will plunge on and on, deeper and deeper into enemy territory.”

“That is a lot to deduce from a few dog-scents,” said Beauregarde.

“Sure it is. But I’ve been in Xanabar long enough to figure out most of their operations. In fact, the only thing that bothers me is this one. With the crew they have on board, simply grabbing a kid should be as easy as—er—”

“—Scratching your ear with your hind foot?” asked Beauregarde.

“Yeah...” said Peter absently. “And even without your talented sniffer, I smell the unmistakable smell of Peacekeeper, about to arrive in a cloud of indignation.”

Beauregarde made a gesture of sniffing at the air. “I agree,” he said. “And now, Peter, take your own advice. Treat this delicate situation delicately. The velvet gloves, remember? The level dish and the careful walk? I shall observe through heavy-lidded eyes with jaw on poised forepaws, the picture of contentment.”

“Oh, shut up!” snapped Peter.

“Ah, how quickly passes the moment of passive acceptance. Peter, your adrenaline count is rising admirably to this occasion. But please, don’t make me bite him. I detest the taste of raw Peacekeeper.”

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In full, colorful regalia, the Peacekeeper of Xanabar approached with the customary haughty air.
“What goes on in Xanabar?”

“Nothing of interest to you, Peacekeeper.”

“You are Peter Hawley, and this is the dog, Beauregarde.”

“That is a brilliant deduction, since we both are quite well known. And since we are both equally well known as lawful folk, we will continue on our way.”

“You are a troublemaker, with the reputation of disturbing the peace of Xanabar. Now, exactly what business brings you to the center of Coleban at this unreasonable hour of the morning?”

“I am walking my dog.”

“Do not be insolent!”

"Then do not make noises like an imbecile. You know damned well that a Terrestrial youth, Terence Lincoln, dropped out of touch in this region not too many hours ago."

"The Peacekeepers of Xanabar have the situation well in hand. We need no intervention from outsiders."

"The Peacekeepers of Xanabar have the situation loused up as usual," said Peter testily. "Any outfit that can't find a fifteen-year-old male Terrestrial without Understanding needs some outside help."

"Finding the missing youth is Peacekeeper business."

"Business seems to be failing. Now go fly your kite."

"You will not be permitted to meddle in the affairs of Xanabar."

"We're not meddling," snapped Peter. "We're merely doing what your whole outfit can't do. So now get out of my way."

"You may not order me around."

"Want to bet?"

"Peter," said Beauregarde quietly, "remember your own advice. Be kind to our web-footed friend."

"Ah, yes," said Peter. "I'm being impulsive. We need not walk roughshod over the Peacekeepers of Xanabar, need we? So, since he will not stand aside and let us on at our business, we will go around. Right, Beau?"

"Right," said Beauregarde. The dog started to circle the Peacekeeper to one side while Peter circled the Peacekeeper to the other. He in the middle tried to keep his eyes on both, which resulted in a back-and-forth snap of the head as the encirclement increased. Finally the patience of the Peacekeeper blew sky high.

"Stop this!" he shouted, reaching for his sidearm.

Beauregarde stopped circling. He faced the Peacekeeper and dropped low into an alert crouch. The strong muscles stood out as he hunched himself for a spring; the sidearm stood high and stiff, and from the deep throat came the growl of the Terrestrial dog in a last-ditch warning.

The growl disturbed the Peacekeeper.

Peter said, "He means that. You touch the pea-shooter, and Beauregarde will have your forearm in bloody shreds before it clears the holster."

"You dare not threaten me!" bellowed the Peacekeeper.

"I'm not threatening you," said Peter calmly. "I'm merely telling you what will happen if you start playing with hardware."

"Peter," asked Beauregarde, "can't we arbitrate this? I'm not really hungry, and the last Peacekeeper I ate was stringy."

"Now see here—"

Peter waved a hand. In it was a banknote, a pleasantly sized denomination in crystal-cut, the currency of Xanabar. "This, Peacekeeper, is not a bribe, for I know better than to bribe the Peacekeepers of Xanabar. Instead, it is payment for a fine in advance. From long experience, I know what it costs to cut a caper in Xanabar; this is payment in advance for a bit of disturbed peace, possibly a cracked skull or two, and the usual treatment for numerous scars, mars, abrasions, shock, and dogbite. I further offer you good advice. Find some overparked automobiles to ticket on the next block over, and get out of harm's way—"

In a normal flap in Xanabar, Peter might well have gotten away with it. He had been. But this Peacekeeper had his orders, and his script had been prepared by Zer Upstairs.

* * * *

The mobile riot squad converged upon them like a swarm of locusts. They arrived in a squeal of tires and brakes, in the thunder of copter blades, the nerve-racking hiss of jets and the horizon-wide clangor of bells and whistles, the howl of two-toned hee-haw horns and the wail of sirens. With them came the blinding glare of searchlight and parachute

Peter and the Peacekeeper were caught in the glare. In Peter's upheld hand shone the unmistakable rectangles of green and gold, the crystal-cut of Xanabar. The tableaus hardly have been improved as it was, but the Peacekeeper capped this climax. He struck Peter's hand in visible indignation and shouted righteously, "You cannot bribe the Peacekeeper of Xanabar!"

He drew back and reached for his sidearm.

Beauregarde growled warningly and crouched once more. But Peter Hawley said, "Play it cool, Beau. You track Terry Lincoln, find him, keep him safe, and bring him home alive. I'll deal with this native uprising."

Beauregarde said, "I hear you, Peter. I'll bring him home alive, unharmed, and probably with Understanding."

At which point the dog turned swiftly and pranced away. His first leap was a sudden spring that barely grazed the Peacekeeper. He landed on his forepaws and then folded an arch that brought the hind feet between and before the front; then he unwound into an arrowing bound forward. Like an accordion, Beauregarde alternately folded and unfolded as he raced with four-footed agility through the dazzled members of the converging force. There was a flurry of flashguns, the hiss of needle beams, the throbbing grunt of stunners, and the pulsating shaft of nerve shockers, but the Peacekeepers of Xanabar were hardly in position, especially in taking snap shots at any target that moved ~~casually~~ *casually* ~~terrestrialis~~ *terrestrialis* in a hurry. Beauregarde made the corner untouched, and turned it in a flurry of scrabbling on the hard pavement. Then he was gone.

Beauregarde was not touched, but the innocent bystanders had not fared well. Four of the Peacekeepers were writhing and moaning on the hard pavement; two were clutched in the burnholes from needlers; and the assortment of stun-guns and nerve shockers had taken their toll, from a full freeze which left the victim in the awkward configuration of an ill-coordinated statue toppled to earth, to lesser attacks which immobilized arm, leg, pelvis, or other major joints.

Ignoring the mess his fellows had made of themselves by their marksmanship, the uniformed Peacekeeper advanced upon Peter Hawley. "Will you come quietly?" he asked in a voice that clearly indicated that he hoped that Peter might resist—ever so little—so that he could chill the Terrestrial agent and have him hauled in stiff.

Peter chuckled jauntily. "Sure," he said, in a tone and manner that he knew to make the average Peacekeeper long for the return of the knout, the scourge, and the rack. "I'll come," he repeated. "Your office is better than mine to call—because at yours I can register a formal complaint. May I walk—or must you show your mastery of the situation by freezing me stiff and clamping me in manacles to boot?"

"Just come quietly," said the Peacekeeper, almost able to conceal the seething anger that threatened to erupt.

* * * *

Homburg reported, "Zer Martell, phase two is now complete.

"As planned?"

"Almost precisely. Very few deviations."

Martel eyed his subordinate carefully. "And how many were told?"

“Peacekeeper Veckten, of necessity. He was essential to the operation. And marksman Randor and Wotane.”

“That is all?”

“That is all, Zer Martell.”

“That was well done, Bod Homburg.”

“Zer—?”

“Yes?”

“Zer Martell, would it not be proper to reward—somehow— those who had to be dropped by Randor and Wotane lest they harm the dog Beauregarde? It strikes me th

“You are not thinking well, Bod Homburg. Those who know must be rewarded—unobtrusively—for their performance. To reward those whose zealous def of the Peace of Xanabar might have defeated our program would only cause puzzlem Despite the odium of having some of our citizens think that we Peacekeepers are so p marksmanship that we hit our own instead of that devil-dog Beauregarde, the fewer in know the better. Oh, well, just see—unobtrusively—that the victims are warmly reward first time that they do something to warrant attention.”

“I understand everything you have said so far.”

“Good. Now, attend to phase three. Beauregarde and young Lincoln are to be harassed and isolated, but not harmed. I must have a detailed report on their operation here in Coleban.”

“Zer?”

“Yes?”

“Zer Martell, you speak as if it were a foregone conclusion that the dog Beaureg will track the youth Lincoln through the streets of Coleban, meet him, and join forces.”

“You are quite correct,” said Martell. “The idea is fantastic— until the record is examined. Peter Hawley and Beauregarde have an awesome record of trailing those missing persons whose lithe young bodies are coveted by some of our unruly citizens told that this is done by following the scent left by the person, but I’d as soon profess believe in free-running telepathy. But fact is fact, and the record stands.”

“And you believe that Beauregarde will meet Lincoln.”

“I may have hazarded my position and my future upon that premise, Bod Hombu, but believe me, I seldom gamble for high stakes. I may play for them, but I do not gamble. You understand the difference in meaning.”

* * * *

IV

Terence Lincoln, with the full, misplaced confidence that he was on the right trail, walked deeper and deeper into the slumland of Coleban, fully convinced that not far beyond the squalor was the spaceport. His watch, set to the local chronology at the spaceport as his comrades debarked, told him that his spacecraft had taken off. That bothered him. His was the confidence of the brash youth whose experience is not extensive enough to convince him that there are things of which he damned well might be afraid.

So he walked onward, with a fair sense of direction, now that he was no longer heckled—this fair sense of direction keeping him on the proper course, albeit in the wrong direction.

He had, as he saw it, two alternatives. He could either continue until he made it a long way to the spaceport, or he could meet up with one of the gaudily uniformed Peacekeepers of Xanabar. In either case, it would be no more than a mere explanation of his plight, a check to verify the veracity of his tale of woe, and then a quick return to his former status—only two ships of passage behind and a fine story to embellish in the retelling.

Even in the slumland of Coleban, one cannot wander on forever without encountering a Peacekeeper, even though the Peacekeepers of Xanabar generally stay where the action is.

And so young Terry espied one of the gold-braided Keepers of Xanabar's Peacekeepers and took heart. For Terry had been taught that policemen were as dedicated to the business of helping those in need as they were to the game of pursuing the ungodly. That he lacked understanding was a point in his favor, for the Peacekeeper should realize that he was an outlander who needed help.

With the ingrained ability of the public servant to turn in the wrong direction, the Peacekeeper rounded a corner instead of turning and coming toward Terry. The lad broke into a run, lest he lose sight of the public protector. He rounded the corner at a dead run, caught sight of the uniform and raced onward until he almost skidded into the backside of the Peacekeeper.

The Peacekeeper turned at the sound of the running feet. He turned to face the

oncoming Terry, and he smiled.

And Terry Lincoln came to a sliding halt, reversed his direction adroitly, and then proceeded to use his best high-speed energy.

For the Peacekeeper, in the full regalia of a middlearchy of Xanabar's force, was none other than saffron-face. He had been relieved of his odious role and restored to but there was no change in his face, his attitude, or his demeanor.

* * * *

As Terry raced away, the Peacekeeper's hand-whistle shrilled, and the shout he delivered did not need any Understanding to decipher.

Once more, Terry eluded a group that swarmed down to encircle him. He raced through the slumland of Coleban with an ease that carried him out of their hands, but as he went, he realized the very uncomfortable but obvious truth: someone was after him.

He was Target For Tonight.

When he was again free of pursuit, he paused to think. What they wanted of him he could not imagine, but the fact remained. It occurred to him that he could not appeal to authority, since authority in the uniform of the Peacekeepers seemed to be an active part of this ploy. His nature was to rail against them, to label the operation a senseless, stupid game. But a glimmering of reason entered, at least long enough to let him understand that a large organization does not play senseless, stupid games. They had something to gain, else they would not play.

It came as a blow to him to realize that he could not in confidence call upon the protection of the Peacekeepers of Xanabar. It cut fifty per cent of his future; he had left the process of continuing on and on and on through this wilderness of broken window panes, rotten timber and decayed brick until he reached the spaceport that lies some Terrestrial kilometers beyond the outskirts of the city.

He found a sidewalk stair with an under-part ungraciously upholstered with ragged mattress and tattered blanket. Their dirt was offensive, but with the natural philosophy that the altitude of fastidiousness depends inversely upon the need, Terry Lincoln hit the very smelly hay.

His occupancy of a favorite assignation spot for the local juveniles of slumland Coleban was not as disliked as it might have been. Most of the would-be users had been homeless themselves, and sympathized with the unknown who slept where they would. They found other accommodations, and felt superior because they, now, were better off than he.

* * * *

Young Lincoln awoke with the coming of true light; that is, shortly after dawn. Strangely, the fact of his plight was secondary to a long-established ritual now unavailable.

First, of course, was the absence of clean clothing, to say nothing of the absence of clean underclothing. Further, he'd slept in his clothing, and this made them even more odious. He could have cheerfully skipped the morning bath at home or at school, especially when something interesting was up, but now that he was absolutely denied any opportunity to bathe, his body felt dusty, his skin crawled with imagined vermin, and he was certain he reeked of unwashed human flesh and stale perspiration. Second—but this quickly came ahead and became foremost—his tongue and teeth felt furry and coated. Deep inside, Terry felt a vague unease; he knew academically that his teeth would hardly fall out after missing one brushing, but his training refuted the facts. So at this part of his awakening, Terry would have accepted the ration of water to brush his teeth instead of washing his body...

Then came thirst. And the ration of water would have been poured down his gullet. For he had traveled far, through dusty city streets; and he had slept in quite unpleasant quarters in an atmosphere that reeked of rot and filth and decay.

Finally, he was hungry. He'd missed dinner the night before; and whereas he'd had been happy to forgo dinner to partake of something interesting, the fact that he was denied made his hunger grow as he thought about the prospects. He could have missed a meal several, without any adverse effect other than the psychology involved in being denied.

With but minor complaint he endured the discomfort of not having a comb. The lack of a urinal bothered him only long enough to espy a drain-grille in the concrete flooring below-stairs hideaway and long enough to make sure no one was about to catch him in the act.

And then came the realization that, hungry or no, bath or not, he had distance to cover. He realized then, for the first time in his life, that he was surely on his own, and that he would most likely be on his own until he, himself, managed to make his way from where he was to where he wanted to be. That the comforts of life were his to attain—once he gained them.

He had one advantage over his operation of yesterday. Today, having slept in his own clothing and having been denied his morning ablutions, Terry Lincoln looked more like a youth of tenement slumland.

With no backward glance, Terry left his hideaway and, with a wary eye peeled to catch the gaudy uniform of the Peacekeeper of Xanabar, he began once more to make

way through squalor and filth toward the spaceport. He aimed as he believed to be right and his aim was good, for he was on the same course as he'd been the night before.

But Martell and Homburg had turned him about neatly. They watched as reports came in, and as their clerks posted colored pinpoints on the illuminated maps and added lengths of illuminated line to mark Terry's course.

With deep interest—separated by the protocol into their own offices—Martell and Homburg watched the progress of the Terrestrial dog Beauregarde, as he followed the trail. That the dog's highly trained nose could separate the scent of a fellow Terrestrial was improbable. They laid this feat to a superior form of Understanding; an affinity toward a fellow Terrestrial that might well fail if Beauregarde were asked to track say, a Crespian.

* * * *

V

The first missed meal—like the first hundred years—is the hardest. If missing a meal sharpens the wits, it is the wit to petty larceny which is sharpened, for the hungry cons finds little to reproach for a swiped breakfast.

Two things worked in Lincoln's favor. First, he was in a district where the food merchant expected to lose a fair slice of his wares—and hoped sincerely that those who stole were truly in need. And second, his fumbling, inept attempts at comestible kleptomania were happily covered over by an outburst of customer indignation over some overcharge, underservice or soft spots in the hard cheese. With clerk, manager, and customer in a full-throated round of hand-waving billingsgate and threats to call upon the Peacekeepers from either side of the mangle, Terry Lincoln found it easy to grab a handful of fruit, some slices of cheese, and a few other odds and ends that were taken simply because they were available.

It was hardly a balanced diet, but Terry was a fifteen-year-old human and, as Humanity knows from the Galactic Center to the oscillating clusters, this has the appetite of a bottomless pit, the metabolism of a blast furnace.

And so he staved off starvation—and fairly well, for the lack of the formal breakfast still remained in his mind, while at the same time he was running a continuous snack-trail as the opportunity came.

Twenty miles a day is a fair trek for the seasoned traveler through wilderness. Lincoln hardly had to hack his way through jungle with a machete, but the pitfalls of running alone took their own toll. For example, he knew that breaking out into a dead run would bring trouble. And so by nightfall on the second eve, Lincoln was still making his way in the wrong direction.

* * * *

By nightfall, Terry had passed beyond the ring of filth and squalor that was characteristic of the blight area. His surroundings were now quieter, sedate, with a nostalgic touch of decadence that had been, but now long gone, glory. It was an area in its dotage, remembering the past all alone, for it had no future but to fall into the widening circle of blight. Its present was no more than the dull state of transition from an active and fruitful past to a deadly, sordid loss of value.

Finding a place to sleep was a problem here. This was no neighborhood where gangs of delinquents roamed to meet and choose up sides to find their pleasure where it was to be found. The neighborhood was old, but it was clean, and it looked clean, and it smelled clean. Just as there was no trash in the gutter, there was no crypt below the stairs upholstered with cast-off blanket and mattress.

The lack of a ready-made pad did not bother Terry as much as it might have. He did not, of course, analyze his feelings about the matter. But the behaviorist would have used the situation to demonstrate the value of experience. Last night, in sheer fatigue, Terry had found lodging when he needed it. Call it, if you must, luck. Today, he had survived a hostile environment; he had eaten, and he had maintained his freedom and, although his sense of direction was wrong, he felt that he had made progress.

Terry Lincoln, for the first time tossed out on his own, had passed his first twenty-four hours in the jungle. And it has been said that a human, physically weak compared to his animal contemporaries, and poorly endowed with tooth, nail, claw, and grown-on fur coat, can be dropped anywhere that life exists and emerge as master so long as he can survive the first diurnal period.

Terry had never heard this statement. But in his mind tomorrow was a new day, and since he'd survived this one, he would survive tomorrow.

The hours of the night passed along, and with them went some of Terry's self-confidence. Again, without his realizing it, he was almost desperate; he was forced to take his chance with what was available. He had no choice. He was forced by his circumstance to make do.

Making do was chancy. Without a ready-made, under-the-stairs assignation-pad preempt throughout the entire district, Terry was forced to seek an alternative. There were many, none of them truly safe. The district was old in the years of the city; it sported the houses of elder grandeur now on their way to seed or to be broken into half-sized rooming mass dwelling. These relics of olden graciousness were equipped with the wide veranda with the broad swing, the chaise, glider, patio lounge, or sofa provided for the afternoon or evening relaxation.

It was a vagrant's choice. Terry could either go on, on, on and on until he dropped, or he could take the chance of being found by a late homecomer or an early riser. The way was still not his to run.

So that night he slept on a chaise that was at least a generation older than he. But it was comfortable and clean.

* * * *

Terry's awakening was not at the hands of an irate householder, but of his own. As dawn grayed the sky, his internal alarm clock, set early to avoid the early morning discovery, rang fast through subconscious anxiety. It rang long before there was any real danger of being discovered by the normal citizen of the area.

He had been discovered by another. On the floor beside the chaise lay Beauregarde.

Beauregarde was a tired dog. He had been at his tracking without sleep since Peter Hawley had shouted the order to find Terry, bring the kid to Understanding and return home whole. Beauregarde was a loyal dog, and his master's order was dog's law. Then, having trailed the youth to this pad, Beauregarde used sensible logic to conclude that part two of the order could wait until both of them were awake. Having found Terry, Beauregarde had no time for sleep; it had been a long day for him, too.

But as young Lincoln began to stir, Beauregarde came wide awake. He yawned and showed a splendid display of dog teeth, stretched fore and hind quarters, passed a forepaw over his nose, and sat on his haunches, looking at Terry Lincoln. In fair imitation of Peter Hawley's frequent sally when finding one of Earth's misplaced, he asked, "Terence Lincoln, I presume?"

Terry recognized Beauregarde for what he was: Terrestrial dog, and undoubtedly here on Coleban as part of the Terrestrial Office. His own name, in the dog's modulated whine and controlled growl, was quite recognizable to the youth, but the rest was wholly new to him, even though the dog used a Terrestrial dialect quite close to Lincoln's own.

It was, of course, one thing to know that such as the intelligent dog existed and that the intelligent dog was a great help to his master. It was something again to meet one face to face. A bit puzzled how to begin, Terry nodded and said, "I'm Terry Lincoln, and somehow I'm lost."

The dog waved his plume and replied, "I am Beauregarde. I belong to Peter Hawley, the chief troublemaker in Coleban."

"Beauregarde—Peter Hawley—the what—?"

“Sorry. You have not Understanding,” said Beauregarde, speaking as slowly and clearly as he could. “I’m Beauregarde. Peter Hawley is my master. Peter Hawley is the Terrestrial agent here in Coleban. We work together. I—er—let’s get out of here!”

The simple phrases got through, and the urgency of the last one was quite clear. Without asking why, Terry followed the dog out of the place onto the sidewalk; he found out why a moment later when a man appeared on the spot they’d left.

* * * *

“How did you know?” asked Terry.

“Scent,” said the dog. “He smelled of trouble.”

“I didn’t hear you....”

“I—smelled—him—coming,” said Beauregarde, as slowly and as clearly as he could. To add communication, the dog lifted his nose high and sniffed audibly. The combination of sound and pantomime got through to Terry, who nodded.

It became evident to Terry that theirs was a one-way communication link. The dog had Understanding. He had not. Therefore the dog could understand him, but he could not completely understand the dog. Since the dog could understand him, he said, “Let’s go.”

They reached the corner, and Terry turned to continue in the direction he thought would be toward the spaceport. “It can’t be far,” he said.

“What—can’t—be—far?”

“The spaceport.”

“It’s on the other side of Coleban,” said Beauregarde.

“Er—huh, please?”

“Sorry. Spaceport—is—on—other side of city.”

“But it should be right out here—?”

“No. You—got turned—around.”

“Okay,” said Terry resolutely. “Let’s go.”

He about faced and began to walk toward the center of Coleban. The dog puzzled a moment and then said, "Stop!"

Terry stopped, puzzlement in his face. "Look, Beauregarde, I want to get back to spaceport."

"Right—smack—through Coleban?"

"Why not?"

"Won't make it."

"Why not?"

"Coleban—won't let you. Us."

Beauregarde sat on his haunches. Like his master, he was big for action and little for the pussy-foot operation. Diplomacy was the show of fang and the sound of the deep-throated snarl and the canine willingness to tackle anything organic enough to bite when bitten. Dimly, to the dog's ability to think in terms of intrigue, came the hard-to-follow logic that the Peacekeepers of Xanabar had some unknown reason for herding the kids of town and isolating him. Certainly the youth's present freedom did not represent the inability of a planetful of trained operators to put the arm on an outlander who lacked Understanding.

With little hope of reaching the meaning or the reason, Beauregarde came to the conclusion that they were fairly safe from the clutches of the Peacekeepers so long as they did not attempt to beat their way through the city to the spaceport.

With extreme patience, the dog said, "Terry, try to understand me. We must make our way to the spaceport by the roundabout way."

"But can't you help me?"

"I can help," said Beauregarde quite clearly. "I can see that you are not molested or harmed. I cannot slip you into an inside pocket and smuggle you through the lines of the city ungodly."

"I don't understand."

* * * *

Beauregarde took in a deep breath and let it out in a dog-sigh. "That's the problem," he said. "You haven't yet got Understanding. If you had, this would make sense to you—"

probably more sense than it does to me.”

Of this, Terry grasped little more than the obvious statement that he lacked Understanding.

“Well,” said Beauregarde, eyeing the youth, “Peter said that I’d have to bring you Understanding before we would beat our way through this mess.”

“Understanding?” asked Terry.

“You—need—Understanding.”

“And you can bring it to me?”

“No.—I cannot. But I—can—bring you to Understand.”

The difference was lost on Terry. He had never heard of either Mahomet or the mountain, and so whither went thither was neither an issue nor a puzzlement. It simply not exist.

To Terry, the acquisition of Understanding was to follow something like a comprehensive final test, or passing a stipulated age... or something he did not understand. It was, in fact, the last. It is impossible to explain Understanding to he who has it not and quite unnecessary to mention it to he who has it.

“Look,” said Terry, “Why don’t we barge in and throw our weight around?”

Beauregarde looked at Terry. The kid was speaking the language known best to both Beauregarde and Peter Hawley, but the process of tying into a platoon of the Peacekeepers required more than Understanding. It required the like of Peter Hawley quarterback the operation, for Peter had the timing, the play, the gimmick, and the right of voice to cut this kind of mustard.

Without Understanding, Terry was not going to be of any help. With it, Terry and Beauregarde could communicate; and although there could be but one Peter Hawley in Beauregarde’s life and admiration, Terry with Understanding could be a big help to Beauregarde and his grasp of the way Peter Hawley might have operated in the same circumstance.

The dog faced Terry and said, “I can—help you. But you—will find me—a responsibility. First—I must be fed.”

This Terry managed to follow. The concept of a predatory carnivore taking his food where he caught it was for the dictionary, the encyclopedia, and the course in paleontology.

and primitive life that he might be forced to take at Scholar's Cluster next semester. Domestic animals were fed.

He said, "If you're hungry, we'll have to steal food, you know."

"Yes," said Beauregarde. "But how?"

"Yes—but—what?"

"How—are we—going to steal—this food?"

Terry Lincoln looked at Beauregarde. He saw a short-haired animal of about eighty-odd pounds, in his own estimation, standing a bit more than a half-meter at the shoulder. One thing occurred to him: this Terrestrial dog was harder and faster than he. The fast footwork belonged to the dog. So he said, "I'll make some sort of a fuss, and they are looking at me, you grab something to eat."

"Good boy," said Beauregarde.

* * * *

VI

They approached the market from opposite sides. The boy was inconspicuous except for his disheveled appearance, which was out of place in this district. The dog was as conspicuous as a billboard, for Xanabar had no such four-footed animal, but Beauregarde kept his identity concealed by animal tactics until the action began.

The operation backfired.

The unkempt youth was obviously one of Xanabar's great underprivileged. His actions also indicated that he was not quite bright. So if this benighted youth was forced to steal his food, common decency required that he be fed, and neither merchant nor customer felt moved to raise an outcry. Instead, they treated Terry's fumbling attempts at shoplifting with the backside observation. Those who could not turn their backs managed, somehow, to be looking over there; anywhere but at the youth who hoped to create a stir.

However, the stir was created by Beauregarde.

The dog was by no means unknown to the people of Coleban, although less than one out of a thousand had ever seen him in the flesh. The only dog in this part of the galaxy to which Beauregarde had appeared in picture and video as a member of the Terrestrial Office

But as Terry had realized, knowing that such a thing as Terrestrial dog existed and

meeting the animal were two different items on the agenda.

Beauregarde swooped in with his headlong gallop, hindpaws scissoring in front of the forepaws for the spring, then the stretch for distance. It was a magnificent sight, a spectacle of animal in full flight. Unfortunately for any plan made by Terry Lincoln, the eyes of Coleban bent their attention to the dog. There were “oohs!” and “ahs!” as the dog raced through, but not one of them moved aside or made the expected opening.

Beauregarde was barricaded from the counter by spectators.

It remained to Terry Lincoln to remember what they were there for. Since things had gone in reverse—including the eyes of the onlookers, Terry found it easy to latch onto the grab of edibles.

And he remembered. Beauregarde was the hungry one. So Terry loaded up on the food that looked as though it would satisfy the dog’s appetite.

“A fine haul,” said Beauregarde, “but did you remember to snatch a can opener with you?”

The words were lost on Terry, but the facts were quite plain. Much of the fodder he had grabbed was brilliantly labeled in seven-color stereograms that made the mouth water. These tidbits were encased in a container carefully designed to withstand any invasion by force that was not equipped with the special device furnished by the company that sold the food. Animal tooth and nail were ineffective; and whereas a mechanic might breach one of the containers, Terry was totally without tools.

So Terry shared his own food with the dog, mentally kicking himself for being so thoughtless.

Beauregarde, on the other hand, let Terry divide his food. Beauregarde was quite capable of foraging for his own, and he was far from lazy, but the main task was to bring the youth to Understanding, and this was one way to do it.

* * * *

With this simple act, their roles reversed—or more properly, were rightfully established.

Terry saw in Beauregarde an end to his problem of being lost, strayed or stolen. Indeed, he might have remained so, ultimately gaining Understanding in the gutters of Coleban, as many of the Xanabarian youth did. But with the arrival of Beauregarde, he was no longer alone. He was part of a “they” relationship, or companionship.

But if Terry expected Beauregarde to lead him through Coleban, either boldly through

the serried lines of the Peacekeepers or stealthily through the shadows of night, he was mistaken.

Beauregarde was not a ministering angel. Beauregarde was a weapon; a trained dog of war. When he walked the streets of Coleban or any other city in the sprawling galactic empire of Xanabar, some feared him and some admired him; but all of them knew that this was dog, Terrestrial dog, intelligent Terrestrial dog. And any person who traveled with Terrestrial dog was himself a Terrestrial, of Earth, Sol III. And like any weapon, Beauregarde served two purposes. Calm and unruffled, he was a potent force, but not useful in the unviolent run of life. Aroused, he was an unsheathed menace, and the strange thing was to see that Beauregarde was not angered, that his master was not angered. It was well known that Terrestrial dog would not hesitate to charge into completely unreasonable odds at the order of his master.

As a traveling companion, Beauregarde was tops. But as an asset to Terry Lincoln's hope of being returned immediately to home and fireside, Beauregarde became a first-class responsibility.

Beauregarde could not manipulate the handle on a water-bubble. Beauregarde could not open doors. Beauregarde could not walk unnoticed along the sidewalks of Coleban, although Terry could so long as no one accosted him. Even before Beauregarde arrived, Terry had learned that the way to walk unnoticed through a city full of strangers is to walk quietly and utter not a sound. Open the yap and utter a word, and all around you know what you are: an outlander.

* * * *

The days passed. Beauregarde was not the total loss he said he would be; the dog knew his way around, and he had the dog's Understanding. Beauregarde also had a fine sense of direction, and he knew City Coleban. So Beauregarde did the navigating, and Terry followed the dog's directions and suggestions. Slowly they were circling the central city, making their way through the roughly annular transition area that sprawled between the blight-that-was and the blight-to-be.

Their days and nights were copies of one another. They awoke in the morning and found water for drinking and a meager washing. They stole food in a process that became more and more refined as they gained practice. They walked, Terry openly along busy streets; Beauregarde racing through alleyways and gangways and backways so he would not call attention to the youth by his very presence.

Terry once suggested that they travel by night. At this, Beauregarde snowed the youth with a flurry of objections, none of which Terry could wholly understand—other than the fundamental concept that they were objections complete with valid argument to support them. The basic idea, Terry managed to grasp, was that he could easily mingle with the

people of Coleban by day, whereas by night there would always be the unexpected wa who would find it interesting for fair or foul reasons to note that a youth alone was walk through the neighborhood in the middle of the night.

So they traveled by day, with Terry walking from checkpoint to checkpoint locate Beauregarde, who operated as a scout.

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Their progress was marked in fine detail by pinpoint lights and glowing stripline on the illuminated map of City Coleban. Their progress would have gratified Peter Hawley, bu was far from satisfactory to the watchers of City Coleban.

“When will the youth gain Understanding?” groaned Homburg.

“They seem to have worked out a routine that makes it unnecessary,” said Martell. “Not even Doktor gave a thought to the possibility that Beauregarde, the dog, could lead young Terence Lincoln through the streets of City Coleban without first bringing the yo Understanding.”

“May I offer a suggestion, Zer Martell?”

“A solution?”

“No, Zer. Just a possible explanation.”

“Go ahead, Bod Homburg.”

“Zer, possibly the dog, Beauregarde, is too capable for our purpose. He does n need a youth with Understanding to act for him.”

“An acceptable explanation,” nodded Martell. “No doubt a lesser dog might have turned the trick. But—” and Martell twisted his face in a sour smile—“Beauregarde is th only dog in all of Xanabar.” He thought deeply for a full minute. Finally he took a deep and said, “Bod Homburg, their way must be made more difficult. You know what to do.”

“I do indeed, Zer Martell.”

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VII

Morning came as usual, and Beauregarde and Terry came awake shortly after dawn. T drank at a bubbly fountain, and washed in the water of a small lagoon in a tiny park that

retained some of the long-gone elegance of the day when this district was strictly for the ruling class of Coleban.

The pair killed time until the customary store-opening hour by sauntering through the merchandising district and casing the stores and supermarkets for a likely source of food.

When the stores began to fill with customers, they made their usual play. It was, now, a well rehearsed program. They entered from opposite sides, and, as usual, the presence of Beauregarde created excitement. Some of the citizens were petrified with fear at the proximity of the animal, others were fascinated, still others wanted to move in closer so they could tell their friends about the incident. With all attention distracted, Terry made his haul from the open shelves—

Or rather, he began to.

He was in the midst of filling a small sack with choice groceries when one of Xanabar's Peacekeepers in the full glittering regalia appeared behind him and laid a heavy hand on his shoulder. Terry whirled, twisting his shoulder out of the Peacekeeper's grip and ducking his head under the Peacekeeper's arm, and plunging away at an angle.

"Halt! Halt in the name of Xanabar!" To back up his order, the Peacekeeper's hand slid toward the stunner in its holster.

And at the same moment, Beauregarde came around the corner of the counter on a dead run. The dog slid to a crouching stop beside the Peacekeeper and emitted an ugly-sounding snarl. "Stop right there, Peacekeeper," growled the dog. "Draw that thing and you'll lose your hand at the wrist."

Terry stopped at the sound of Beauregarde's first deep-throated snarl; he turned to face them. The Peacekeeper whirled to face the dog. "You are the Terrestrial dog, Beauregarde."

"You are so right. I am."

"You may not threaten the peace of Xanabar."

"If you were capable of keeping it, which both I and my master doubt—or willing to risk it, which we question—neither I nor my master would be required in Xanabar."

"You may not criticize—"

"Stop it, Peacekeeper," said the dog. "The very fact that I am here is proof enough that someone in your upper office is playing games. Otherwise young Terence Lincoln would have been found and returned to the spaceport, instead of being harried and chased a

herded from one slum to another and forced to steal.”

“There are no slums in Xanabar.”

“Call them ‘Points of historic interest,’ then,” said Beauregarde.

“This is the missing Terrestrial youth, Terence Lincoln?”

“You call it ‘missing,’ but we call it something else.”

“This is the missing person. He is also a thief. He must answer to the Justice of Xanabar.”

“That’s what you think,” said Beauregarde with a snarl. “Terry has had enough of so-called Justice of Xanabar to last him a lifetime. Now if your justice were real and honest you would escort us to the spaceport and make certain that this youth is properly restored to those who will see him home to Mother Earth.”

“You cannot conceal his thieving under a cloak of false righteousness! Nor may you impute that Xanabar renders false justice when we take a thief to jail instead of releasing him to fly free and clear. He must answer to—”

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“Oh, knock it off,” snapped Beauregarde. “Terry and I will go out of here in one piece on our feet, whether you live to tell your family about it or not. Now stand aside, and don’t touch that hand on that stunner—or we’ll find out how fast we are, you and I.”

“You cannot threaten—”

“I already have. Now, if you want to try your skill against my speed, start reaching ahead, draw it. Start now. I’ll have plenty of time to take you after you start. Make your move first—”

“Look out!” shouted Terry. With a single, whirling motion, the youth turned, scooped up a container of something handy in size and shape and hardness, and hurled it in a bullet-throw over the dog’s back into the face of what looked like an ordinary citizen of Coleban.

But the ordinary citizen was far from ordinary, for truly ordinary citizens do not carry minibeams in the breast pocket ordinarily reserved for pens and pencils.

The hard canister caught the citizen across the bridge of the nose. The rim bit down as bone splintered. No will of iron was ever strong enough to prevent the reaction; pain

shock removed all plan for action from the man's mind. By reaction, his hand opened a the minibeam drop as he raised the hand to his face in the instinctive gesture.

Beauregarde leaped, caught the falling minibeam in his mouth, and with a sharp snap of his powerful neck, he hurled it against the face of the counter beside him. It hit and smashed with an ear-splitting crack! and a blinding flash of light as its bottled power went radiant.

In the excitement, the Peacekeeper managed to draw his stunner and was bringing to bear on Beauregarde.

"Hit him low!" barked the dog as he leaped for the Peacekeeper's throat.

Terry plunged forward in a football tackle, hitting the Peacekeeper several inches lower than any referee would have allowed. But this was no game, and neither was it time to behave like a gentleman.

The Peacekeeper went over in a tangle, his legs cut out from under him by the football tackle, and his topside completely overwhelmed by the mass of the dog, who hit him at the throat. There was little bloodshed. Beauregarde merely nicked the soft flesh, but he kept the throat between his fangs until the Peacekeeper had time to realize just what the dog could have done.

Then with a gesture calculated to live in the humility of the Peacekeeper for the rest of his life, Beauregarde slurped the man from the chin to hairline with a large, soggy, rough-surfaced tongue-of-dog. "You're dead," he said. "Lie down and be counted."

Then the dog looked at Terry. "I think we've stirred us up a Donnybrook in the good old Peter Hawley tradition," he said. "Let's cut out and slope for home."

* * * *

Terry scrambled to his feet, pocketing the Peacekeeper's stunner because it seemed a good idea at the time. He looked around at the people of Coleban; some were frozen in place, some were leaving, and a fair number were converging warily. "Beau," he replied, "I read you solid five by five."

Side by side, the Terrestrial youth and his dog headed for the nearest door. The crowd melted before them, opening a way; those who were the professionals in this game beat a parallel course outside the immediate crowd and began to converge on the door. Slowly; they would bring up behind and surround the pair with the aid of those outside.

A large figure loomed in the door, blocking it almost completely.

“Beau! It’s old saffron-face. Hit ‘im high; I owe him one!”

They hit old saffron-face one-and-two. Beauregarde caught the throat with the soft-trained mouth of a retriever, and the dog’s mass bent old saffron-face backward, thrusting the barrel stomach forward on an arched spine. Terry connected with this facade in a shoulder block that caught the plexus and the pit of the stomach with a paralyzing blow.

Saffron-face did not go down. He went back and back and back, off-balance on rounds of his stumbling heels, his trained body struggling to regain footing. The mass flesh, which he’d used as a barrier at the doorway, became the main point of a one-bo flying wedge which battered its way backward through his own men and created an av through which Terry and Beauregarde went before the opening could close behind the human battering ram. At the curb, the stumbling heels found no means of support, and saffron-face went over on his back, walloping the back of his head on the pavement.

He was out stone cold in the gutter when Terry and Beauregarde used him as a gangplank toward freedom.

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Once free of immediate hands, both of them turned left and ran along the center of the street. They outdistanced the local gathering with ease, since the locals were still trying to figure out what had happened. By a zigzag course, they managed to get themselves out of sight.

“And now which way?” asked the dog.

“The shortest and quickest,” said Terry immediately.

“That may lead us through some trouble,” said Beauregarde, after looking around to locate himself with respect to the rest of City Coleban.

“That may be,” replied Terry, “but there’s two things wrong with trying to make it out the sly.”

“Two?”

“Two. First, I’ve suspected all along that this was a planned operation. Now I know it is. So the sooner we can get out of it the better—it’ll give us less time to get trapped. The reason I know it is a planned operation is because I now know why they want me and with Understanding. You see, Beau, I am a courier.”

“A courier?”

“Beau, I could hardly understand you before, even though you were speaking and I was thinking in my own native tongue. Now even this mess they gabble around here makes sense to me. I understand the tongue of Xanabar. Now, how could you send a secret message through enemy territory in a universe where Understanding is the way of life?”

Beauregarde said, “I wouldn’t know. My world is not filled with intrigue and secret messages.”

“Well, one of the first things about secret messages is to conceal the fact that a message is being sent. In this universe of Understanding, the only way is to send the message by some courier who does not yet have Understanding—neither he nor anyone he meets will be aware of the fact. Second, of course, no one could simply carry a letter. To carry the information, I was given posthypnotic orders to forget what I’d been told until I got back home on Earth. Unfortunately, I gained Understanding while here in Xanabar. And when they get their clutches on me, they can extract the information because, with Understanding, they can call up information from my subconscious.”

“And you know what this message is?”

“Sure—and so does whoever runs the Peacekeepers of Xanabar. So it’s no secret. Professor Marquart discovered the secret of Scholar’s Cluster and planted it in my mind to carry back home.”

“Whoof!” said Beauregarde. He looked up into the sky. “My eyes are not as sharp as my nose, and I can neither see nor smell a hovercar at twenty thousand feet. Terry, do you see anything up there?”

“Clouds. Oh, there’s a flash, a speck. Can’t make anything out.”

“That will be an observer in a hovercar. Probably with a rifle-microphone which lets him listen to every word we say.”

“So we cannot go by stealth,” said Terry. “Then we will go boldly and defy them at their worst. Come on,” he said, “which way toward the spaceport?”

Beauregarde pointed, then, as Terry started walking in that direction with a determined stride, Beauregarde aligned himself at the lad’s side.

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VIII

Once more there came a change in the environment. A subtle change; not one of crack

windows, peeling paint, nor of lost elegance or a standard of living. It was a change in traffic, both vehicle and human. It was not a change in the pattern, but in the density; as if some computer had extrapolated the natural city pattern of shaded randomness along an asymptote toward zero. It looked exactly like one of those periods in the life of any community in which, in certain hours, everyone in the area is busy inside.

And, being so natural-looking, it went unnoticed by Terry and Beauregarde.

The total area was roughly elliptical, with the major axis aligned with their general course. Being further geometric, Terry and Beauregarde were approximately at one focus point of the ellipse, the behind point, so that the other focus was always ahead of them as they walked toward the spaceport—still far across the city—the citizens of Xanabar were being ordered aside and away, to clear the area; they remained aside and out of sight until the Terrestrial pair passed, and were then permitted to resume their daily lives.

It was an operation that could only have been carried out with the resources of a large, despotic organization which was driven by the prospect of great gain or loss.

From the site, the operation was not possible to grasp, but it was clearly visible to Martell and Homburg.

These Xanabarians had abandoned their offices and the huge illuminated map of cramped quarters in a huge tractor-trailer van, fitted inside as temporary field offices. In place of the citywide map was a sectional area to the same approximate scale and detail, showing the neighborhood. Tiny colored pointlets of light labeled and identified all vehicular and pedestrian traffic so that a citizen could be told from Peacekeeper, with Terry and Beauregarde especially coded.

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They were not alone, citizen, Peacekeeper, and the two targets. Peter Hawley was present too. Peter did not have the advantage of the high-flying hovercars, with their rifle microphones and the super tele video lenses, and the computer that maintained surveillance over the neighborhood by following the moving traffic and maintaining the code once the object was identified.

But Peter Hawley was not without his own sources of information. Earth's recognition of the silliness of trying to operate under cover in a universe full of Understanding had another facet. By using Beauregarde, an object as conspicuous as a paid political advertisement, Peter could keep track of Terry with fair accuracy. For the passage of anything as exotic as Terrestrial dog through any district made various waves. Some were frightened, some curious; many had heard of this strange beast with the tongue of man. Speculation, fear, wonder, sometimes amusement, and quite frequently fanciful tales of personal encounter were commonplace in the streets and in the vurguzz joints; all one

do was listen carefully and then sort fact from fiction.

By keeping one ear to the ground, Peter Hawley had been able to keep track of and the dog, and so long as progress was maintained, Peter let well enough alone.

Like Terry, Peter was at a total loss to figure out what Xanabar had in mind; certainly there was enough manpower to collect the kid if Xanabar wanted to, and was willing to pay the price of overt kidnap. In the hope of gaining some idea of what was going on, Peter stayed things ride, while watching carefully.

When the call went out to execute one of their mobilization plans, its interception by the Terrestrial Office was a matter of standard operating procedure. Peter went to the periphery of the ellipse, along with Martell, Homburg, and their specialized force of Peacekeepers. Knowing the city well, Peter stationed himself fairly accurately on a narrow street between Beauregarde's position and the spaceport. This left an error-probability of several city blocks, but it was close.

So in this area there were three very determined attitudes. One, a very large and well-determined group, was not going to let Terence Lincoln get to City Coleban spaceport; they were restrained only by the sure knowledge that open violence would bring about retaliation and they were wary of the fractious temper of all Terrestrials. The second, a minority consisting solely of Peter Hawley, was bent on joining forces with Terry and Beauregard and marching out of the district with them, daring any Xanabarian to put one toe over the line demarking a forty-foot circle about them. The third consisted of Terry and Beauregard who wanted out and were going to get out, with or without help, with flags flying or furled, either marching down the avenue or slinking through the alleys.

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It was Terry who noted the lightening traffic. Not as such, however, but in an entirely different way.

The sight of standard urban traffic is natural, as inconspicuous to the city man as Poe's purloined letter or the postman whose presence was so stereotyped and scheduled that he was above suspicion. But when traffic thins down, it is no longer the collective flow of Traffic, but individuals and vehicles which are not a mass, but a bunch of articles that may look nor act alike.

Put another way, traffic is a moving mass; but a vehicle is a means of transportation.

"Beau," said Terry. "Why must we walk?"

"I don't see any visible means of riding," said the dog. "Why, there aren't any cars"

parked along here. And if we did try to swipe one, could you drive it?"

"Not really, and this is hardly the time to start learning, even though the principle be about the same as any vehicle. You know, a dingus to start it, a doodad to make it go fast or slow, wheel or lever to steer, and some sort of brakes. Finding out which is which be hazardous if done empirically. No. Beauregarde, I was wondering whether we might convince some driver that it would be the friendly thing to drive us."

"I see," said the dog. "You mean, 'To the spaceport, James, or kiss your arm good-bye.'?"

"Something like that."

"Might be interesting, at that," said Beauregarde, looking up and down the street carefully. "And now that you mention it, traffic is sure thin. Terry, I'll bet you a nice juicy steakbone that any driver we stop will be Peacekeeper in mufti. This is the kind of cap they plan."

"Well, you've taken on a Peacekeeper or two, haven't you?"

"Sure thing. Peter and I have taken on quite a number. But never more than one two at a time."

"Then one more won't bother you."

"Not really—but this time we'll be taking on the entire force, Terry."

"The entire force is what they've got surrounding us," said Terry thoughtfully. "And we're going to be collected at their option—unless we bust out shouting."

"I hear you," said Beauregarde. "But what do you propose to do about it?"

"We wait until we and a vehicle approach a traffic signal simultaneously; specifically a vehicle with a single occupant, the driver. And one with doors easy to open."

* * * *

They continued toward the next intersection, paying little apparent attention to their surroundings, but watching carefully in any windows to see if there was a vehicle approaching. Far behind, one turned in to the street and began to approach them.

Terry chuckled. "Now I know why the old folks kept saying that they simply can't explain Understanding to someone who doesn't have it and didn't have to to someone who has. It's sort of like playing chess with every move and motive explained."

Beauregarde said, "Peter always claims that Understanding is a sort of refined premonition or intuition; that women and dogs always had it even before it was discovered."

"Beau, when was Understanding discovered?"

"All interstellar-traveling cultures have it," said Beauregarde. "It seems to enter a culture that is on the verge of real space travel. I guess, about that time, most people in that culture are well warned and prepared to believe that Out There they will meet creatures of extreme ugliness whose ancestors were out spacing while the home race was still settling their differences with a stone hatchet."

"I mean in the individual."

"Same difference but less vast. It comes rapidly once the individual really matures enough to take on true responsibility, face the consequences of his own acts and about to take care of those who depend upon him. Now, of course, there always have been individuals like that, many of them. But Understanding has to wait until the culture is ready for it. Until then, it lies a dormant faculty that all possess to some degree, but—er, let's put it this way, Terry: until the culture and its people are advanced enough to grasp Understanding itself can only be latent. And—er, here comes our transportation, right on time and to your specifications. Ready?"

"Sure thing."

"Let's go and find out who can maneuver the faster."

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IX

The car stopped and paused overlong. Terry opened a rear door, and Beauregarde leapt in, over the back of the front seat, and showed the driver his fangs. Terry got in behind him and closed the door.

"Peacekeeper," said Beauregarde, "this may be an act to you, but we're deadly serious. Got it?"

The driver hit the go pedal, and the car leaped forward; within five seconds it was going fifty miles per hour. "Bite me at this speed," said the driver, "and none of us will get home."

"You haven't won yet," snarled Beauregarde. "You'll have to slow down sooner or later, and then you lose—unless you're driving us toward the spaceport."

“Watch me,” said the driver. He goosed the pedal until the car was making better than sixty-five. Then he relaxed behind the wheel.

Neither Terry nor Beauregarde had ever envisioned a situation like this, but both of them understood what was going on. Obviously, the driver was following a carefully planned route, from which all traffic had been cleared so that such breakneck speed was quite possible. It went quietly; there was no blare of the horn at intersections. And to point up the magnitude of the forces that Terry and Beauregarde were facing, traffic signals always turned to red for the hurtling vehicle, even though there was no side traffic visible at any intersection.

“This always proves what Peter says,” said Beauregarde. “If you want to ride at a break-law speed, ride with a keeper of the peace, who is sworn to defend and uphold the law. It’s fun going this fast, isn’t it?”

“So far. But when he stops?”

“We’ll see. Surely,” said Beauregarde to the driver, “you don’t think that stopping before fifty thousand witnesses is going to stop me from making a mess of you.”

“Not really. It’s one of the hazards of the profession,” said the driver.

With great skill, the driver hit a turn, tapped the brakes until the car drifted, waited through the drift until the car was aligned with the new street, and then kicked the drive again. The turn took no more than a second or two, and the force of the turn made the car hang tight—too tight to bother watching their surroundings.

When stress and strain diminished it was too late; dead ahead and blocking their path was a huge van. To Terry it was a sure crash, and coming too suddenly to do more than realize that a sure crash was coming. To Beauregarde it was part of the caper but this was far too short to do more than appreciate the fact. To the driver it was part of his instruction and training, for instead of hitting the brakes in a panic stop, he hit the go-pedal and clenched the wheel carefully.

The back of the van dropped, making a ramp. The car hit the ramp and raced up with hardly a bounce on its special springs. Inside the van was a solid mass of feathery plastic which cushioned the possible crash; a carefully designed mass of plastic that applied a braking force inversely proportional to the kinetic energy of the racing car.

The car came to a stop with all three occupants pasted to the front by the force of deceleration, but unharmed beyond a few bruises and the inevitable blackout that comes with the high-G forces.

* * * *

When the smoke cleared away, Beauregarde was in a small cage, Terry was manacled lightly to a chair, and their driver was receiving the thanks of a man behind a small but desk.

Beauregarde said, "That was a fine operation—but then, it would be, wouldn't it, Commissioner Martell?"

"You know him?" asked Terry.

"Sure. Peter and I have met him a number of times, but under different circumstances. This is Commissioner Martell, Number Two Peacekeeper. The party sitting at the other desk is Homburg, Number Three, or among the several Number Threes that Martell has reporting to him."

"Quite," said Martell to the dog. To Terry, he said, "You are Terence Lincoln, of Earth."

"I am—and now that you recognize me, I demand that you place me on a space bound for Earth."

"Stop acting childish," said Martell coldly. "You've gained Understanding. You are responsible for your acts. You are going to account for them."

"I am a Terrestrial—"

"You are a lawbreaker, and we are operating within the rules of universal law."

"If so, why this big operation?"

"Quite simple," said Martell calmly. "At first, we assumed that your runaway was only a boyish lark, the universal urge to go it alone in a strange land for a time. We tolerated boyish pranks. We smiled at your theft of food, for it is neither the policy of Xanabar nor the desire of her citizens that the stranger within her gates go hungry."

"That was darned nice of you," said Terry.

"Then you team up with this animal, and at that point you became no longer a young man with an adventuresome spirit, but the center of possible danger to the Peace of Xanabar. At this point, the Peacekeepers we assigned to see that you came to no harm in the badlands of City Coleban were then assigned to protect the Peace. And then you gained Understanding, Terence Lincoln, and became responsible for your acts."

"So I did. But there's an—"

“And, with Understanding, did you abandon your lawlessness? You did not. Instead you assaulted a Peacekeeper—”

“Old saffron-face had it coming.”

“—during the performance of his duty, instead of appealing to him for protection and safe delivery to the spaceport. Had you renounced your former acts by becoming a peace-loving man, you would not be here.”

“Nuts,” replied Terry. “I know why I’m here and so does Beauregarde.”

“Of course,” said Martell smoothly. “Understanding works that way. You are a lawbreaker, and you are here to account for your petty felonies.”

“Fine. And I suppose that I will be sentenced to a series of terms for vagrancy, trespass, and using old saffron-face for a punching bag? Terms long enough to squeeze the secret of Scholar’s Cluster out of me.”

* * * *

“You have that secret?” asked Martell.

“Get off it,” growled Terry. “You know it, and I know it, and Beauregarde knows it. Maybe even Peter Hawley knows it by now.”

“Yes,” smiled Martell suavely. “But you see, I know it now because you’ve told me.”

“Terry,” said Beauregarde, “you can’t fight this city hallitician with words. You’ll find that he and his gang of Peacekeepers were acting only in the best interests of Xanabara for both Earth and its hapless youth, Terence Lincoln. That he and his have put you through the wringer, and out of it comes a hidden secret—that’s just serendipity, Terry.”

“Well,” replied Terry thoughtfully, “nothing we’ve done is a capital crime, so he’ll have to release us sooner or later.”

“I’d prefer it sooner,” said Beauregarde. “This cage isn’t big enough, and I’m not in favor of cages anyway. Peter—”

“You can forget Peter Hawley,” said Martell. “The danger of you and the youth together was so great that we have cleared the entire district of anybody except us Peacekeepers, who have sworn to lay down our lives to maintain the Peace of Xanabara.”

“And I suppose that stunt with the truck full of crushable gunch was simply part of your Peacekeeping activity?”

“How would you apprehend a headstrong youth and a dangerous animal who had invaded the car of a citizen and threatened the citizen with the loss of life or limb? Would you hold up a hand and cry ‘Stop!’ or perhaps—”

“Forget it,” said Beauregarde. “You make me—”

There came a crash. The van lurched, humping high on one corner, and then dropping down so that the corner was lower than the others. The sense of smooth motion stopped.

There was muffled shouting outside. The van lurched slowly again. Then came the incredibly short electrical tingle that fills the region when a nerve stunner is fired; the electricity came through the metal walls of the van, even though the bolt would not have penetrated.

The uproar outside ceased. The van door opened, and two Peacekeepers came carrying a man by ankles and armpits. The man was not as stiff as a board, because the cliché implies something straight and flat. The man was stiff all right, but he had been in the typical posture of a man halfway through the act of getting out of a car in a tearing hurry. The Peacekeepers dropped him on the floor, where he rolled over, statue-like, until three points of rest came to ground with the center of gravity between them.

“He came roaring down the street flat out,” explained one Peacekeeper. “He did not miss you. Instead, he aimed the car like a missile.”

Martell nodded and waved the Peacekeeper away. “Now we are complete,” he said cheerfully. “Terence Lincoln, may I present Peter Hawley—who won’t be able to do anything for a day or so. Now,” he said to the dog, “what were you thinking about Peter Hawley?”

“There isn’t much to say,” said Beauregarde. “You’ve got me caged, Terry man, and Peter Hawley in the deep freeze. We can’t even go where you’d like to go—we’ll have to be taken.”

Martell turned to Homburg. “Whistle up your car. There’ll be room in it for all of us if we put Hawley and his dog in the trunk.” He turned to Beauregarde. “And that makes three,” he said, waving a hand at Peter. “Lawbreakers all; for we will find that his stated purpose was to come here to assist you criminals to escape. He is an accessory, and thus accountable of the same breaches of the peace as you.”

Beauregarde made an ugly dog-noise deep in his chest. Terry rattled the handcuffs helplessly. Peter Hawley startled everybody by emitting a long, lung-shuddering sigh and collapsing from his up-ended statue position to a completely flaccid limpless flat upon the slightly tilted floor.

“They must have hit him with a near-miss or a splash-off from the car body,” said Martell. “He shouldn’t go limp for at least another hour.”

“No matter, Martell,” said Homburg. “It will make him easier to put in my trunk.”

“So it will, Homburg. So it will.”

Inwardly, Homburg glowed. Martell had been addressed as an equal and had received him in kind. He had been accepted.

For one of five in the office van, things were looking up.

* * * *

X

The man who entered wore the uniform of a Peacekeeper, complete with sidearm, but on his shoulder was the blazer of a chauffeur. He saluted Homburg and said, “Your car, Zer Homburg.”

“You made good time,” nodded Homburg. “Get help and put that one in the trunk. Then come and get that animal and put it with its master. In the trunk. We will be quite capable of handling the youth.”

“Yes, Zer Homburg.”

The chauffeur turned to walk toward Peter Hawley as Homburg approached Terry Lincoln. It was their first mistake.

Terry waited, looking helpless as Homburg approached, the ring of keys dangling from his hand. “Behave,” he said to the youth, “and you won’t get hurt.” Seeing no movement, even an air of defiance, Homburg put the key in the lock, turned, and sprang the cuff. Terry lurched backward in his chair, curled like a ball, put his feet up, and let them fly outward. Homburg went hurtling back, the ring of keys completely torn from his grasp. He hit the cage at the same time Terry’s chair completed its backward overturn and hit the floor.

The blow took Terry’s breath, but he was young, and he had been hit before on the playing fields of Scholar’s Cluster. He landed almost flat, and rolled to one side, the keys dangling from the lock.

Homburg’s scream stopped all motion. He’d fallen with one arm close to the dog cage. While Homburg’s body was still at a tumble, Beauregarde had snapped at the fingers and caught. Now he had hand and arm through the bars; he had Homburg’s wrist between the gleaming molars, with the fangs denting the skin on the far side of the wrist. As the

echoing scream died, the dog applied pressure. Homburg screamed again.

Terry got to his feet slowly, watching the action—or the frozen lack of it—warily. “Beauregarde means ‘stop!’ or your man Homburg loses a hand,” he said.

They stood. Martell in half-a-step forward; the Peacekeeper half-turned from Peter Hawley, his hand on the sidearm; Homburg on the floor, groveling in fear and pain; and Beauregarde with a trickle of blood on his muzzle.

They stood frozen for but a moment, but it was moment enough for Terry to regain breath and his balance. Then, as he reached to unlock the other cuff, Martell went into and fury.

* * * *

“Drill them both!” he shouted at the Peacekeeper, and with the words he leaped for Terry. Terry swung the manacles; they were not the morgenstern of knightly warfare, but they were lethal against unarmored flesh. The open cuff caught Martell in the mouth, and stopped him in midstep.

Behind the Peacekeeper, Peter Hawley fought himself to his knees, lunged with a painful lack of nearly all coordination, and managed to connect—not with the Peacekeeper’s shooting arm, but with his calves and ankles. The shock wrecked the Peacekeeper’s aim; the bolt hit the metal wall and simply disappeared. Its field tingle went unnoticed.

Beauregarde snapped his head, and Homburg screamed once more and fainted. “Get me outa here!” roared the dog. Terry swung the manacles again, but Martell ducked back—and into the Peacekeeper, who was trying once more to take aim. They both went back a step, off balance; then the second step hit the still-trying Peter Hawley. Peacekeeper and Martell went down asprawl, landing on Peter, who did not feel a thing.

There were, by luck, only two keys on the dangling ring that still hung from the cuffs. One was the key still in its lock. The other was the only one free. Without even looking, Terry lunged with the other key, slid it into the lock on the cage, and turned. Beauregarde came out with a leap that brought him face to face with Martell—or more properly, fang to fang with Martell. With a snarl, Beauregarde said, “I broke his wrist. What do you want to lose, Peacekeeper?”

Martell cringed back from the fangs, but replied, “You wouldn’t dare—”

“Oh, I can bite gently,” said the dog.

“You cannot win. We’re surrounded by my men for an entire district of City Colebrook.”

“Then I suggest that you tell them that you are escorting Terence Lincoln to the spaceport, in person, with Beauregarde the dog and Peter Hawley the Terrestrial Agent as part of the embarking party.”

Martell sneered. “Watch,” he said. He stepped to the door of the van, ran down to the window and shouted orders that the Terrestrials were to be given free passage.

* * * *

Seconds later there was a muffled blast outside, and a black missile screeched in through the opened window, and hit the far wall. Beauregarde leaped, and caught it in mid-bow, snapped his head aside without waiting to come to the floor, and whipped the smoking missile through the opened window. It burst outside; some of the pale blue gas billowed out but not enough to do its job. A second missile hit the side of the van. A third hit the window, cracking it, as Terry wound it up. A fourth hit the closed window but did not shatter the

Calmly, Martell said, “I don’t mind taking a gas nap. You can’t stay in here forever and when we awaken, we Peacekeepers will be once more the masters.”

There was an official sounding rap on the door. “Open!” came the cry.

“Go ahead, Terry, open it.”

“And let them in?”

“No, to let me out for a moment.”

“I—er—”

“Open it, Terry,” said the painful voice of Peter Hawley. “He—knows what—he’s doing.”

Terry opened the door. Beauregarde leaped out, catching the Peacekeeper out by the throat, and carrying him backwards by yards before the two of them went down. The man screamed in fear and pain, and Beauregarde cold-bloodedly raked the soft throat with his teeth, making ugly furrows that ran together and down to a spreading red puddle on the pavement. Then with a leap the dog turned, made three long bounds and on the third passed back inside the van.

Terry slammed the door behind the dog; he was just in time to stop a spattering of missiles that further cracked the glass but did not breach it.

* * * *

Beauregarde faced Martell; there was menace in the dog's forward pose and there was anger in the dog's voice.

"You, Martell, listen to me. We're safe in this bullet-proof, mobile castle of yours, you're likely to win so long as you can keep us bottled up. But we're not staying. Peter is here—"

"I'm not much—like my fighting—self," groaned Peter Hawley.

"In fighting trim or barely able to sit up and take nourishment, you're good for this game."

"Game? Oh, the one about the farmer with the fox, the goose and the sack of grain and one wide river to cross in a leaky boat?"

"The same—with Terry as the prize. Now, Martell, hear this! I am a dog, and while I don't have Understanding, it is a dog's Understanding because, being a dog, I think like a dog. No civilized person commits murder, Martell. But isn't 'murder' confined to the killing of one's own species? I hardly think of it as 'murder' when Peter Hawley points at some unidentifiable bastovich and says, 'Beauregarde, kill!' because the deceased isn't my kind of herring."

"Now," went on the dog, "that Peacekeeper out there on the street isn't dead, but he will bear the scars of dog-fangs for life, and he will forever more be scared of the sight of a Terrestrial dog. You, Martell, think of him as an example and tell your mob of Peacekeeper warriors outside to think of their Glorious Leader, Commissioner Martell, lying out there real with his throat slashed with sharp teeth—because that is the name of the game of the farmer with the fox and the goose and the grain."

"Threats cannot—"

"Get off it!" snapped the dog. "They can, too. You will therefore give orders that Homburg's tame Peacekeeper is to drive through your battle line with Terence Lincoln and your outfit remains honest. Once Terence is in the hands of the local Terrestrial Office at the spaceport, your Peacekeeper and Peter will return, at which point I will permit your master Homburg to depart as whole as he ever will be. It shouldn't be too bad," said Beauregarde with a cynical tone in his voice, "because a man in his position hardly needs a good, fast-drawing gun wrist. Once Homburg gets to a sawbones for his shattered wrist, and gets a shot of perk-up to dissipate that nerve-stun hangover, he himself can return alone and we happy trio will walk out of here with you in the middle."

"You fools, you cannot—"

"But you forget. It's ~~really~~ ~~only~~ ~~at~~ ~~the~~ throat that we are wagering, isn't it—Bod Martell?"

* * * *

Now, to end all this, this is the ending that got lost. Fred Pohl remarked that it was far better than the ending I had written, and I'm reasonably certain that John W. Campbell would have said the same thing. I leave it to you readers to decide. Go back to Martell's exclamation:

* * * *

“Threats cannot—”

“Get off it,” snapped the dog. “They—”

“No, Beauregarde, he is right,” said Terry Lincoln calmly.

Understanding is like maturity. In fact, it is a part of maturity, so one explains them both in the same terms. Then, some acquire maturity and Understanding early, others long time, and some never acquire either. At no time in the life of the young who are p from late adolescence to youthful maturity does some upper being wave a wand and transform one overnight. One starts to acquire Understanding as a babe, when one re that sounds have meaning and begins to make them, and one finally has acquired Understanding when operations and traits foreign to the maturing adolescent, but quite conventional to someone else, make sense to the someone else, despite the fact that who has just acquired Understanding would have no part in the other’s behavior. Thus Lincoln passed his last test. Martell’s operations were anathema to Terry, but he Understood how and why Martell behaved as he did.

Terry said, “Threats won’t work, Beauregarde. Homburg and Martell rank quite high in the Empire of Xanabar; they did not come to their rank by chance, nor by family, nor other reason beyond ambition and competence. To yield under a threat would be a disastrous mistake, one that couldn’t be explained to the next highest above them. Inco they and theirs would fair far better if they gave their lives to defend what is expected of them.”

Homburg groaned, and stirred from his faint. Martell said, as calmly as Terry had “You can’t win against these odds, young Lincoln.”

“Can’t I?” replied Terry. “Can’t I? Remember the mission I was sent upon. I don’t to die to complete it. Keep him away from me, Beau!”

The dog took a stance before Martell, and said, “You may prefer to die for your cause, Martell, but you have enough Understanding to realize that if you attack me you die without accomplishing anything.”

And as the dog took his stance, Terry went to the front of the van and pulled away crushables, and behind it he found what he sought. He snapped the switch, turned the

function dial to “general broadcast, all frequencies including planet to starcraft” and picked up the microphone.

“Record this,” he said, “and re-broadcast it for the entire universe to hear:

“The secret of Scholar’s Cluster is a complicated multi-modulated series of waveforms generated by three of the central suns of the cluster and intermodulated as radiation passes through the ionized gases between the three suns. The process is fairly new. In the early days of the first wireless telegraph systems, one of the radio transmitters was an electric arc immersed in a heavy magnetic field.

“The three source suns generate radiation that inter-modulates to produce the wave trains that affect the brain. It has the form—” and here Terry rattled off three minutes of mathematical symbols in a notation as far above calculus as calculus is above simple algebra.

To which Beauregarde said, “What does that mean?”

Terry smiled. “Specifically, I haven’t the foggiest notion. I was taught it by rote just as one can recite higher mathematics without knowing what it means. Specifically, it means nothing to me. But in detail, here and now, I have accomplished my mission, and from now and now, the peoples of the outer spiral arm will not have to pass through this mare’s nest graft and colossal dishonesty called the Empire of Xanabar.

“You have lost, Martell, haven’t you, Martell!”