

Indirection

Everett B. Cole

The lower half of the page features a vibrant green background with several thick, bright blue lines. These lines are arranged in a complex, abstract pattern that includes curved segments, straight horizontal and vertical segments, and diagonal lines. The lines appear to be layered or overlapping, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall effect is a modern, minimalist graphic design.

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INDIRECTION

The best way to keep a secret is to publish it in a quite unbelievable form—and insist that it is the truth.

BY EVERETT B. COLE

Illustrated by Freas

Elwar Forell leaned back in his chair, looking about the small dining salon. The usual couples were there, he noticed. Of course, the faces were different from those of last evening, but the poses were similar. And the people were there for the same reasons. They were enjoying the food and drinks, just as many others had enjoyed them before. But like all those others, their greater enjoyment was in the company of one another. Forell glanced at the vacant chair across the table from him and sighed.

It would be nice, he thought, if— But any arrangement involving a permanent companion would be hardly practical under his circumstances. After all, prudence dictated limits.

He picked up his cup and drained it, then leaned back and beckoned the waiter over.

"The reckoning, please," he ordered.

He looked again at the letter on the table before him, then folded it and put it in his pocket. It was well, he thought. His latest book of fairy tales and fantasy had enjoyed good acceptance. And the check in the letter had been of satisfactory size. He smiled to himself. There were compensations in this job of his. It seemed to be profitable to have a purpose other than the obvious and usual one.

He paid his bill and left the restaurant, to walk slowly along the street, enjoying the mild, spring air.

As he passed a sidewalk café, a man beckoned from one of the tables.

"Oh, Forell," he called. "I was hoping I'd see you this evening." He held up a book.

"Just finished your 'Tales of the Sorcerers,'" he added. "Some of those yarns of yours seem almost real."

Elwar Forell nodded. They should, he thought. Factual material, however

disguised, often shines through its fictional background. And he had an inexhaustible source of material, drawn from many sources. He twisted his face into a gratified smile.

"That's my objective," he said aloud. "I do all in my power to place the reader inside the story."

Charo Andorra nodded. "It's the secret of good fiction, I know," he admitted, "and every storyteller tries to do it. But I seem to see more than that in your stuff. There's an almost believable pattern." He hesitated. "You know, while I'm reading it, I can almost see beings of superior powers walking the earth. And sometimes, I visualize us working with them." He laughed shortly.

"Of course, I may be more credulous and imaginative than most. Probably why I'm a critic. And I really should know better." He looked down at the book in his hands.

"But that stuff of yours can be mighty convincing." He tilted his head. "Somehow, I can't help but look at some of the old legends—and some of the things that have happened in more recent years, too. Can't help but wonder if we actually are babes of the cosmos, and if we haven't been visited and watched by some form of extra-planetary life at one time or another."

Forell looked closely at his friend. Andorra, he knew, was a clear thinker in his own right. And he just might start a serious analysis—and publish it. He grimaced. It wasn't time for that, he knew. Many years must pass before it would be time.

He placed a hand on the back of Andorra's chair, remembering the words of one of the teachers.

"Remember, Elwar," he had been told, "your objective is clear, but your methods must be most indirect—even unclear. Some things you must obscure in a mass of obviously imaginative detail, while you bring others to the fore. You must hint. You must suggest. You should never fully explain or deny. And you must never be guilty of definite, direct falsehood.

"There may come a time when you will be directly questioned—when discovery of your real background and purpose seems imminent, and you will have to take positive action. For such an eventuality, I cannot outline any steps, or even any definite plan of action, since I neither fully understand many of the factors

involved, nor have any way of knowing the circumstances which may arise. You'll have to prepare yourself for almost anything, always keeping in mind the peculiarities and capabilities of your own people."

It looked as though the time might have come. If Andorra, a clever, influential critic, should guess at the real background and the sources of the Forell tales, and if he should misunderstand the motives behind those tales, he would probably publish his thoughts. And those thoughts would be widely read. Many would smile as they read and regard the thing as a hoax. But others might start their own analyses. And some of those might come to highly undesirable conclusions and cause undesirable, even disastrous, reactions. It would be many generations before clear explanations could be made and definite principles outlined without causing misunderstanding and serious damage. The Forell tales were evasive and preparatory as well as vaguely instructive.

He recovered his self-discipline and waved his hand negligently.

"You know, Charo," he said laughingly, "I've been thinking along similar lines for a long while. Of course, you know I must have built up some sort of fantasy world to base my yarns on?"

Andorra nodded. "That's obvious. I've been wondering about some of your basic theory. Like to see your notes some time."

Forell spread his hands. "You're quite welcome to look them over," he said. "Come on up to my rooms now." He smiled. "As a matter of fact, I've been doing a little extension on my dream world. Built up a little sketch a while ago, and I'm not just sure what to do with it."



As they entered the study, Forell walked across to his desk. He fumbled for a few seconds under the desk, then opened a drawer. For a moment, he paused, looking inside, then pulled out a thin folder. Again, he hesitated. At last, he picked a small, metallic object from the drawer and held it in his left hand.

"Might need this," he told himself. "If I'm wrong, it'll take a sector patrolman to straighten out the mess. And I could be wrong—two ways."

Casually, he placed his left hand in his pocket, then he turned toward Andorra, holding out the folder.

"Here," he said. "See what you think of this one."

Andorra opened the folder, taking out a few sheets of paper. He read for a moment, then looked up quizzically.

"A little different from your usual style, isn't it?"

Forell nodded, watching the man tensely. "I'm trying something new," he said. "Go ahead and read it, then tell me what you think."

He busied himself with a bottle and glasses.

INFORMAL MEMO

130-263

From: Explorations Officer, Sector Nine
To: Ecological Officer
Subject: Incident Report

Enclosed is the file on that recent occurrence on Planet 3-G3-9/4871, consisting of the certificates and statements of the various officers and guardsmen concerned, together with a digest of the interrogation of Elwar Forell, a young planetary native, who appears to have been the instigator.

It seems to me that something is seriously wrong with our system of operation, at least on the subject planet. After all, our operations have the purpose of research and observation, with a view to protection and development. Certainly, we cannot create chaos. And knowledge of our existence by very young cultures would certainly cause just that. We've got to clear this up in a hurry. The Elder Galactics are most certain to be unhappy about it in any event, and I don't like to make them unhappy.

Obviously, there was a chain of errors, and some of our people concerned will have to be reassigned for further training, but that's just the beginning. I've recalled all the observers from this planet, pending reorganization, and we've got to come up with an answer that'll prevent further occurrences of this nature, as well as covering this affair on the planet concerned.

I realize that the situation has some of the elements of comedy, and I presume that it will eventually be regarded with considerable amusement, but right at the moment, my sense of humor is working very poorly.

I have a few ideas of my own, but would like to have your recommendations and those of other section officers before I make any final decision or report. I am calling a conference on this incident at 280.1000, so make a full investigation on this, and give me some practical recommendation as soon as possible.

CIJORN

6 enclosures

STATEMENT

I, Florand Anremdor, am assigned to the Communications Branch, Exploratory Section, Sector Nine.

At 261.0196, I was on duty in the emergency communications room at Increment Four. A call came in from Resident Station number fourteen, Planet 3-G3-9/4871, requesting emergency condensation over the immediate station area. Co-ordinates were not given and I checked the planetary co-ordinates with the call sign and the Communications List. I added these to the message and forwarded the request to the Patrol Duty Officer for his action.

There was no visual on the call, but the voice sounded urgent. I relayed the request without requiring special authentication, since the station was precisely on the correct settings, no inimical culture is known to be operating in this sector, and the coded call was correct. At the time, I had no way of suspecting that this was not a genuine emergency call.

Florand Anremdor
Comm. 1/c

CERTIFICATE

I, Captain Binkar Morancos, am assigned to the 334th Vector, which is presently under the orders of the Commander, Sector Nine.

I was assigned as Sector Patrol Duty Officer at 261.0200, when a message was relayed from Increment Four, requesting emergency condensation on a planet in that increment. I checked the co-ordinates and data furnished, consulted the situation chart, and instructed Cruiser P-4730, Captain Klorantel commanding, to carry out the mission.

Since the message came through normal channels, I had no doubt as to its

authenticity, and treated it as routine. I felt that the cruiser commander could deal with the matter at his discretion.

Binkar Morancos
Capt. StG(C)

CERTIFICATE

I, Captain Corrondao Klorantel, am in command of the Stellar Guard Cruiser *Myloren*, number P-4730. I am assigned to duty with the 334th Vector, which is operating in Sector Nine.

The *Myloren* was on routine patrol in the Fourth Increment at 261.0203, when a message was received from Sector Headquarters, giving co-ordinates on Planet 3-G3-9/4871, with a request for emergency condensation. I proceeded to the subject planet and took position outside the atmosphere. Visual checks failed to show any emergency condition on the surface, though a burned-out area was noted in the forest a short distance to the planetary south of the station concerned. A call was made to the resident station, requesting clarification of the request, and the answer proved to be unsatisfactory.

There was no visual transmission, and the voice was strongly accented. The message gave insufficient data for action, contained no identification, and was in improper form for station-to-ship contact. I decided to make contact by other means, and shifted my secondary communicator to the guardsman's personal settings, requesting further information, suitable identification, and confirmation of the request. Guardsman Jaeger immediately informed me that the call was spurious, stating that he was away from his station, and that he would return immediately. During the conversation, I noted that full condensation was taking place to atmospheric limits.

I called Auxiliary, and Technician Melran stated that his control circuits were inoperative and that he was tracing the difficulty. He cleared the trouble, but condensation had already been established and precipitation had commenced. I ordered re-absorption, which was started as soon as repairs had been accomplished.

At the request of Guardsman Jaeger, we stood by to render aid if necessary, maintaining contact with his station. At 0572, Jaeger requested immediate evacuation for himself and for one other person. I entered atmosphere, made

planetfall with nullified visibility, and took off the guardsman and a young native. During the evacuation, I noted a number of natives armed with various implements, who were attempting to break their way into the station. Guardsman Jaeger fired his demolitions as he left, firing the screen generator with his last flare. For a few minutes, the natives fell back before the flames, but they were entering the station by the time we cleared the planet. It is believed that the installation was completely destroyed.

Corrondao Klorantel
Capt. StG(C)
Commanding P-4730

STATEMENT

I, Danaeo Melran, am assigned to the Patrol Cruiser *Myloren*, number P-4730, for duty.

At 261.0204, I was on duty in Auxiliary Equipment when Captain Klorantel called, informing me that a request had come in for emergency condensation. He told me to set up and await execution order. I preset two forward radiators for forty kilometers at low condensation, with a three kilometer radius at surface. I then put the controls on automatic trigger, notified the captain, and went on with my normal duties. At 0221, we came out of trans-light, and I adjusted my equipment for slow-drive operation.

At 0223, my indicators showed activity on the forward radiators. I checked and discovered that full power was being applied. Attempts to override the automatics were unsuccessful, and while I was attempting to clear the trouble, the captain called again, saying that the request was false, and asking why I had turned the radiators on. I told him that the controls were jammed, and he instructed me to make repairs and set up re-absorption.

I discovered a short between the automatic trigger and the ship's secondary communication antenna. After clearing this, I found trouble in the control section of the condensation driver. The automatic trigger had become fused, and the control paths were shorted to full-drive throughout. The sub-assemblies were replaced and trouble cleared by 0300. I then set up re-absorption as ordered.

Danaeo Melran
Eq Tech 3/c

STATEMENT

I, Franz Jaeger, am Resident Guardsman at Station Fourteen, Planet 3-G3-9/4871.

I have been assigned to my station for eight planetary years for survey and observation duty. During the past five years, I have employed Elwar Forell, the son of a local peasant, to keep the living quarters clean and to do general work about the station. I have never discussed the possibilities of extra-planetary civilization with him, and I have been careful to exclude him from knowledge of my technical equipment, which I have kept in a secure room in accordance with regulations. I have presented myself to him, as well as to all the villagers in my area, as a scholar, tired of city life, and desirous of a quiet existence.

There has been a drought in part of my area for the entire season. We have suffered from one forest fire and there is a strong possibility of others. Crops are doing very badly, and the peasants have been complaining bitterly. This is not an unheard-of situation, but it has caused considerable discomfort and worry, since there is a very definite threat of famine. There have been numerous attempts to obtain rain by occult means, and I have been personally approached on the matter. For some time, the villagers in the immediate area of the station have regarded me as a sorcerer, and I have been asked to cast a spell to cause rain.

I had considered a request for light condensation, but had hesitated to make such a request, since I felt that rain closely following the villagers' petition to me would confirm their supernatural beliefs, which I have attempted to discourage.

At 261.0223, I was on a routine tour of my area. I received a call from the cruiser *Myloren*, Captain Klorantel commanding, asking for further information on a request for emergency condensation. I informed him that I had made no such request, adding that a light rain would be desirable if he were in position and prepared to radiate.

During the conversation with Captain Klorantel, I noted that the sky was darkening. There were several flashes of lightning, and I felt the signs of imminent, heavy rain. I promptly started back to my station.

Upon my arrival, I discovered that Elwar had managed to open the communications room and had been using the equipment. He was extremely frightened, and made incoherent remarks about talking to a demon. When I attempted to question him as to how he had opened the room, and where he had

learned the operation of the communications equipment, he became hysterical and I could find out precisely nothing.

By this time, it was raining violently. There was a high wind. Several trees had been blown down and lightning was frequent. A flood was starting down the mountainside toward the village, threatening severe damage. It was quite apparent that crops, such as they were, would be almost completely destroyed.

At the time, I could do little to remedy the situation. I re-established contact with the cruiser, informed Captain Klorantel of the situation, and requested that he stand by. I then turned on my viewsphere to keep watch on the village from the communications room. Since Elwar had been in the room on several previous occasions, I saw no reason for excluding him. On the contrary, I thought it would be advisable to keep him with me, since I felt that he would be seriously injured if he were turned loose in the village. I do not believe he would have survived the fury of the villagers, who had taken shelter, and were watching the destruction of their crops.

The flood had become a torrent, which overflowed the banks of the village brook, tore at the bridge, and swept through the lanes. In the fields, grain was beaten into the ground and it was clear that the villagers would have little or no harvest to celebrate during the approaching festival. The wind grew in force, lashing at the tall festival pole, which bent, crashed down in the village square, and partially demolished the front of the inn.

During this period, there was no human activity, since everyone had taken what shelter he could find.

At 0448, the rain slackened, the wind died down, and people started gathering in the square. For a time, they milled about, wading through the ebbing flood. They examined the damage, then they gathered in groups, talking earnestly.

The dry wind came up at 0510, and by 0550, the entire village was on the march toward my station. Their intentions were quite easy to determine. They were armed with pitchforks, scythes, axes, and other tools which could be converted to offensive use. I established a protective screen, but realized that to set up a permanent defense would be impractical and even harmful. I therefore called the cruiser, requesting evacuation for myself and for young Forell. Prior to evacuation, I demolished all my fixed equipment, so that the only things left for the villagers to find when they entered the station were damaged remains of those things normal for a recluse scholar of their era.

Franz Jaeger
Observer 2/c

INFORMAL MEMO

130-265

From: Evaluations Officer
To: Explorations Officer
Subject: Interrogation

Enclosed is a digest of the interrogation of one, Elwar Forell, who was evacuated from forty-eight seventy-one, in company with Guardsman Jaeger. This boy was abjectly terrified and had to be calmed several times during questioning. He was pitifully hysterical when recalling his conversation with Captain Klorantel, who, you will remember, is a capriform humanoid.

The subject appears to be an intelligent specimen of his race, and when he had conquered his hysteria, was extremely co-operative, showing active interest in his surroundings. I believe he would be able to assimilate training, and would make a valuable addition to the Stellar Guard. I recommend his retention and training.

If Elwar is a typical "son of a simple peasant," and if the planet from which he comes has any considerable number of "simple peasants" with sons like him, I can foresee some strangely interesting problems in connection with further dealings on that planet.

FONZEC

1 enclosure

DIGEST

Interrogation of Elwar Forell, native of Planet 3-G3-9/4871.

"My Masters, I did mean no harm, but only good. I have long known that my master was possessed of power denied to most men. When I was apprenticed to him five years ago, I thought I would one day learn some of the dark secrets of the hidden worlds, but never did my master mention aught of those secrets he so surely knew. He taught me only of those things known to the scholars. He told me of reading, of writing, and of ciphering, and taught me many facts of our world which are known to the learned. I wished to know of many other things, but of these he was silent. Even so, I am grateful for his teachings, for how else

could the son of a simple peasant gain the knowledge of the scholars?

"I saw that my master often repaired to a room which I was never allowed to enter. This room he cleaned himself. And he always entered in the greatest of secrecy, being quite cross with me when I once betrayed curiosity. I remained curious, however, and fell at last to watching him in secret as he opened the door.

"He slid aside a secret panel, then turned a wheel this way and that, finally pushing a handle. I watched, at last learning to what numbers he did turn the wheel, and how he pushed the handle. During his absences, I went sometimes to that room of magic, and I read the books of power, though there was much I could not read, since much of the writing was in strange tongues and I dared not ask my master the meanings of the strange words. But for his own convenience, my master had written many instructions plainly. And these, I read.

"I did learn that there were powers beyond those of men. I learned that these strange instruments on the table did have strange ability to call forth demons and spirits, but never until that day did I dare touch other than the books and papers. And those I took great care to restore to their original condition.

"For three months past, my father's land and the fields of his neighbors have been dry. During this time, there has been no rain, nor hint of rain, and the peasants have cried out for relief. They have appealed even to my master, who has told them that he has no strange powers—that he can do naught to call up rain. But they did not believe him, nor did I, Elwar, who knew better than this. I had seen the books of power, and I knew the demons could cause the skies to deliver water if rightly asked. So, I visited the room of magic upon the occasions of my master's absence. And I tried to decipher his writings that I might find the means to ask for the skies to open. Always, when I felt my master's presence approaching, I left the room, taking care to properly lock the door and to hide all evidence of my entry.

"On that day of direful events, I found a paper in my master's hand. It mentioned fire in the forests. It mentioned rain. And it had on it words of power.

"For a time, I practiced the strange syllables. Many times did I speak them aloud, then I pressed the bosses on the table, as shown by one of the books. There was a light. Then, the great ball glowed with color, to show me the first demon.

"He spoke. And I conquered my fear, to repeat the syllables I had labored to learn. Once again, he spoke, and I could not understand him. I could think of

nothing but to say again those words which I hoped would bring the rain we so badly needed. I took my hands from the bosses and stood, wondering what would happen. The ball became dark.

"I stood, waiting. And nothing happened. Finally, thinking nothing was to occur, I turned and started to leave the room. Then, a great voice spoke. Again, the wall was alight. Within it was a fearsome demon who glared at me ferociously and demanded something in that tongue of power. I could not think. I stood, trembling fearfully. And he spoke again. Then did I repeat again the words I had learned, and ran from the room.

"It became dark. The lightnings flashed, and the rain fell, and my master came, but not as I had ever seen him before. He did not walk from the forest as was his wont, but appeared before me from the air. I started back in fright, for now I was certain beyond doubt that he was a man of great wizardry. I thought he would beat me, or possibly cast me under a spell.

"Never has he beaten me, always saying that it was wrong to beat an apprentice, and that those who so did were lacking in their senses. And this is but another proof of his sorcery, for who, other than a sorcerer, could handle his servants without beating them?

"I dared do nothing other than to tell him of my misdoing, and he rushed to the room, taking me with him. He pressed the bosses, turning one that I had not known of, and the demon appeared again and talked with him. Then, my master made strange passes about the instruments and the village was shown in the ball.

"At last the rain stopped. A wind blew—hot and dry, as from the pit—and the people came and did try by violence to enter. But they could not. At last, the great machine came, and though we could not at first see it, we entered and were carried away through the sky.

"The people watched the house burn, then entered, to scatter the ashes.

"And I am here, and afraid."

Doer Kweiros flipped off the playback and gazed at the unresponsive wall. He rubbed the back of his head, looked at the viewsphere, then checked the playback index and tapped the rewind.

"Oh, me," he complained sorrowfully, "how do we get into these things?"

He looked toward the communicator controls unhappily, then reached out and dialed a number. The sphere lit and an alert face looked at him inquiringly.

"How is that Forell boy?"

"Soaking up information like a sponge, sir."

Kweiros nodded. "Gathered he might," he remarked. "Send him up here, will you? And have Jaeger come with him."

"Yes, sir."

Kweiros snapped the communicator off, sat back to drum idly on his desk, then got up and walked over to his master file control board. He glanced at the index, then punched out a sequence on the buttons. There was a subdued hum and a door opened. Kweiros reached into the compartment, to take out several tape reels. He glanced at them, nodded, and went back to the desk, where he spread them out and looked from one to another. Finally, he selected one of the smaller reels and started to thread it into the playback.

There was a light tap on the door and he looked up.

"So soon? Come in."

A tall, sharp-featured guardsman entered and stood at attention. Beside him was a boy, who looked curiously and a little fearfully at the officer, who waved to chairs.

"Sit down, both of you. I'm not going to claw you. Just want to go over a few things. I've some ideas, but I want to be sure of a couple of points." The captain glanced at the reels before him.

"One thing puzzles me, Jaeger. Why did you have notes in the planetary language in your communications room?"

Jaeger stirred uneasily. "I started doing that some time ago, sir," he explained. "You see, their language is quite dissimilar to either my own or to Galactica, and I have yet to learn to think in it. I wanted to avoid any possibility of lapsing away from it, so I translated my instructions and notes, hoping to keep myself constantly reminded to refrain from using Galactica at any time." He spread his hands. "I suppose—"

Kweiros waved. "Logical, I presume," he admitted. "Anyway, that's done, and we can't do much about it now. Now for another thing." He glanced at the tape reels. "I noticed that the villagers in your area regarded you as a sorcerer. What cause did they have to form such an opinion?"

"None, sir, that I know of." Jaeger shook his head.

Kweiros looked at the boy. "Elwar?"

"Why, all the village knew it, Master." The boy shook his head. "One had but to be near Master Jaeger for a time, and he could feel the power, just as I can feel it now." He shook his head again. "But it is very strong, Master. You must be one of the ones of truly great power."

Kweiros looked speculatively at Jaeger.

"I understood they were nontelepaths. All the reports agree on that."

"Definitely, sir, they are. They're absolutely mute. Not a trace of radiation, even when they're close. And they don't receive. You can try it now, sir. It's just like punching into space itself. No resistance, no reflection, just nothing."

"Shield?"

"No, sir. Just no indication. Makes me feel as though I were in free space with a dead drive."

Kweiros looked for a moment at Jaeger, then sent out a probing thought, searching for some indication of mental activity from the boy. But there was nothing. It wasn't anything like a shield, he thought. It seemed more like an infinite baffle.

But there was some reaction. The boy shrank back in terror.

"Please, Master," he begged. "Do not place me under enchantment." He held up his hands in a peculiar gesture.

"What made you do that?" Kweiros raised a hand slowly, palm out. "I have no intention of harming you."

"But I could feel you, trying to cast me under a spell."

"You ... felt me?"

"To be sure, Master, just as I have felt the same power from my master, Jaeger. But this was far stronger. It hurt. And it seemed as though you wanted me to do something."

Kweiros nodded. "I think I'm getting an idea," he remarked. "And it scares me a little. They're not really nontelepathic, any more than the Kierawelans, for example, are nonvocal. I think we've got something here that's almost unique in the galaxy." He rubbed his neck. "Excuse me a few minutes. I want to check something in one of these tapes."

Jaeger nodded and leaned back in his chair, looking curiously at the boy beside him, then back at his superior, who had selected a tape reel. He threaded it into the playing heads, put on a headband, and snapped a switch. Jaeger and the boy watched as Kweiros leaned back.

The officer's face became vacant, then twisted, seeming to reflect painful mental effort. Slowly, he leaned forward again, touching another switch. Then, he sank back, to concentrate on his thoughts.

Jaeger looked again at the boy, who was sitting tensely, his hands gripping the arms of his chair, his eyes fastened fearfully on the officer before him. As Jaeger watched, Elwar half rose from his chair, then sank back, his face appearing to mirror Kweiros' efforts.

At last, Kweiros sat up. Shakily, he removed his headband and snapped the playback off.

"Long time since I checked that tape," he said. "Pretty rugged stuff, and highly speculative. Always gives me a headache." He shook his head as he looked at Elwar.

"And this makes it even worse. It was bad enough as pure speculation, but we've got something real here. Something rough. For one thing, we have got a planet where no one but native operatives stand a chance of working. For another we —" He cupped his chin in his hands and examined Elwar closely.

"Do you really want to learn the secrets you looked for in the books, youngster? Do you still want the secrets you first thought you might learn?"

The boy seemed to withdraw a little. "I have a great fear," he admitted

tremulously.

"You haven't been injured or mistreated, have you?"

"No, Master, but—" Elwar looked toward the door.

"And you won't be," he was told reassuringly. "Now you just go ahead on back to your quarters."

As the door closed, Kweiros turned to Jaeger.

"Think we'll put you on special assignment. For the next few cycles, you'll act as a private tutor. Then you can go back to Main Base with Elwar while they give him his training."

Jaeger raised his eyebrows. "Yes, sir," he said doubtfully. "You think the boy will develop?"

Kweiros nodded. "I'm quite sure of it," he said. "And he's got a big job ahead of him. He may be instrumental in preventing a major disaster." He waved at the tape reels.

"I got that little tape out just on an off chance," he added. "Didn't really expect to find anything, but—" He flipped his hands out. "Anyway, I pulled it." He leaned forward, looking at Jaeger.

"We may have run into a second, or even third growth culture," he said slowly. "Once, before some ancient war of destruction, the people of this planet might have been normally telepathic." He closed his eyes for an instant. "Possibly they were unable to use their telepathic power. And equally possibly, they could have had a highly developed mechanical civilization. Something went wrong." He waved at the tape reel.

"In this reconstruction, there's an hypothesis on just such a situation. Here, a race reaches high development and wrecks itself—leaving no trace of its accomplishments. Growth starts over from the most meager of beginnings. Survival becomes a matter of the most bitter conflict, with everyone becoming a hunter and being hunted in his turn. In this situation, detection of an enemy becomes vital." He grinned wryly. "Can you imagine what would happen to someone who radiated his thoughts?"

Jaeger ran a finger over his lips. "He'd be easy to locate," he mused. "And he'd have a hard time evading an enemy."

"Precisely." Kweiros nodded. "And he'd never be able to approach his prey. In short, he'd fail to survive. Complete telepathic blankness would have a high survival value. But an ability to detect mental radiation would still be a big help." He waved a hand.

"So, a race like this one could evolve. And the author of this tape extrapolated from there. A normal telepathic reception will be accompanied, by a slight feedback. A completely black body, however, will neither radiate nor feed back. It merely absorbs energy and, unless it's super-imposed on a reflective background, it leaves no trace. Since nothing in nature other than a telepathic mind can reflect telepathy, no background would survive for long." He frowned a little.

"Of course, no mind we are familiar with could act as a telepathically black body, but this author hypothesized a race that could do just that—plus. There's a further hypothesis of an ability to detect and localize radiations as such, without bothering to resolve them."

"Sounds like just what we have here," Jaeger admitted.

"It does, doesn't it?" Kweiros nodded. "And there's a further extrapolation. Some of the members or the elder races have speculated on a sort of second-order telepathy, undetectable to the normal telepath, but capable of noting normal radiation. And some of the speculations seem to make sense—though they're a little confusing. If you don't have a specific sense, it's difficult to visualize it, or even to speculate on its presence." He drew a deep breath.

"That leads us into a real problem. Our people roamed around this planet for several cycles this time. And there may have been others before us, who didn't record their visits, other than in the minds and legends of the natives. And there may be other legends from that other, older culture." He shrugged.

"We picked up what we could on the culture, but we didn't get the full story on them. And we've probably left a thousand legends behind us, including that beautiful mess at your station." He grinned.

"Right now, their folklore is loaded with sorcerers, warlocks, wizards, and what not. After all, whatever their past is, they're primitive now. So those stories are

going to grow and continue. Eventually, long before they really develop a stabilized ethic, someone's going to collate that whole mess. And do you know what he'll come up with?"

"Us?"

"Us, yes. Us, in a distorted form." Kweiros nodded emphatically. "They will come to a full realization that there are advanced entities running around the cosmos, entities that have all kinds of mysterious powers. And they'll invent still more powers and characteristics—mostly bad." He spread his hands, then laid them on the desk in front of him.

"That way, they could develop a hopeless, planet-wide trauma—a sort of super inferiority complex—and they could contract on themselves, devote their time to an intensive study of demonology, and very possibly come apart at the seams.

"Or, they could do something else. I was watching Elwar while I was checking that tape. Did you notice anything peculiar?"

"He seemed disturbed."

"As though he were sensing my thoughts?"

"Something like that. But—"

Kweiros nodded. "But I had a shield up. You could detect no trace of mental action. Right?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's what I thought." Kweiros shook his head and looked closely at Jaeger.

"Can you imagine," he added, "a primitive race with the power to detect a galactic by his thoughts? And can you imagine that power developing until that detection is possible at interstellar ranges, with members of that race being able to pick up faint impressions from received thoughts—distorted impressions? And can you imagine that same race, ignorant of the humanic equations, devoid of a stable ethic, superstitious, distrustful and fearful of advanced entities? They would be undetectable by normal telepathic means, you know. And suppose they were disposed to destroy what they could not understand." He frowned.

Jaeger looked back at him, his eyes becoming wide. Suddenly, his gaze

defocused and he looked aside, to stare unseeingly at the floor.

"Something's got to be done, sir," he said reluctantly.

Kweiros nodded. "Something's got to be done," he agreed. "Of course, there's another side to the picture. If this race develops and learns, they'll be just as valuable to the galaxy as they would otherwise be dangerous." He looked toward the door.

"And our boy out there is one of the few who can help in this situation. He's going to have to work out counter stories—amusing stories—about all those magical creatures his people tell about. He's going to have to hint at the possibilities of close co-ordination and co-operation between members of his own species. And he's going to have to suggest the possibility of friendly co-operation between his species and others." He drew a deep breath.

"And he's going to have to do all this without taking any risk of exposing the existence of other, more advanced species in the galaxy." He brushed a hand across his head, then pressed the back of his neck, kneading the skin.

"These stories of his, he'll have to publish. He'll have to get them circulated all over his planet, if he can. Possibly we can give him some indirect help, but he's going to have to carry a good share of the load.

"He knows his own people as we could never hope to. And he'll have to be thoroughly educated, so he can say what he wants to. And he'll have to be fully aware of the humanic equations and all their connotations. If he's to have any direct help, he'll have to choose his helpers from among his own people, and he'll have to choose carefully." Kweiros thrust at his temple with the heel of a hand, then shook his head violently.

"Somehow, he's going to have to accentuate any legends he may be able to find which present a favorable light on co-ordination and co-operation, and he'll have to invent more. And all those other legends—the ones which treat of superstition and destructive force—will have to be reduced to the realm of the storybook, submerged under a layer of amused condemnation, and kept there. All these things, that youngster is going to have to do.

"It's your job to help teach him."



Forell watched his friend closely as the critic laid aside the last page.

Andorra sat for a moment, his head cocked in thought. Then, he picked up the last page and looked at it again. Finally, he laid the sheet aside. He looked at his friend with a wry smile, then picked up his wineglass, looking at it quizzically.

"Do you always give your own name to one of your characters?"

Forell's grip tightened on the small object in his hand.

"Oh, sure," he said. "Gives me a better identification. If I can get into the story, it's easier to draw the reader in." He forced a casual smile. "I'll change that name later, of course."

"I see what you mean." Andorra sipped from his glass.

"You know," he added, "a couple of hours ago, I was almost ready to get excited about the idea of a cosmos full of super beings. And I even might have dreamed up something like this myself—and more than half believed it." He shook his head.

"But when a fantasist like yourself comes up with it, and makes it look so nicely possible, the idea almost looks foolish. After all, Elwar, if you actually were the guy in that little sketch of yours, you'd hardly be asking me to read it, now would you?" He looked down at the papers, then raised his head again, frowning.

"He'll have to choose his helpers from among his own people," he quoted. "All these things, that youngster is going to have to do." He sipped again from his glass, keeping a searching gaze on his friend.

"And on the other hand, if your story here should be true, you just might be asking me to read it, for one reason or another." He raised his glass, examining the bright liquid within it.

Elwar tensed, his hand coming part way out of his pocket.

Suddenly, Andorra set the glass down and leaned forward, hands gripping his knees.

"Tell me, Elwar," he begged, "this isn't a hoax, is it? Surely, no one could be so warped as to present a friend with something like this and then to laugh it off?"

Forell drew a deep breath and examined his companion closely. At last, his left hand relaxed a little.

"It's no hoax," he admitted.

Andorra sighed and leaned back.

"And you can use help? You're asking me?"

He paused, waiting as Forell nodded, then spread his hands.

"You know," he said, "it shouldn't take me too long to fix it so I would not be missed too much for a few years." He looked at the wall.

"It must be quite a training course."

THE END

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