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THE TIES THAT BIND

By Walter Miller, Jr.

Illustrated by Kelly Freas

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The Earth was green and quiet. Nature had survived Man, and Man had survived himself. Then, one day, the great silvery ships broke the tranquillity of the skies, bringing Man's twenty-thousand-year-lost inheritance back to Earth....

*"Why does your brand sae drop wi' blude,
Edward, Edward?
Why does your brand sae drop wi' blude,
And why sae sad gang ye, O?"
"O I hae kill'd my hawk sae gude,
Mither, mither;
O I hae kill'd my hawk sae gude,
And I had nae mair but he, O."*

—ANONYMOUS

The Horde of sleek ships arose in the west at twilight—gleaming slivers that reflected the dying sun as they lanced across the darkling heavens. A majestic fleet of squadrons in double-vees, groups in staggered echelon, they crossed the sky like gleaming geese, and the children of Earth came out of their whispering gardens to gape at the splendor that marched above them.

There was fear, for no vessel out of space had crossed the skies of Earth for countless generations, and the children of the planet had forgotten. The only memories that lingered were in the memnoscripts, and in the unconscious *kulturverlaengerung*, of the people. Because of the latter half-memory, the people knew, without knowing why, that the slivers of light in the sky were

ships, but there was not even a word in the language to name them.

The myriad voices of the planet, they cried, or whispered, or chattered in awed voices under the elms....

The piping whine of a senile hag: "The ancient gods! The day of the judging! Repent, repent...."

The panting gasp of a frightened fat man: "The alien! We're lost, we're lost! We've got to run for the hills!"

The voice of the child: "See the pretty birdlights? See? See?"

And a voice of wisdom in the councils of the clans: "The sons of men—they've come home from the Star Exodus. Our brothers."

The slivers of light, wave upon wave, crept into the eclipse shadow as the twilight deepened and the stars stung through the blackening shell of sky. When the moon rose, the people watched again as the silhouette of a black double-vee of darts slipped across the lunar disk.

Beneath the ground, in response to the return of the ships, ancient mechanisms whirred to life, and the tech guilds hurried to tend them. On Earth, there was a suspenseful night, pregnant with the dissimilar twins of hope and fear, laden with awe, hushed with the expectancy of twenty thousand years. The stargoers—they had come home.



"*Kulturverlaengerung!*" grunted the tense young man in the toga of an Analyst. He stood at one end of the desk, slightly flushed, staring down at the haughty wing leader who watched him icily from a seat at the other end. He said it again, too distinctly, as if the word were a club to hurl at the wingsman. "*Kulturverlaengerung*, that's why!"

"I heard you the first time, Meikl," the officer snapped. "Watch your tongue and your tone!"

A brief hush in the cabin as hostility flowed between them. There was only the hiss of air from the ventilators, and the low whine of the flagship's drive units somewhere below.

The erect and elderly gentleman who sat behind the desk cleared his throat politely. "Have you any further clarifications to make, Meikl?" he asked.

"It should be clear enough to all of you," the analyst retorted hotly. He jerked his head toward the misty crescent of Earth on the viewing screen that supplied most of the light in the small cabin. "You can see what they are, what they've become. And you *know* what *we* are."

The two wingsmen bristled slightly at the edge of contempt in the analyst's voice. The elderly gentlemen behind the desk remained impassive, expressionless.

The analyst leaned forward with a slow accusing glance that swept the faces of the three officers, then centered on his antagonist at the other end of the desk. "You want to *infect* them, Thaüle?" he demanded.

The wingsman darkened. His fist exploded on the desktop. "Meikl, you're in contempt! Restrict yourself to answering questions!"

"Yes, sir."

"There will be no further breaches of military etiquette during the continuance of this conference," the elderly gentleman announced icily, thus seizing the situation.

After a moment's silence, he turned to the analyst again. "We've got to refuel," he said flatly. "In order to refuel, we must land."

"Yes, sir. But why not on Mars? We can develop our own facilities for producing fuel. Why must it be Earth?"

"Because there will be *some existing facilities* on Earth, even though they're out of space. The job would take five years on Mars."

The analyst lowered his eyes, shook his head wearily. "I'm thinking of a billion earthlings. Aren't they worth considering, sir?"

"I've got to consider the men in my command, Meikl. They've been through hell. We all have."

"The hell was our own making, baron."

"*Meikl!*"

"Sorry, sir."

Baron ven Klaeden paused ominously, then: "Besides, Meikl, your predictions of disaster rest on certain assumptions not known to be true. You assume that the recessive determinants still linger in the present inhabitants. Twenty thousand years is a long time. Nearly a thousand generations. I don't know a great deal about cuturetics, but I've read that *kulturverlaengerung* reaches a threshold of extinction after about a dozen generations, if there's no restimulation."

"Only in laboratory cultures, sir," sighed the analyst. "Under rigid control to make certain there's no restimulant. In practice, in a planet-wide society, there's constant accidental restimulation, unconsciously occurring. A determinant gets restimulated, pops back to original intensity, and gets passed on. In practice, a kult'laenger linkage never really dies out—although, it can stay recessive and unconscious."

"That's too bad," a wingsman growled sourly. "We'll wake it up, won't we?"

"Let's not be callous," the other wingsman grunted in sarcasm. "Analyst Meikl has sensitivities."

The analyst stared from one to the other of them in growing consternation, then looked pleadingly at the baron. "Sir, I was *summoned* here to offer my opinions about landing on Earth. You asked about possible cultural dangers. I've told you."

"You discussed the danger to earthlings."

"Yes, sir."

"I meant 'danger' to the personnel of this fleet—to their esprit, their indoctrination, their group-efficiency. I take it you see none."

"On the contrary, I see several," said the analyst, coming slowly to his feet, eyes flashing and darting among them. "Where were you born, Wingman?" he asked the officer at the opposite end of the desk.

"Lichter Six, Satellite," the officer grunted after a moment of irritable silence.

"And you?"

"Omega Thrush," said the other wingsman.

All knew without asking that the baron was born in space, his birthplace one of the planetoid city-states of the Michea Dwarf. Meikl looked around at them, then ripped up his own sleeve, unsheathed his rank-dagger, and pricked his forearm with the needle point. A red droplet appeared, and he wiped at it with a forefinger.

"It's common stuff, gentlemen. We've shed a lot of it. And each of us is a walking sackful of it." He paused, then turned to touch the point of his dagger to the viewer, where it left a tiny red trace on the glass, on the bright crescent of Earth, mist-shrouded, chastely wheeling her nights into days.

"It came from there," he hissed. "She's your womb, gentlemen. Are you going back?"

"Are you an analyst or a dramatist, Meikl?" the baron asked sharply, hoping to relieve the sudden chill in the room. "This becomes silly."

"If you land on her," Meikl promised ominously, "you'll go away with a fleet full of hate."

Meikl's arm dropped to his side. He sheathed his dagger. "Is my presence at this meeting still imperative, sir?" he asked the baron.

"Have you anything else to say?"

"Yes—*don't land on Earth.*"

"That's a repetition. No further reasons?—in terms of danger to ourselves?"

The analyst paused. "I can think of nothing worse that could happen to us," he said slowly, "than just being what we already are."

He snapped his heels formally, bowed to the baron, and stalked out of the cabin.

"I suggest," said a wingsman, "that we speak to Frewek about tightening up the discipline in the Intelligence section. That man was in open contempt, Baron."

"But he was also probably right," sighed the graying officer and nobleman.

"*Sir—!*"

"Don't worry, Wingsman, there's nothing else to do. We'll have to land. Make preparations, both of you—and try to make contact with surface. I'll dictate the message."

When the wingsmen left, it was settled. The baron arose with a sigh and went to peer morosely at the view of Earth below. Very delicately, he wiped the tiny trace of blood from the glass. She was a beautiful world, this Earth. She had spawned them all, as Meikl said—but for this, the baron could feel only bitterness toward her.

But what of her inhabitants? I'm past feeling anything for them, he thought, past feeling for any of the life-scum that creeps across the surface of a world, any world. We'll go down quickly, and take what we need quickly, and leave quickly. We'll try not to infect them, but they've already got it in them, the dormant disease, and any infection will be only a recurrence.

Nevertheless, he summoned a priest to his quarters. And, before going to the command deck, he bathed sacramentally as if in preparation for battle.

*"Your hawk's blude was never sae red,
Edward, Edward;
Your hawk's blude was never sae red,
My dear son, I tell thee, O."
"O I hae kill'd my red-roan steed,
Mither, mither;
O I hae kill'd my red roan steed,
That erst was sae fair and free, O."*

—ANONYMOUS

False dawn was in the east when the slivers of light appeared once again out of the eclipse shadow to rake majestically across the heavens, and again the children of Earth crowded in teeming numbers from the quiet gardens to chatter their excitement at the wonder in the sky. But this time, a message came. The men of the tech clans who tended the newly activated mechanisms heard it, and the mechanisms memorized it, and played it again and again for the people, while the linguists puzzled over the unidentified language used in the transmission.

PROPAUTH EARTH FROM COMMSTRAFEEFLEET THREE, SPACE,
KLAEDEN COMM, PRESENTS GREETINGS!

IF YOU HAVE RECORDS, OUR USE OF ANCIENT ANGLO-
GERMANIC SHOULD MAKE OUR IDENTITY CLEAR. HAVE YOU

FUELING FACILITIES FOR 720 SHIPS OF THOR-NINE CLASS? IF NOT, WE SHALL DEVELOP FACILITIES FROM LOCAL RESOURCES, WITH, WE TRUST, YOUR PEACEFUL COOPERATION. THIS CADRE NOT REIMMIGRATING, BUT EN ROUTE TO URSAN STARS. REQUEST LANDING SUGGESTIONS, IN VIEW OF OUR FUELING NEEDS.

REQUEST INTELLIGENCE CONCERNING PRESENT LEVEL OF TERRESTRIAL CULTURE. OUR ORIBITAL OBSERVATIONS INDICATE A STATIC AGRARIAN-TECHNICAL COMPLEX, BUT DETAILS NOT AVAILABLE. WE COME IN ARMS, BUT WITHOUT ENMITY. PLEASE REPLY, IF POSSIBLE.

ERNSTLI BARON VEN KLAEDEN, COMMANDING STRAFEFLEET THREE, SPACESTRIKE COMMAND, IMPERIAL FORCES OF THE SECESSION



So it came, repeated continuously for an hour, followed by an hour of silence, and then by another hour of repetition. The linguists were unable to discern meanings. Thousands of memorizers were consulted, but none knew the words of the harsh voice from the ships. At last, the sages consulted the books and memnoscripts in the ancient vaults, pouring over tomes that had been buried for countless centuries. After hours of hurried study....

"It is found, *it is found*, a tongue of the ancients!" a joyous cry in the glades and the garden pathways.

Happily, the sages recorded the linguistic structure of the forgotten tongue on memnoscript, and gave it to a servo translator. Outmoded mechanisms were being brought out of wraps and prepared for use. The servos supplied a translation of the message, and the sages studied it.

"It is badly understood," was the curious mutter along the garden pathways.

"Many words have no words to match them, nor any thoughts that are similar," was the only explanation the sages could give.

In translation the message seemed meaningless, or unfathomable. Only one thing

was clear. The sons of Man meant to descend again upon the world of their ancestors. There was a restless unease in the gardens, and groups of elders gathered in the conference glades to mutter and glance at the sky. "Invite our brothers to land," was the impetuous cry of the young, but there were dissenters.

In the Glade of Sopho, a few thoughtful clansmen of Pedaga had gathered to muse and speak quietly among themselves, although it was not ordinarily the business of tutors to consider problems that confronted society as a whole, particularly problems arising outside society itself. The Pedaga were teachers of the very young, and deliberately kept themselves childlike in outlook in order to make fuller contact with the children in their charge.

"I think we should tell them to go away," said Letha, and looked around at the others for a response.

She got nothing in reply but a flickering glance from Marrita, who sat morosely on a cool rock by the spring, her chin on her bare knees. Evon gave her a brief polite smile, to acknowledge the sound of her voice, but he returned almost at once to absently tearing twigs and glancing up at the bits of sky that showed through the foliage of the overhanging trees. Iak and Karrn were whispering together at the far end of the glade, and had not heard her.

Letha shrugged and leaned back against the tree trunk again, sitting spraddle-legged this time in the hope of catching Evon's eye. She was a graceful girl, and while gracefulness is sometimes feline, Letha's was more nearly kittenish. She was full-bodied and soft, but well-shaped in spite of a trace of plumpness. Thick masses of black hair fell over baby-skin shoulders in a pleasing contrast, and while her face was a bit too round, it radiated a gentle, winning grin, and the sympathetic gaze of gray-blue eyes. Now she seemed ready to pout. Evon remained self-absorbed.

"I think we should tell them to go away," she repeated a little sharply. "They'll all be big and swashbuckling and handsome, and the children will become unmanageable as soon as they see them. All the little girls will swoon, and all the little boys will want to go with them."

Evon glanced at her briefly. "It's up to the elders of the Geoark," he muttered without interest, and prepared to return to his own meditations.

"And all the *big* girls will run away with them," she purred with a tight smile, and stretched a languorous leg out in front of her to waggle her foot.

Evon shot her a quick glance, held it for a moment, then looked skyward again. She pursed her lips in irritation and glared at him. Gradually, she forgave him. Evon was distraught. He *must* be—because she hadn't seen him sit still this long in years. He was *always* doing something, or looking for something to do. It wasn't like Evon just to sit still and think. He was a restless, outgoing fellow, nearly always reacting boisterously, or laughing his staccato laugh. Now he just sat there and looked puzzledly in the direction of the sky-fleet. Looking puzzled didn't fit his face, somehow. It was a bony brown face, slightly oily, with a long narrow jaw that jutted forward like a plowshare under an elastic smirk. It was a rubbery kind of a face, the kind that could twist into horrid masks for the amusement of the young. Now it just drooped.

She stirred restlessly, driven to seek sympathetic understanding.

"You wonder what it's like, Evon?" she asked.

He grunted at her quizzically and shook his head.

"To be one of the children of the Exodus, I mean," she added.

"*Me?* What *are* you thinking of, Letha?"

"Of your face. It looks suddenly like a nomad's face. You remind me of an old schnorrer who used to wander through our gardenboro every year to play his fiddle, and sing us songs, and steal our chickens."

"I don't fiddle."

"But your eyes are on the sky-fleet."

Evon paused, hovering between irritation and desire to express. "It's strange," he murmured at last. "It's as if I know them—the star-birds, I mean. Last night, when I saw them first, it was like looking at something I expected to happen ... or ... or...."

"Something familiar?"

"Yes."

"You think he has the genemnem, Marrita?" she asked the blonde girl who sat on the cool rock by the spring.

Marrita looked up from dabbling her toes in the icy trickle. "I don't believe in the

genemnemon. My great grandfather was a thief."

"How silly! What's that to do with it?"

"He buried a fortune, they say. If there was a genemnemon, I'd remember where he buried it, wouldn't I?" She pouted, and went back to dabbling a club toe in the spring.

Evon snorted irritably and arose to stretch. "We lie around here like sleepy pigs!" he grumbled. "Have the Pedaga nothing to do but wait on the Geoark to make up its mind?"

"What do you think they'll do?"

"The Geoark? Invite the strangers to land. What else could they do?"

"Tell them to go away."

"And suppose they chose not to go?"

The girl looked bewildered. "I can't imagine anyone refusing the Geoark."

"Maybe they've got their own Geoark. Why should they cooperate with ours?"

"Two Geoarks? What a strange idea."

"Is it strange that you and I should have two brains? Or were you aware that I have one too?"

"Evon! What a *strange* idea."

He seized her by the ankles and dragged her squealing to the spring, then set her down in the icy trickle. Marrita moved away, grumbling complaints, and Letha snatched up a switch and chased him around the glade, shrieking threats of mayhem, while Evon's laughter broke the gloomy air of the small gathering, and caused a few other Pedaga to wander into the clearing from the pathways.

"I think we should prepare a petition for the Geoark," someone suggested.

"About the sky-fleet? And who knows what to say?"

"I'm afraid," said a girl. "Somehow I'm suddenly afraid of them."

"Our brothers from the Exodus? But they're *people*—such as you and I."

So went the voices. After an hour, a crier came running through the glade to read another message received from the sky-fleet.

PROPAUTH EARTH FROM COMMSTRAFEFLEET THREE, SPACE, KLAEDEN COMM, PRESENTS GREETINGS!

HAVING RECEIVED NO ANSWER TO OUR PREVIOUS COMMUNICATION, WE HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO LAND AT ONCE. I AM IMPOSING AN INFORMATIONAL QUARANTINE TO AVOID RESTIMULATING POSSIBLE RECESSIVE KULTURVERLAENGERUNG, BUT SUGGEST YOU GUARD YOURSELVES. OUR CULTURES HAD A COMMON ORIGIN. WE COME IN ARMS, WITHOUT ENMITY.

ERNSTLI BARON VEN KLAEDEN, COMMANDING STRAFEFLEET THREE, SPACESTRIKE COMMAND IMPERIAL FORCES OF THE SECESSION

This was even more mystifying than the previous one, even less meaningful in translation. One thing was clear, however: the fleet was going to land, without invitation.

Embarrassed, the elders of the Geoark immediately called the tech clans. "Can you revive the devices that speak across space?" they asked.

"They are revived," answered the tech clans.

"Then let us speak to our brothers from space."

And so it was that the people of the gardens of Earth sang out:

BRETHREN TO BRETHREN, PRESENT LOVE LOVE LOVE.

WE WELCOME YOU TO OUR GLADES AND TO OUR PLACES OF FEEDING AND OUR PLACES OF SLEEPING. WE WELCOME YOU TO THE BOSOM OF THE WORLD OF BEGINNING. AFTER TWENTY THOUSAND YEARS, EARTH HAS NOT FORGOTTEN. COME AMID REJOICING.

THE ELDERS OF THE GEOARK

"I'm afraid Earth will remember more than it wants to," growled Ernstli Baron

ven Klaeden, as he issued the command to blast into an atmospheric-braking orbit.

And there was thunder in a cloudless sky.

*"O your steed was auld and ye hae mair,
Edward, Edward.*

*O your steed was auld and ye hae mair,
And some other dule ye dree, O."*

*"O I hae kill'd my ain father dear,
Mither, mither;*

*O I hae kill'd my ain father dear,
Alas and woe is me, O."*

—ANONYMOUS

In accordance with the rules of invasion strategy for semi-civilized planets, the fleet separated itself into three groups. The first group fell into atmospheric braking; the second group split apart and established an "orbital shell" of criscrossing orbits, timed and interlocking, at eight hundred miles, to guard the descent of the first wave of ships, while the third wave remained in battle formation at three thousand miles as a rear guard against possible space attack. When the first wave had finished braking, it fell into formation again and flew as aircraft in the high stratosphere, while the second wave braked itself, and the third wave dropped into the orbital shell.

From the first wave, a single ship went down to land, and its telecameras broadcast a view of a forest garden, slightly charred for a hundred yards around the ship, with fires blazing along its edges.

"No signs of the natives yet," came the report. "No signs of technology. No evidence of hostility."

A second ship descended to land a mile from the first. Its telecamera caught a fleeting glimpse of a man waving from a hilltop, but nothing more.

One at a time the ships came, with weapon locks open and bristling with steel snouts. The ships came down at one-mile intervals, the first wave forming a

circle that enclosed an area of forty-six hundred square miles. The second wave came down to land in a central circle of fifteen miles diameter. The third wave remained in its orbital shell, where it would stand guard as long as the fleet was on the ground.

In accordance with the rules of officer's conduct, Baron ven Klaeden, who had ordered the landing, was the first to expose himself to the enveloping conditions outside the flagship. He stood in an open lock, sniffing the autumn air of Earth in late afternoon. It was full of jet-fire smoke, and smelled of burning brush. The automatic extinguishers had quenched the flames, but the blackened trees and brush still roasted and sparked and leaked smoke across the land. Somewhere a bird was singing through the sunlit haze. Baron ven Klaeden recognized the sound as made by a living thing, and wondered if the recognition was born into his bones.

Three hundred and fifty yards to the north, a wingship towered in the sun, its guns trained outward from the inner circle, and to the south, another wingship. The baron glanced down at the earth beneath the flagship. The jets had reduced to ashes something that might have been a low wooden structure. He shrugged, and glanced across the blackened area toward the orderly forest. Trees and shrubs, and a carpet of green turf below, broken here and there by rain-worn rocks and clusters of smaller fragile leafy stuff that might be food-plants. Vivid splashes of color blossomed in the shady forest, scarlets and blues and flashes of brilliant lemon that lived in profusion in the foliage of the shrubbery. Some of the trees were living masses of tiny flowers, and when the wind stirred them, petals showered to the ground in fragrant gusts. The wind changed, and the air that breathed about the commander's face was full of perfume.

I feel nothing, he thought. Here is beauty and warmth, here is the home of Man, and almost an Eden, but I feel nothing. It is just another mote that circles a minor sun, and to me it is only an exploitable supply dump of Nature, a place to accomplish Procedure 76-A, "Refueling Method for Terrestroid Planets Without Facilities, Native Labor Exploitable."

It was only a way-station on the long long road from Scorpius to Ursa, and it meant nothing, nothing at all. It had changed too much. Millenia ago, when the Star Exodus had burst forth to carry Man halfway across the galaxy, things had been different. A few colonies had kept accurate histories of Earth intact, and when the Transpace Empire had gathered itself into social integration, nearly five thousand years ago, the histories had been made universally available. The

baron had studied them, but from the viewpoint of the spacer, the history of Humanity had ceased in any way to be associated with Earth after the Star Exodus. Man was a space creature, a denizen of the interstellum—or had been, before the War of Secession—and when history moved into space, Earth was a half-remembered hamlet. Ven Klaeden had seen the Earth-vistas that the historians had reconstructed for the museums—vistas of roaring industrial cities, flaming battlegrounds, teeming harbors and spaceports. The cities were gone, and Earth had become a carefully tended Japanese garden.

As he stared around, he felt a lessening of the anxiety that had gnawed at him since the analyst Meikl had predicted dire consequences after the landing. The cultural blood of Man had diverged into two streams so vastly different that no intermingling seemed possible to him. It would be easy, he decided, to keep the informational quarantine. The order had already been issued. "All personnel are forbidden to attempt the learning of the current Earth-tongue, or to teach any Empire-culture language to the natives, or to attempt any written communication with them. Staff-officers may communicate only under the provisions of Memorandum J-43-C. The possession of any written or recorded material in the native tongue, and the giving of written material to the natives, shall be taken as violations of this order. No sign language or other form of symbolic communication shall be used. This order shall be in force until Semantics section constructs a visual code for limited purposes in dealing with the natives. Staff officers are hereby authorized to impose any penalty ranging to death upon offenders, and to try any such cases by summary courts martial. Junior officers authorized to summarily arrest offenders. Effective immediately. Ven Klaeden, Comm."

It would keep any interchange to an absolute minimum, he thought. And Semantics had been ordered to attempt construction of a visual language in which only the most vital and simple things could be said. Meanwhile, the staff could attempt to utilize the ancient Anglo-Germanic tongue in which the messages had been exchanged.

The baron had started to turn back into the lock when his eye caught a flash of motion near the edge of the forest. Reflexively, he whirled and crouched, gun flickering into his hand. His eyes probed the shrubs. Then he saw her, half hidden behind a tree trunk—a young girl, obviously frightened, yet curious to

watch the ships. While he stared at her, she darted from one trunk to the next closer one. She was already approaching the edge of the blackened area. The baron shot a quick glance at the radiation indicators on the inner wall of the airlock. The instantaneous meter registered in the red. The induced radioactivity in the ground about the base of the ship's jets was still too high. The rate-of-decrease meter registered a decrement of point ten units per unit. That meant it wouldn't be safe for the crew to leave ship for twenty-three minutes, and that the girl had better stay back.

"*Keep clear!*" he bellowed from the airlock, hoping to frighten her.

She saw him for the first time, then. Instead of being frightened, she seemed suddenly relieved. She came out into the open and began walking toward the ship, wearing a smile and gazing up at the lock.

"*Go back, you little idiot!*"

Her answer was a brief sing-song chant and another smile. She kept coming—into the charred area.

The gun exploded in his fist, and the bullet ricocheted from the ground near her feet. She stopped, startled, but not sensing hostility. The gun barked again. The bullet shattered a pebble, and it peppered her legs. She yelped and fled back into the green garden.

He stood there staring after her for a moment, his face working slowly. She had been unable to understand his anger. She saw the ships, and was frightened but curious. She saw a human, and was reassured. Any human. But was what she saw really human any longer, the baron asked himself absently. He grunted scornfully, and went back through the lock.

It was easier, even on the ground, to communicate with the elders of the Geoark by radio, since both parties had set up automatic translators to translate their own tongues into the old Anglo-German which was a mutually recorded dead language.

"We have neutralized a circle of land of thirty-one mile radius," ven Klaeden reported to the elders. "If our selection of this region is unfortunate, we are open to discussion of alternatives. However, our measurements indicated that the resources of this area make it best for *our* purposes."

"Your landing caused only minor damage, brethren," replied the gentle voice of

the Geoark. "You are welcome to remain as you are."

"Thank you. We consider the occupied area to be under our military jurisdiction, and subject to property seizures. It will be a restricted area, closed to civilian population."

"But brethren, thousands of people live in the gardens you have surrounded!"

"Evacuate them."

"I don't understand."

"*Evacuate* them. Make them get out."

"My translator is working badly."

The baron turned away from the mike for a moment and grunted to the colonel in command of ground operations. "Start clearing the occupied zone. Get the population out unless they'll work for us."

"How much notice?"

The baron paused briefly. "Fifty hours to pack up, plus one additional hour for each mile the fellow has to stomp it to the outer radius."

"My translator is working badly," the voice of the elder was parroting.

"Look," the baron grunted at the mike. "All we want is to accomplish what we came here for, and then get out—as quickly as possible. We don't have much time to be polite. I invite the elders of the Geoark to confer in my flagship. We'll try to make everything clear to you. Is this agreed?"

"My translator is working badly."

"Aren't you getting anything?"

A pause, then: "I understand that you wish us to come to the place where the sky-fleet rests."

"Correct."

"But what of the welcome we have made for our brethren in the feast-glades?"

"I shall dispatch flyers to pick you up immediately. Unless you have aircraft of your own."

"We have no machinery but the self-sustaining mechanisms in the Earth."

"Any of your population understand the mechanisms?"

"Certainly, brother."

"Then bring technicians. They'll be best able to understand what we want, and maybe they can make it clear to you."

"As you wish, brother."

The baron terminated the contact and turned to his staff with a satisfied smile. "I think we shall have what we need and be gone quickly," he said.

"The elder took it well. They must be afraid of us."

"Respectful awe is more like it," the baron grunted.

"I suggest the answer is in the word 'brethren,'" came a voice from the back of the room.

"Meikl! What are you doing in here?" ven Klaeden barked irritably.

"You called my department for a man. My department sent me. Shall I go back?"

"It's up to you, Analyst. If you can keep your ideals corked and be useful."

Meikl bowed stiffly. "Thank you, sir."

"Having it in mind that our only objective is to go through the tooling-mining-fueling cycle with a minimum of trouble and time—have you got any suggestions?"

"About how to deal with the natives?"

"Certainly ... but with the accent on *our* problems."

Meikl paused to snap the tip from an olophial and sniffed appreciatively at the mildly alkaloid vapor before replying. "From what we've gathered through limited observation, I think we'd better gather some more, and do our suggesting later."

"That constitutes your entire opinion?"

"Not quite. About the question of recessive kulturverlaengerung...."

"Our problems, I said!" the commander snapped.

"It's likely to be our problem, sir."

"How?"

"In Earth culture at the time of the Exodus, there were some patterns we'd regard as undesirable. We can't know whether we're still carrying the recessive patterns or not. And we don't know whether the patterns are still dominant in the natives. Suppose we get restimulated."

"What patterns do you mean?"

"The Exodus was a mass-desertion, in one sense, Baron."

A moment of hush in the room. "I see what you mean," the commander grunted. "But 'desertion' is a pattern of *action*, not a transmittable determinant."

Meikl shook his head. "We don't *know* what is a transmittable determinant until after it's happened." He paused. "Suppose there's some very simple psychic mechanism behind the 'pioneer' impulse. We don't feel it, but our ancestors did, and we might have recessive traces of it in our kulturverlaengerung lines."

A wingman coughed raucously. "To be blunt with you, Meikl ... I think this is a lot of nonsense. The whole concept is far-fetched."

"What, the kult'laenger lines?"

"Exactly." The wingsman snorted. "How could things like that get passed along from father to son. If you people'd stop the mystical gibberish, and deal in facts...."

"Do you regard parent-child rapport as a fact?" Meikl turned to stare absently out a viewing port at the trees.

"You mean the telepathic experiments with infants? I don't know much about it."

"Seventy years ago. On Michsa Three. A hundred parents were given intensive lessons and intensive practice in playing a very difficult skill game ... before they became parents. They did nothing but play the game for three years. Then their babies were taken away from them at the age of one year. Brought up institutionally. There was a control group—another hundred whose parents never heard of the skill game."

"Go on."

"So, when the children were ten years old, they did learning-speed tests on all two hundred."

"Learning the game, you mean?"

"Right. The children whose parents had learned it came out way ahead. So far ahead that it was conclusive. Sometime during pregnancy and the first year, the kids had picked up a predisposition to learn the patterns of the game easily."

"So?"

"So—during infancy, a child is beginning to mirror the patterns of the parental mind—probably telepathically, or something related. He doesn't 'inherit it' in the genes, but there's an unconscious cultural mechanism of transmittal—and it's an analog of heredity. The kulturverlaengerung—and it can linger in a family line without becoming conscious for many generations."

"How? If they hadn't taught the children to play the game...."

"If they hadn't, it'd still be passed on—as a predisposition-talent—to the third and fourth and Nth generation. Like a mirror-image of a mirror-image of a mirror-image ... or a memory of a memory of a memory...."

"This grows pedantic, and irrelevant," the baron growled. "What are the chances of utilizing native labor?"

*"And whatten penance will we dree for that,
Edward, Edward?"*

*Whatten penance will ye dree for that?
My dear son, now tell me, O."*

*"I'll set my feet in yonder boat,
Mither, mither;*

*I'll set my feet in yonder boat,
And I'll fare over the sea, O."*

—ANONYMOUS

Phase-A had been accomplished, after six months of toil. Baltun Meikl, Analyst Culturetic of Intelligence Section stood on the sunswept hill, once forested, but now barren except for the stumps of trees, and watched the slow file of humanity that coursed along the valley, bearing the hand-hewn ties that were being laid from the opening of the mine shaft to the ore dump. Glittering ribbons of steel snaked along the valley, and ended just below him, where a crew of workmen hammered spikes under the watchful eye of a uniformed foreman. In the distance, the central ring of grounded ships dominated the land. Spacers and natives labored together, to lend an impression of egalitarian cooperation under the autocracy of the officer class.

"How good it is for brethren to be reunited," Meikl's native interpreter murmured, in the facile tongue devised by Semantics Section for use by staff officers and Intelligence men in communicating with the natives.

He stared at her profile for a moment, as she watched the men in the valley. Was she really that blind? Were all of them? Had they no resistance at all to exploitation, or any concept for it?

Meikl had learned as much as he could of the socio-economic matrix of the static civilization of the present Earthlings. He had gone into their glades and gardens and seen the patterns of their life, and he wondered. Life was easy, life was gay, life was full of idle play. Somehow, they seemed completely unaware of what they had done to the planet in twenty thousand years. One of the elders had summed up, without meaning to, the entire meaning of twenty millenia, with the casual statement: "*In our gardens, there are no weeds,*" and it applied to the garden of human culture almost as well as it applied to the fauna and flora of the planet.

This "weedlessness" had not been the goal of any planned project, but rather, the inevitable result of age-old struggles between Man and Nature on a small plot of land. When Man despoiled Nature, and slaughtered her children, Nature could respond in two ways: she could raise up organisms to survive in spite of Man, and she could raise up organisms to survive in the service and custody of Man. She had done both, but the gardener with his weed-hoe and his insect spray and his vermin exterminators had proved that he could invent new weapons faster than Nature could evolve tenacious pests, and eventually the life forms of Earth had been emasculated of the tendency to mutate into disobedient species. Nature had won many bloody battles; but Man had won the war. Now he lived in a green world that seemed to offer up its fruits to him with only a minimum of

attention from Man. Nature had learned to survive in the presence of Man. Yet the natives seemed unaware of the wonder of their Eden. There was peace, there was plenty.

This, he thought, could be the answer to their lack of resistance in the face of what seemed to Meikl to be sheer seizure and arrogant exploitation by Baron ven Klaeden and his high command. In a bounteous world, there were no concepts of "exploitation" or "property seizure" or "authoritarianism". The behaviour of the starmen appeared as strange, or fascinating, or laughable, or shocking to such as the girl who stood beside him on the hill—but not as aggressive nor imperious. When a foreman issued an order, the workman accepted it as a polite request for a favor, and did it as if for a friend. Fortunately, ven Klaeden had possessed at least the good sense to see to it that the individual natives were well treated by the individual officers in charge of tasks. There had been few cases of inter-personal hostility between natives and starmen. The careful semantics of the invented sign-language accomplished much in the way of avoiding conflicts, and the natives enthusiastically strived to please.

He glanced at the girl again, her dark hair whipping in the breeze. Lovely, he thought, and glanced around to see that no one was near.

"You belong to another, Letha?" he asked.

She tossed him a quick look with pale eyes, hesitated. "There is a boy named Evon...."

He nodded, lips tightening. Stop it, you fool, he told himself. You can't make love to her. You've got to leave with the rest of them.

"But I don't really belong to him," she said, and reddened.

"Letha, I...."

"Yes, Meikl."

"Nothing. I'm lonely, I guess."

Her eyes wandered thoughtfully toward the ships. "Meikl, why will you tell us nothing of space—how you've lived since the Exodus?"

"We are an evil people."

"Not so."

She touched his arm, and looked up at him searchingly.

"What is it you wish to know?"

"Why will you never return to your home?"

"To space—but we shall."

"To the worlds of your birth, I mean."

He stiffened slightly, stared at her. "What makes you think we won't?" he asked, a little sharply.

"Will you?"

So there were leaks after all, he thought. After six months, many things would be communicated to the natives, even under strictest security.

"No," he admitted, "we can't go back to the worlds of our birth."

"But why? Where are your women and children?"

He wanted to tell her, to see her turn and flee from him, to see the natives desert the project and keep to their forests until the ships departed. There had been a translator set up between the Anglo-Germanic and the present native tongue, and he had fed it the word "war". The single word had brought five minutes of incomprehensible gibberish from the native tongue's output. There was no concept to equate it to.

"There is blood on our hands," he grunted, and knew immediately he had said too much.

She continued to stare at the ships. "What are the metal tubes that point from the front and the sides of the ships, Meikl?"

There was no word for "guns" or "weapons".

"They hurl death, Letha."

"How can 'death' be hurled?"

Meikl shook himself. He was saying too much. These are the children of the past, he reminded himself, the same past that had begotten the children of space. The same traces of the ancient *kulturverlaengerung* would live in their neural

patterns, however recessive and subliminal. One thing he knew: sometime during the twenty millennia since the Exodus, they had carefully rooted out the vestigial traces of strife in their culture. The records had been systematically censored and rewritten. They were unaware of war and pogroms and persecution. History had forgotten. He decided to explain to her in terms of the substitute concepts of her understanding.

"There were twelve worlds, Letha, with the same Geoark. Five of them wished to break away and establish their separate Geoark. There was a contention for property."

"Was it settled?" she asked innocently.

He nodded slowly.

It was settled, he thought. We razed them and diseased them and interpersted them and wrecked their civilizations, and revolutions reduced the remains to barbarism. If a ship landed on a former planet of the empire, the crew would be lynched and murdered. Under ven Klaeden, the ships of the Third Fleet were going to seek out an alleged colony in Ursa, to sell ships, tools, and services to a minor technology that was approaching its own space-going day, in return for immigration and nationalization rights—a young civilization full of chaotic expansion.

"There is much you could not understand, Letha," he told her. "Our cultures are different. All societies go through three phases, and yours has passed through them all—perhaps into a fourth and final."

"And yours, Meikl?"

"I don't know. First there is the struggle to integrate in a hostile environment. Then, after integration, comes an explosive expansion of the culture—*conquest*, a word unknown to you. Then a withering of the mother-culture, and the rebellious rise of young cultures."

"We were the mother-culture, Meikl?"

He nodded. "And the Exodus was your birth-giving."

"Now we are old and withered, Meikl?"

He looked around at the garden-forests in the distance. A second childhood? he

wondered. Was there a fourth phase?—a final perpetual youth that would never reach another puberty? He wondered. The coming of the sky-fleet might be a cultural coitus, but could there be conception?

A pair of junior officers came wandering along the ridge, speaking in low tones and gazing down toward the valley. There was a casual exchange of salutes as they approached the girl and the analyst. The officers wore police armbands, and they asked for Meikl's fraternization permit, using the spacer's tongue.

"Deserter troubles?" he asked, as they returned his papers.

"Nineteen last week," said one of the officers. "We've lost about three hundred men since we landed."

"Found any of them?"

"Justice Section got sixty-three. The rest are probably hopeless."

Another exchange of salutes. The officers left.

"What did they want, Meikl?" she asked.

"Just idle conversation. It's nearly time for the meeting with the elders. Let's go."

They began walking along the ridge together in the late sunlight. The meeting was to attempt to explain to the elders of the Geoark that the men of the fleet were not free to depart from the occupied zone. The attempt would be fruitless, but ven Klaeden had ordered it.

From the viewpoint of the high command, three hundred desertions out of nineteen thousand men over a period of six months was not an important loss of personnel. What was important: the slow decay of discipline under the "no force" interdict. A policy of "no arrest" had been established for the ausland. If a man escaped from the occupied zone, Justice Section could send a detail to demand his return, but if he refused, no force would be used, because of the horrified reaction of the natives. If he were located, a killer was dispatched, armed with a tiny phial, a hollow needle, and a CO₂ gun that could be concealed in the palm of the hand. The killer stalked the deserter until he caught him alone, fired from cover, and stole quietly away while the deserter plucked the needle

out of his hide to stare at it in horror. He had a week in which to get back to the occupied zone to beg for immunization; if he did not, the spot would become alive with fungus, and the fungus would spread, and within months, he would die rather grimly.

The real danger, Meikl knew, was not to the fleet but to the natives. The spacers were cultural poison, and each deserter was a source of infection moving into the native society, a focal point of restimulation for any recessive kult'laenger lines that still existed in a peaceful people after twenty thousand years.

"I think Evon will be here," the girl said too casually as they entered the forest and turned into a path that led to the glade where the elders had assembled.

He took her arm suddenly, and stopped in the pathway.

"Letha—you have worked for me many months."

"Yes—"

"I love you, Letha."

She smiled very slowly, and lifted her hands to his face. He kissed her quietly, hating himself.

"You'll take me with you," she said.

"No." It was impossible.

"Then you'll stay."

"It is ... *forbidden* ... *verboten*...." There was no word in the tongue.

"I can't understand.... If you love...."

He swallowed hard. For the girl, "love" automatically settled everything, and consummation must follow. How could he explain.

"Letha—in your culture, 'life' is the highest value."

"How could it be otherwise? Love me, Meikl."

He took a deep breath and straightened. "You understand 'drama', Letha. I have watched your people. Their lives are continuous conscious play-acting. Your lives are a dance, but you know you are dancing, and you dance as you will.

Have you watched our people?"

She nodded slowly. "You dance a different dance—act a different play."

"It's not a play, Letha. We act an *unconscious* drama, and thus the drama becomes more important than living. And death takes precedence over life."

She shuddered slightly and stared into his eyes, unbelieving.

"I don't know what you mean."

"Can you understand?—that I love you, and yet my ... my..." He groped for a word for "duty". "My death-allegiance to the ship-people takes precedence? I can neither take you nor remain with you."

Something went dead in her eyes. "Let us go to the glade," she said in a monotone. "It's growing late."

*"And what will ye leave to your ain mither dear,
Edward, Edward?
And what will ye leave to your ain mither dear,
My dear son, now tell me, O?"
"The curse of hell frae me sall ye bear,
Mither, mither;
The curse of hell frae me sall ye bear;
Sic counsels ye gave to me, O!"*

—ANONYMOUS

The trouble had begun on the eighteenth day of the ninth month. A party of unidentified men had stolen into the occupied zone during the night. Without warning, they killed three guards, seized control of the dispensary, raided the pharmacy, taking the entire supply of fungus immunization serum, together with a supply of the deadly phials and needles. They stole a flyer and departed to the south, skimming low over the forest to avoid fire from the grounded fleet. The following day, a leaflet appeared, circulating among the fleet personnel.

NOTICE OF SANCTUARY
TO: ALL PERSONNEL
FROM: AUSLAND COMMITTEE
SUBJECT: FREEDOM

1. ANY OFFICER OR MAN WHO WISHES TO RESIGN FROM THE SERVICES OF THE IMPERIAL FORCES OF THE SECESSION MAY DO SO OF THIS DATE.
2. THE PROCEDURE FOR RESIGNATION INVOLVES NO FORMAL STATEMENT. A MAN MAY TERMINATE HIS PERIOD OF SERVICE BY DEPARTING FROM THE OCCUPIED ZONE.
3. ANY OFFICER OR MAN WHO ATTEMPTS TO INTERFERE WITH THE RESIGNATION OF ANOTHER SHALL BE TRIED IN ABSENTIA BY THIS COMMITTEE, AND IF FOUND GUILTY, SHALL INCUR THE DEATH PENALTY.

AUSLAND COMMITTEE

"An outrageous and preposterous bit of devilry!" ven Klaeden had hissed. "Get them. Make an example of them."

In reversal of previous policy, a police party was sent to search for the self-styled ausland committee, with orders to capture or kill on sight. The police party hunted down and killed six deserters, dragged eleven more back to the occupied zone, under the very eyes of the native population. But the immunizing serum was not recovered.

A few days later, three staff officers and a dozen officers in Justice Section awoke with yelps in the night to pluck stinging needles from their skins and scream for the guard to pursue the silent shadows that had invaded their quarters.

Five men were captured. Three of them were natives. Interrogation failed to disclose the location of the immunizing serum.

Muttering natives began to desert the project. The five culprits were brought before the baron.

"Execute them in public, with full dress military ceremony. Then close the border of the occupied zone. No native may leave, if he has signed a work contract."

On the day of the execution, the natives attempted to leave en masse. The police activity along the border approached the proportions of a massacre.

"We were nearly finished," raged the baron, pacing like an angry predator in the glade. "Another two weeks, and the first ore would come out of the crushers. They can't stop us now. They can't quit."

Three elders of the Geoark sat like frozen statues on a mossy boulder, tight-lipped, not understanding the colonel's tongue, disdaining to speak in the intermediate language.

"Explain it to them, Meikl. Make it clear."

Pale, trembling with suppressed disapproval, the analyst bowed curtly and turned to the girl. "Tell them," he said in the Intermedia, "that death will come to any native who deserts, and that ten auslanders will die for every man murdered by the renegade committee. Tell them that the Geoark is...." He paused. There was

no word for "hostage."

He was explaining the hostage-concept lengthily, while the girl's face drained of color. Suddenly she turned away to retch. Meikl stood stricken for a moment, turned helplessly toward the baron.

"*They* understood you, damn them!" ven Klaeden snapped. "They know the Intermedia."

The elders continued to sit stonily on the boulder without acknowledging that they had heard. One of them sighed deeply and spoke a few words to the others. They nodded sadly, answered with polite monosyllables.

"No!" Letha yelled, suddenly whirling, looking at the elders.

One of them smiled and murmured a few words to her. Then the three of them slid down from the boulder. The guard who stood at port arms a few feet away stirred restlessly.

The elders walked casually toward a path leading away from the glade. The guard looked questioningly at the officers.

"Where are they going?" ven Klaeden demanded.

"Well, Letha?" Meikl muttered.

"I—I don't know—"

"You're lying, girl," the baron grunted, then to the guards: "Tell them to halt."

"Party, *halt!*" snapped the guard.

The three elderly gentlemen continued toward the path, loose robes gathered up from spindley shins.

"Party, *halt!*"

The elders murmured conversationally among themselves as they continued.

"HALT, I SAID."

"Take the one in the middle," ordered ven Klaeden.

The guard lifted the snub-nosed shoulder weapon. There was a brief rattling hiss. The back of the elder's robe went crimson, and he crumpled at the entrance of

the pathway.

The other two continued on their way, their stride unbroken.

"Shoot for the legs, you fool!" barked the baron.

The rattling hiss came again. They fell in the shrubs, whimpering softly.

Meikl turned away with a choking spasm in his throat, looked around for Letha. She had vanished from the glade.

"Haul them to the dispensary, keep them prisoner," the baron was growling.

Meikl turned on him. "Now it's come to this, has it?" he snapped. "From the beginning, they were willing—even eager, to give what we wanted. Why did they *stop* being willing?"

"That's enough, Meikl!"

"I've hardly started. You came here like a tyrant, and they served you like a friend. You couldn't bear it. 'Brethren', they said. But there's nothing about 'brethren' in the tactical handbooks, is there, Baron?"

"Shut up."

Ven Klaeden said it quietly, as if bored. He crossed slowly to stand before the analyst and stare at him icily.

"You speak of the unconscious inheritance of culture, analyst—the kulturverlaengerung. And you have accused me for being a carrier of the war plague, eh?"

Meikl paused. The baron's eyes were narrowed, stabbing as if in judgment or triumph.

"Well, Meikl? Is that what we've done? Inflicted them with conflict? Brought back the old seeds of hate?"

The analyst drew himself up slightly. "You just killed a man, a man of dignity," he snarled, "and you cut two others down like weeds."

"Innocent old men." The baron's mouth twisted into a snarl.

"They wanted nothing but to help us."

"Yes, Meikl? And we are the barbarians, eh?"

The analyst spoke disdain with his eyes.

The baron straightened in sudden hauteur. "*Look down at the ground, Analyst,*" he hissed.

Ven Klaeden's sudden change of tone impelled him to obey. His eyes fell to the turf at his feet—moss covered sod, rich and dark beneath the green.

The baron kicked a hole in the moss with the toe of his boot. "Tell me where the infection came from, Analyst," he growled. He scraped at the hole with his heel. "And why is the dirt so *red* right here?"

Meikl glanced up slowly. Two men were coming through the shrubs, walking warily along the path toward the clearing. Ven Klaeden seemed unaware. He leaned forward to speak through his teeth.

"I give them nothing but what they gave our fathers—their own inner hell, Meikl—the curse they so carefully forgot. In their Eden."

The man was mad ... perhaps. Meikl's eyes followed the men who approached through the shrubs. One of them carried a burden—the limp body of a girl, occasionally visible through the low foliage as they drew nearer. One of the men was a junior officer, the other a native. After a moment, he recognized the native....

"Evon!"

As he called out, the baron whirled, hand slipping to the hilt of the ceremonial sword he wore in the presence of the Geoark. The men stopped. Meikl stared at the limp figure in the arms of the native.

"*Letha!*"

"Dead," Evon hissed. "They killed her for running...."

They emerged from the shrubs into full view. The officer was holding a gun.

"Put that away!" ven Klaeden snapped.

The young officer laughed sourly. "Sorry, baron, I'm from the committee."

"*Guard!*"

There's no one in earshot, Baron."

"Fool!" Ven Klaeden arrogantly whipped out the sword. "Drop that gun, or I'll blade-whip you!"

"Easy, baron, easy. I'm your executioner...."

The baron straightened haughtily and began a slow advance, a towering figure of icy dignity in the sun that filtered through the foliage.

"... but I want to take care of this one first." The renegade waved the gun toward Meikl. "You, Baron, you can have it slower—a needle in your official rump."

Ven Klaeden, a figure of utter contempt, continued the slow advance with the sword. The officer's lips tightened. He squeezed the trigger. Ven Klaeden hesitated, jerking slightly, then continued, his hand pressing against his abdomen, doubling forward slightly. The officer fired again—a sharp snap of sound in the glade. The baron stopped, wrestling with pain ten feet from the pale renegade.

Suddenly he flung the sword. It looped in mid-air and slashed the man's face from chin to cheekbone. He tripped and tumbled backward as ven Klaeden slipped to his knees on the moss.

Meikl dived for the gun. By the time he wrestled it away from the officer with the bloody face, ven Klaeden was sitting like a gaunt Buddha on the moss, and the body of Letha lay nearby, while a confused Evon clutched his hands to his face and rocked slowly. Meikl came slowly to his feet. The renegade officer wiped his face of blood and shrank back into shrubs.

"Get him," croaked ven Klaeden.

Scarcely knowing why, the analyst jerked the trigger, felt the gun explode in his fist, saw the renegade topple.

There was a moment of stillness in the glade, broken only by ven Klaeden's wheezing breath. The baron looked up with an effort, his eyes traveling over the girl, then up to the figure of the child of Earth.

"Your woman, Earthling?"

Evon lowered his hands, stood dazed and blinking for a moment. He glanced at Meikl, then at the girl. He knelt beside her, staring, not touching, and his knee

encountered the blade of the sword.

"You have brought us death, you have brought us hate," he said slowly, his eyes clinging to the sword.

"Pick it up," hissed the baron.

"You will never leave. A party of men is wrecking what you have done. Then we shall wreck your ships. Then we...."

"Pick it up."

The native hesitated. Slowly, his brown hand reached for the hilt, and fascination was in his eyes.

"You know what it is for?" the analyst asked.

The native shook his head slowly.

Then it was in his hand, fingers shaping themselves around the hilt—as the fingers of his fathers had done in the ages before the Star Exodus. His jaw fell slightly, and he looked up, clutching it.

"Now do you know?" the baron gasped.

"My—my hand—*it* knows," the native whispered.

Ven Klaeden glanced sourly at Meikl, losing his balance slightly, eyes glazed with pain. "He'll need it now, won't he, Analyst?" he breathed, then fell to the moss.

Evon stood up slowly, moistening his lips, feeling the grip of the sword and touching the red-stained steel. He peered quickly up at Meikl. Meikl brandished the gun slightly.

The low rumble of a dynamite blast sounded from the direction of the mines.

"You loved her too," Evon said.

He nodded.

The native held the sword out questioningly, as if offering it.

"Keep it," the analyst grunted. "You remembered its feel after twenty thousand years. That's why you'll need it."

Some deeds, he thought, would haunt the soul of Man until his end, and there was no erasing them ... for they *were* the soul, self-made, lasting in the ghost-grey fabric of mind as long as the lips of a child greedily sought the breast of its mother, as long as the child mirrored the mind of the man and the woman.
Kulturverlaengerung.

The analyst left the native with the sword and went to seek the next in line of command. The purpose of the fleet must be kept intact, he thought, laughing bitterly. Yet still he went.

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