



**The Word for
World is
Forest**
(Part 1)
Ursula K Le Guin

Ursula was once asked what she wanted to see happen with her books after she died.

“I want them available, I want cheap paper editions of them, I want them to be continuously downloaded in forty languages, I want them to be read, I want them to be argued about, I want people to cry over them, I want unreadable dissertations written about them, I want people to get angry with them, I want people to love them.”

In accordance with her wishes, we are making this freely available to anyone who wants to get more familiar with Ursula’s work, or to anyone who just needs a reason to hate the Ewoks.

Chapter One

Two pieces of yesterday were in Captain Davidson's mind when he woke, and he lay looking at them in the darkness for a while. One up: the new shipload of women had arrived. Believe it or not. They were here, in Centralville, twenty-seven lightyears from Earth by NAFAL and four hours from Smith Camp by hopper, the second batch of breeding females for the New Tahiti Colony, all sound and clean, 212 head of prime human stock. Or prime enough, anyhow. One down: the report from Dump Island of crop failures, massive erosion, a wipe-out. The line of 212 buxom beddable breasty little figures faded from Davidson's mind as he saw rain pouring down onto plowed dirt, churning it to mud, thinning the mud to a red broth that ran down rocks into the rainbeaten sea. The erosion had begun before he left Dump Island to run Smith Camp, and being gifted with an exceptional visual memory, the kind they called eidetic, he could recall it now all too clearly. It looked like that bigdome Kees was right and you had to leave a lot of trees standing where you planned to put farms.

But he still couldn't see why a soybean farm needed to waste a lot of space on trees if the land was managed really scientifically. It wasn't like that in Ohio; if you wanted corn you grew corn, and no space wasted on trees and stuff. But then Earth was a tamed planet and New Tahiti wasn't. That's what he was here for: to tame it. If Dump Island was just rocks and gullies now, then scratch it; start over on a new island and do better. Can't keep us down, we're Men. You'll learn what that means pretty soon, you godforsaken damn planet, Davidson thought, and he grinned a little in the darkness of the hut, for he liked challenges. Thinking Men, he thought Women, and again the line of little figures began to sway through his mind, smiling, jiggling.

"Ben!" he roared, sitting up and swinging his bare feet onto the bare floor. "Hot water get-ready, hurry-up-quick!" The roar woke him satisfyingly. He stretched and scratched his chest and pulled on his shorts and strode out of the hut into the sunlit clearing all in one easy series of motions. A big, hard-muscled man, he enjoyed using his well-trained body. Ben, his creechie, had the water ready and steaming over the fire, as usual, and was squatting staring at nothing, as usual. Creechies never slept, they just sat and stared. "Breakfast. Hurry-up-quick!" Davidson said, picking up his razor from the rough board table where the creechie had laid it out ready with a towel and a propped-up mirror.

There was a lot to be done today, since he'd decided, that last minute before getting up, to fly down to Central and see the new women for himself. They wouldn't last long, 212 among more than two thousand men, and like the first batch, probably most of them were Colony Brides, and only twenty or thirty had come as Recreation Staff; but those babies were real good greedy girls and he intended to be first in line with at least one of them this time. He grinned on the left, the right cheek remaining stiff to the whining razor.

The old creechie was moseying 'round, taking an hour to bring his breakfast from the cookhouse. "Hurry-up-quick!" Davidson yelled, and Ben pushed his boneless saunter into a walk. Ben was about a meter high and his back fur was more white than green; he was old, and dumb even for a creechie, but Davidson knew how to handle them; He could tame any of them, if it was worth the effort. It wasn't, though.

Get enough humans here, build machines and robots, make farms and cities, and nobody would need the creechies any more. And a good thing too. For this world, New Tahiti, was literally made for men. Cleaned up and cleaned out, the dark forests cut down for open fields of grain, the primeval murk and savagery and ignorance wiped out, it would be a paradise, a real Eden. A better world than worn-out Earth.

And it would be his world. For that's what Don Davidson was, way down deep inside him: a world-tamer. He wasn't a boastful man, but he knew his own size. It just happened to be the way he was made. He knew what he wanted, and how to get it.

And he always got it.

Breakfast landed warm in his belly. His good mood wasn't spoiled even by the sight of Kees Van Sten coming toward him, fat, white, and worried, his eyes sticking out like blue golf-balls.

"Don," Kees said without greeting, "the loggers have been hunting red deer in the Strips again. There are eighteen pair of antlers in the back room of the Lounge."

"Nobody ever stopped poachers from poaching, Kees."

"You can stop them. That's why we live under martial law, that's why the Army runs this colony. To keep the laws."

A frontal attack from Fatty Bigdome! It was almost funny. "All right," Davidson said reasonably, "I could stop 'em. But look, it's the men I'm looking after; that's my job, like you said. And it's the men that count. Not the animals. If a little extra-legal hunting helps the men get through this godforsaken life, then I intend to blink. They've got to have some recreation."

"They have games, sports, hobbies, films, teletapes of every major sporting event of the past century, liquor, marijuana, hallies, and a fresh batch of women at Central, for those unsatisfied by the Army's rather unimaginative arrangements for hygienic homosexuality. They are spoiled rotten, your frontier heroes, and they don't need to exterminate a rare native species 'for recreation.' If you don't act, I must record a major infraction of Ecological Protocols in my report to Captain Godde."

"You can do that if you see fit, Kees," said Davidson, who never lost his temper.

It was sort of pathetic the way a euro like Kees got all red in the face when he lost control of his emotions. "That's your job, after all. I won't hold it against you; they can do the arguing at Central and decide who's right. See, you want to keep this place just like it is, actually, Kees. Like one big National Forest. To look at, to study. Great, you're a spesh. But see, we're just ordinary joes getting the work done. Earth needs wood, needs it bad. We find wood on New Tahiti. So—we're loggers. See, where we differ is that with you Earth doesn't come first, actually. With me it does."

Kees looked at him sideways out of those blue golf-ball eyes. "Does it? You want to make this world into Earth's image, eh? A desert of cement?"

“When I say Earth, Kees, I mean people. Men. You worry about deer and trees and fibreweed, fine, that’s your thing. But I like to see things in perspective, from the top down, and the top, so far, is humans. We’re here now; and so this world’s going to go our way. Like it or not, it’s a fact you have to face; it happens to be the way things are. Listen, Kees, I’m going to hop down to Central and take a look at the new colonists. Want to come along?”

“No thanks, Captain Davidson,” the spesh said, going on toward the Lab hut. He was really mad. All upset about those damn deer. They were great animals, all right. Davidson’s vivid memory recalled the first one he had seen, here on Smith Land, a big red shadow, two meters at the shoulder, a crown of narrow golden antlers, a fleet, brave beast, the finest game animal imaginable. Back on Earth they were using robodeer even in the High Rockies and Himalaya Parks now, the real ones were about gone. These things were a hunter’s dream. So they’d be hunted. Hell, even the wild creechies hunted them, with their lousy little bows. The deer would be hunted because that’s what they were there for. But poor old bleeding-heart Kees couldn’t see it. He was actually a smart fellow, but not realistic, not tough-minded enough. He didn’t see that you’ve got to play on the winning side or else you lose. And it’s Man that wins, every time. The old Conquistador.

Davidson strode on through the settlement, morning sunlight in his eyes, the smell of sawn wood and woodsmoke sweet on the warm air. Things looked pretty neat, for a logging camp. The two hundred men here had tamed a fair patch of wilderness in just three E-months. Smith Camp: a couple of big corruplast geodesics, forty timber huts built by creechie-labor, the sawmill, the burner trailing a blue plume over acres of logs and cut lumber; uphill, the airfield and the big prefab hangar for helicopters and heavy machinery. That was all. But when they came here there had been nothing. Trees. A dark huddle and jumble and tangle of trees, endless, meaningless. A sluggish river overhung and choked by trees, a few creechie-warrens hidden among the trees, some red deer, hairy monkeys, birds. And trees. Roots, boles, branches, twigs, leaves, leaves overhead and underfoot and in your face and in your eyes, endless leaves on endless trees.

New Tahiti was mostly water, warm shallow seas broken here and there by reefs, islets, archipelagoes, and the five big Lands that lay in a 2500-kilo arc across the Northwest Quarter-sphere. And all those flecks and blobs of land were covered with trees. Ocean: forest. That was your choice on New Tahiti. Water and sunlight, or darkness and leaves.

But men were here now to end the darkness, and turn the tree-jumble into clean sawn planks, more prized on Earth than gold. Literally, because gold could be got from seawater and from under the Antarctic ice, but wood could not; wood came only from trees. And it was a really necessary luxury on Earth. So the alien forests became wood. Two hundred men with robosaws and haulers had already cut eight mile-wide Strips on Smith Land, in three months. The stumps of the Strip nearest camp were already white and punky; chemically treated, they would have fallen into fertile ash by the time the permanent colonists, the farmers, came to settle Smith Land. All the farmers would have to do was plant seeds and let ’em sprout.

It had been done once before. That was a queer thing, and the proof, actually, that New Tahiti was intended for humans to take over. All the stuff here had come from Earth, about a million years ago,

and the evolution had followed so close a path that you recognized things at once: pine, oak, walnut, chestnut, fir, holly, apple, ash; deer, bird, mouse, cat, squirrel, monkey. The humanoids on Hain-Davenant of course claimed they'd done it at the same time as they colonized Earth, but if you listened to those ETs you'd find they claimed to have settled every planet in the Galaxy and invented everything from sex to thumbtacks. The theories about Atlantis were a lot more realistic, and this might well be a lost Atlantean colony. But the humans had died out. And the nearest thing that had developed from the monkey line to replace them was the creechie—a meter tall and covered with green fur. As ETs they were about standard, but as men they were a bust, they just hadn't made it. Give 'em another million years, maybe. But the Conquistadors had arrived first. Evolution moved now not at the pace of a random mutation once a millennium, but with the speed of the starships of the Terran Fleet.

“Hey Captain!”

Davidson turned, only a microsecond late in his reaction, but that was late enough to annoy him. There was something about this damn planet, its gold sunlight and hazy sky, its mild winds smelling of leafmold and pollen, something that made you daydream. You mooched along thinking about conquistadors and destiny and stuff, till you were acting as thick and slow as a creechie. “Morning, Ok!” he said crisply to the logging foreman.

Black and tough as wire rope, Oknanawi Nabo was Kees' physical opposite, but he had the same worried look. “You got half a minute?”

“Sure. What's eating you, Ok?”

“The little bastards.”

They leaned their backsides on a split rail fence. Davidson lit his first reefer of the day. Sunlight, smoke-blued, slanted warm across the air. The forest behind camp, a quarter-mile-wide uncut strip, was full of the faint, ceaseless, cracking, chuckling, stirring, whirring, silvery noises that woods in the morning are full of. It might have been Idaho in 1950, this clearing. Or Kentucky in 1830. Or Gaul in 50 B.C. “Te- whet,” said a distant bird.

“I'd like to get rid of 'em, Captain.”

“The creechies? How d'you mean, Ok?”

“Just let 'em go. I can't get enough work out of 'em in the mill to make up for their keep. Or for their being such a damn headache. They just don't work.”

“They do if you know how to make 'em. They built the camp.”

Oknanawi's obsidian face was dour. “Well, you got the touch with 'em, I guess. I don't.” He paused. “In that Applied History course I took in training for Far-out, it said that slavery never worked. It was uneconomical.”

“Right, but this isn’t slavery, Ok baby. Slaves are humans. When you raise cows, you call that slavery? No. And it works.”

Impassive, the foreman nodded; but he said, “They’re too little. I tried starving the sulky ones. They just sit and starve.”

“They’re little, all right, but don’t let ’em fool you, Ok. They’re tough; they’ve got terrific endurance; and they don’t feel pain like humans. That’s the part you forget, Ok. You think hitting one is like hitting a kid, sort of. Believe me, it’s more like hitting a robot for all they feel it. Look, you’ve laid some of the females, you know how they don’t seem to feel anything, no pleasure, no pain, they just lay there like mattresses no matter what you do. They’re all like that. Probably they’ve got more primitive nerves than humans do. Like fish. I’ll tell you a weird one about that.

When I was in Central, before I came up here, one of the tame males jumped me once. I know they’ll tell you they never fight, but this one went spla, right off his nut, and lucky he wasn’t armed or he’d have killed me. I had to damn near kill him before he’d even let go. And he kept coming back. It was incredible the beating he took and never even felt it. Like some beetle you have to keep stepping on because it doesn’t know it’s been squashed already. Look at this.” Davidson bent down his close-cropped head to show a gnarled lump behind one ear. “That was damn near a concussion. And he did it after I’d broken his arm and pounded his face into cranberry sauce. He just kept coming back and coming back. The thing is, Ok, the creechies are lazy, they’re dumb, they’re treacherous, and they don’t feel pain.

You’ve got to be tough with ’em, and stay tough with ’em.”

“They aren’t worth the trouble, Captain. Damn sulky little green bastards, they won’t fight, won’t work, won’t nothing. Except give me the pip.” There was a geniality in Oknanawi’s grumbling which did not conceal the stubbornness beneath.

He wouldn’t beat up creechies because they were so much smaller; that was clear in his mind, and clear now to Davidson, who at once accepted it. He knew how to handle his men. “Look, Ok. Try this. Pick out the ringleaders and tell ’em you’re going to give them a shot of hallucinogen. Mesc, lice, any one, they don’t know one from the other. But they’re scared of them. Don’t overwork it, and it’ll work. I can guarantee.”

“Why are they scared of hallies?” the foreman asked curiously.

“How do I know? Why are women scared of rats? Don’t look for good sense from women or creechies, Ok! Speaking of which, I’m on the way to Central this morning, shall I put the finger on a Collie Girl for you?”

“Just keep the finger off a few till I get my leave,” Ok said grinning. A group of creechies passed, carrying a long 12 × 12 beam for the Rec Room being built down by the river. Slow, shambling little figures, they worried the big beam along like a lot of ants with a dead caterpillar, sullen and inept. Oknanawi watched them and said, “Fact is, Captain, they give me the creeps.”

That was queer, coming from a tough, quiet guy like Ok.

“Well, I agree with you, actually, Ok, that they’re not worth the trouble, or the risk. If that fart Lyubov wasn’t around and the Colonel wasn’t so stuck on following the Code, I think we might just clean out the areas we settle, instead of this Voluntary Labor routine. They’re going to get rubbed out sooner or later, and it might as well be sooner. It’s just how things happen to be. Primitive races always have to give way to civilized ones. Or be assimilated. But we sure as hell can’t assimilate a lot of green monkeys. And like you say, they’re just bright enough that they’ll never be quite trustworthy. Like those big monkeys used to live in Africa, what were they called?”

“Gorillas?”

“Right. We’ll get on better without creechies here, just like we get on better without gorillas in Africa. They’re in our way...But Daddy Ding-Dong he say use creechie-labor, so we use creechie-labor. For a while. Right? See you tonight, Ok.”

“Right, Captain.”

Davidson checked out the hopper from Smith Camp HQ: a pine-plank 4-meter cube, two desks, a watercooler, Lt. Birno repairing a walkytalky. “Don’t let the camp burn down, Birno.”

“Bring me back a Collie, Cap. Blonde. 34-22-36.”

“Christ, is that all?”

“I like ’em neat, not floppy, see.” Birno expressively outlined his preference in the air. Grinning, Davidson went on up to the hangar. As he brought the helicopter back over camp he looked down at it: kid’s blocks, sketch-lines of paths, long stump- stubbled clearings, all shrinking as the machine rose and he saw the green of the uncut forests of the great island, and beyond that dark green the pale green of the sea going on and on. Now Smith Camp looked like a yellow spot, a fleck on a vast green tapestry.

He crossed Smith Straits and the wooded, deep-folded ranges of north Central Island, and came down by noon in Centralville. It looked like a city, at least after three months in the woods; there were real streets, real buildings, it had been there since the Colony began four years ago. You didn’t see what a flimsy little frontier- town it really was, until you looked south of it a half-mile and saw glittering above the stumplands and the concrete pads a single golden tower, taller than anything in Centralville. The ship wasn’t a big one but it looked so big, here. And it was only a launch, a lander, a ship’s boat; the NAFAL ship of the line, Shackleton, was half a million kilos up, in orbit. The launch was just a hint, just a fingertip of the hugeness, the power, the golden precision and grandeur of the star-bridging technology of Earth.

That was why tears came to Davidson’s eyes for a second at the sight of the ship from home. He wasn’t ashamed of it. He was a patriotic man, it just happened to be the way he was made.

Soon enough, walking down those frontier-town streets with their wide vistas of nothing much at each end, he began to smile. For the women were there, all right, and you could tell they were fresh ones.

They mostly had long tight skirts and big shoes like goloshes, red or purple or gold, and gold or silver frilly shirts. No more nipplepeeps. Fashions had changed; too bad. They all wore their hair piled up high, it must be sprayed with that glue stuff they used. Ugly as hell, but it was the sort of thing only women would do to their hair, and so it was provocative. Davidson grinned at a chesty little euraf with more hair than head; he got no smile, but a wag of the retreating hips that said plainly: Follow follow follow me. But he didn't. Not yet.

He went to Central HQ: quickstone and plastiplaste Standard Issue, 40 offices, 10 watercoolers and a basement arsenal, and checked in with New Tahiti Central Colonial Administration Command. He met a couple of the launch-crew, put in a request for a new semirobo bark-stripper at Forestry, and got his old pal Juju Sereng to meet him at the Luau Bar at fourteen hundred.

He got to the bar an hour early to stock up on a little food before the drinking began. Lyubov was there, sitting with a couple of guys in Fleet uniform, some kind of speshes that had come down on the Shackleton's launch. Davidson didn't have a high regard for the Navy, a lot of fancy sunhoppers who left the dirty, muddy, dangerous on-planet work to the Army; but brass was brass, and anyhow it was funny to see Lyubov acting chummy with anybody in uniform. He was talking, waving his hands around the way he did. Just in passing, Davidson tapped his shoulder and said, "Hi, Raj old pal, how's tricks?" He went on without waiting for the scowl, though he hated to miss it. It was really funny the way Lyubov hated him. Probably the guy was effeminate like a lot of intellectuals, and resented Davidson's virility. Anyhow Davidson wasn't going to waste any time hating Lyubov, he wasn't worth the trouble.

The Luau served a first-rate venison steak. What would they say on old Earth if they saw one man eating a kilogram of meat at one meal? Poor damn soybeansuckers! Then Juju arrived with—as Davidson had confidently expected—the pick of the new Collie Girls: two fruity beauties, not Brides, but Recreation Staff. Oh the old Colonial Administration sometimes came through! It was a long, hot afternoon.

Flying back to camp he crossed Smith Straits level with the sun that lay on top of a great gold bed of haze over the sea. He sang as he lolled in the pilot's seat. Smith Land came in sight hazy, and there was smoke over the camp, a dark smudge as if oil had got into the waste-burner. He couldn't even make out the buildings through it. It was only as he dropped down to the landing-field that he saw the charred jet, the wrecked hoppers, the burned-out hangar.

He pulled the hopper up again and flew back over the camp, so low that he might have hit the high cone of the burner, the only thing left sticking up. The rest was gone, mill, furnace, lumberyards, HQ, huts, barracks, creechie compound, everything. Black hulks and wrecks, still smoking. But it hadn't been a forest fire. The forest stood there, green, next to the ruins. Davidson swung back round to the field, set down and lit out looking for the motorbike, but it too was a black wreck along with the stinking, smoldering ruins of the hangar and the machinery. He loped down the path to camp. As he passed what had been the radio hut, his mind snapped back into gear. Without hesitating for even a stride he changed course, off the path, behind the gutted shack. There he stopped. He listened.

There was nobody. It was all silent. The fires had been out a long time; only the great lumber-piles still smoldered, showing a hot red under the ash and char. Worth more than gold, those oblong ash-heaps had been. But no smoke rose from the black skeletons of the barracks and huts; and there were bones among the ashes.

Davidson's brain was super-clear and active, now, as he crouched behind the radio shack. There were two possibilities. One: an attack from another camp. Some officer on King or New Java had gone spla and was trying a coup de planète. Two: an attack from off-planet. He saw the golden tower on the space-dock at Central. But if the Shackleton had gone privateer why would she start by rubbing out a small camp, instead of taking over Centralville? No, it must be invasion, aliens. Some unknown race, or maybe the Cetians or the Hainish had decided to move in on Earth's colonies.

He'd never trusted those damned smart humanoids. This must have been done with a heatbomb. The invading force, with jets, air-cars, nukes, could easily be hidden on an island or reef anywhere in the SW Quartersphere. He must get back to his hopper and send out the alarm, then try a look around, reconnoiter, so he could tell HQ his assessment of the actual situation. He was just straightening up when he heard the voices.

Not human voices. High, soft, gabble-gobble. Aliens.

Ducking on hands and knees behind the shack's plastic roof, which lay on the ground deformed by heat into a batwing shape, he held still and listened.

Four creechies walked by a few yards from him, on the path. They were wild creechies, naked except for loose leather belts on which knives and pouches hung.

None wore the shorts and leather collar supplied to tame creechies. The Volunteers in the compound must have been incinerated along with the humans.

They stopped a little way past his hiding place, talking their slow gabble-gobble, and Davidson held his breath. He didn't want them to spot him. What the devil were creechies doing here? They could only be serving as spies and scouts for the invaders.

One pointed south as it talked, and turned, so that Davidson saw its face. And he recognized it. Creechies all looked alike, but this one was different. He had written his own signature all over that face, less than a year ago. It was the one that had gone spla and attacked him down in Central, the homicidal one, Lyubov's pet. What in the blue hell was it doing here?

Davidson's mind raced, clicked; reactions fast as always, he stood up, sudden, tall, easy, gun in hand. "You creechies. Stop. Stay-put. No moving!"

His voice cracked out like a whiplash. The four little green creatures did not move. The one with the smashed-in face looked at him across the black rubble with huge, blank eyes that had no light in them.

"Answer now. This fire, who start it?"

No answer.

“Answer now: hurry-up-quick! No answer, then I burn-up first one, then one, then one, see? This fire, who start it?”

“We burned the camp, Captain Davidson,” said the one from Central, in a queer soft voice that reminded Davidson of some human. “The humans are all dead.”

“You burned it, what do you mean?”

He could not recall Scarface’s name for some reason.

“There were two hundred humans here. Ninety slaves of my people. Nine hundred of my people came out of the forest. First we killed the humans in the place in the forest where they were cutting trees, then we killed those in this place, while the houses were burning. I had thought you were killed. I am glad to see you, Captain Davidson.”

It was all crazy, and of course a lie. They couldn’t have killed all of them, Ok, Birno, Van Sten, all the rest, two hundred men, some of them would have got out. All the creechies had were bows and arrows. Anyway the creechies couldn’t have done this. Creechies didn’t fight, didn’t kill, didn’t have wars. They were intraspecies non- aggressive, that meant sitting ducks. They didn’t fight back. They sure as hell didn’t massacre two hundred men at a swipe. It was crazy. The silence, the faint stink of burning in the long, warm evening light, the pale-green faces with unmoving eyes that watched him, it all added up to nothing, to a crazy bad dream, a nightmare.

“Who did this for you?”

“Nine hundred of my people,” Scarface said in that damned fake-human voice.

“No, not that. Who else? Who were you acting for? Who told you what to do?”

“My wife did.”

Davidson saw then the telltale tension of the creature’s stance, yet it sprang at him so lithe and oblique that his shot missed, burning an arm or shoulder instead of smack between the eyes. And the creechie was on him, half his size and weight yet knocking him right off balance by its onslaught, for he had been relying on the gun and not expecting attack. The thing’s arms were thin, tough, coarse-furred in his grip, and as he struggled with it, it sang.

He was down on his back, pinned down, disarmed. Four green muzzles looked down at him. The scarfaced one was still singing, a breathless gabble, but with a tune to it. The other three listened, their white teeth showing in grins. He had never seen a creechie smile. He had never looked up into a creechie’s face from below. Always down, from above. From on top. He tried not to struggle, for at the moment it was wasted effort. Little as they were, they outnumbered him, and Scarface had his gun.

He must wait. But there was a sickness in him, a nausea that made his body twitch and strain against his will. The small hands held him down effortlessly, the small green faces bobbed over him grinning.

Scarface ended his song. He knelt on Davidson's chest, a knife in one hand, Davidson's gun in the other.

"You can't sing, Captain Davidson, is that right? Well, then, you may run to your hopper and fly away, and tell the Colonel in Central that this place is burned and the humans are all killed."

Blood, the same startling red as human blood, clotted the fur of the creechie's right arm, and the knife shook in the green paw. The sharp, scarred face looked down into Davidson's from very close, and he could see now the queer light that burned way down in the charcoal-dark eyes. The voice was still soft and quiet.

They let him go.

He got up cautiously, still dizzy from the fall Scarface had given him. The creechies stood well away from him now, knowing his reach was twice theirs; but Scarface wasn't the only one armed, there was a second gun pointing at his guts. That was Ben holding the gun. His own creechie, Ben, the little gray mangy bastard, looking stupid as always but holding a gun.

It's hard to turn your back on two pointing guns, but Davidson did it and started walking toward the field.

A voice behind him said some creechie word, shrill and loud. Another said, "Hurry-up-quick!" and there was a queer noise like birds twittering that must be creechie laughter. A shot clapped and whined on the road right by him. Christ, it wasn't fair, they had the guns and he wasn't armed. He began to run. He could outrun any creechie. They didn't know how to shoot a gun.

"Run," said the quiet voice far behind him. That was Scarface. Selver, that was his name. Sam, they'd called him, till Lyubov stopped Davidson from giving him what he deserved and made a pet out of him, then they'd called him Selver. Christ, what was all this, it was a nightmare. He ran. The blood thundered in his ears. He ran through the golden, smoky evening. There was a body by the path, he hadn't even noticed it coming. It wasn't burned, it looked like a white balloon with the air gone out. It had staring blue eyes. They didn't dare kill him, Davidson. They hadn't shot at him again. It was impossible. They couldn't kill him. There was the hopper, safe and shining, and he lunged into the seat and had her up before the creechies could try anything. His hands shook, but not much, just shock. They couldn't kill him. He circled the hill and then came back fast and low, looking for the four creechies. But nothing moved in the streaky rubble of the camp.

There had been a camp there this morning. Two hundred men. There had been four creechies there just now. He hadn't dreamed all this. They couldn't just disappear. They were there, hiding. He opened up the machinegun in the hopper's nose and raked the burned ground, shot holes in the green leaves of the forest, strafed the burned bones and cold bodies of his men and the wrecked machinery and the rotting white stumps, returning again and again until the ammo was gone and the gun's spasms stopped short.

Davidson's hands were steady now, his body felt appeased, and he knew he wasn't caught in any dream. He headed back over the Straits, to take the news to Centralville. As he flew he could feel his

face relax into its usual calm lines. They couldn't blame the disaster on him, for he hadn't even been there. Maybe they'd see that it was significant that the creechies had struck while he was gone, knowing they'd fail if he was there to organize the defense. And there was one good thing that would come out of this. They'd do like they should have done to start with, and clean up the planet for human occupation. Not even Lyubov could stop them from rubbing out the creechies now, not when they heard it was Lyubov's pet creechie who'd led the massacre! They'd go in for rat-extirpation for a while, now; and maybe, just maybe, they'd hand that little job over to him. At that thought he could have smiled.

But he kept his face calm.

The sea under him was grayish with twilight, and ahead of him lay the island hills, the deep-folded, many-streamed, many-leaved forests in the dusk.

Chapter Two

ALL the colors of rust and sunset, brown-reds and pale greens, changed ceaselessly in the long leaves as the wind blew. The roots of the copper willows, thick and ridged, were moss-green down by the running water, which like the wind moved slowly with many soft eddies and seeming pauses, held back by rocks, roots, hanging and fallen leaves. No way was clear, no light unbroken, in the forest. Into wind, water, sunlight, starlight, there always entered leaf and branch, bole and root, the shadowy, the complex. Little paths ran under the branches, around the boles, over the roots; they did not go straight, but yielded to every obstacle, devious as nerves. The ground was not dry and solid but damp and rather springy, product of the collaboration of living things with the long, elaborate death of leaves and trees; and from that rich graveyard grew ninety-foot trees, and tiny mushrooms that sprouted in circles half an inch across. The smell of the air was subtle, various, and sweet. The view was never long, unless looking up through the branches you caught sight of the stars. Nothing was pure, dry, arid, plain. Revelation was lacking. There was no seeing everything at once: no certainty. The colors of rust and sunset kept changing in the hanging leaves of the copper willows, and you could not say even whether the leaves of the willows were brownish-red, or reddish-green, or green.

Selver came up a path beside the water, going slowly and often stumbling on the willow roots. He saw an old man dreaming, and stopped. The old man looked at him through the long willow-leaves and saw him in his dreams.

"May I come to your Lodge, my Lord Dreamer? I've come a long way."

The old man sat still. Presently Selver squatted down on his heels just off the path, beside the stream. His head drooped down, for he was worn out and had to sleep. He had been walking five days.

"Are you of the dream-time or of the world-time?" the old man asked at last.

"Of the world-time."

“Come along with me then.” The old man got up promptly and led Selver up the wandering path out of the willow grove into dryer, darker regions of oak and thorn. “I took you for a god,” he said, going a pace ahead. “And it seemed to me I had seen you before, perhaps in dream.”

“Not in the world-time. I come from Sornol, I have never been here before.”

“This town is Cadast. I am Coro Mena. Of the Whitethorn.”

“Selver is my name. Of the Ash.”

“There are Ash people among us, both men and women. Also your marriage-clans, Birch and Holly; we have no women of the Apple. But you don’t come looking for a wife, do you?”

“My wife is dead,” Selver said.

They came to the Men’s Lodge, on high ground in a stand of young oaks. They stooped and crawled through the tunnel-entrance. Inside, in the firelight, the old man stood up, but Selver stayed crouching on hands and knees, unable to rise. Now that help and comfort was at hand, his body, which he had forced too far, would not go farther. It lay down and the eyes closed; and Selver slipped, with relief and gratitude, into the great darkness.

The men of the Lodge of Cadast looked after him, and their healer came to tend the wound in his right arm. In the night Coro Mena and the healer Torber sat by the fire. Most of the other men were with their wives that night; there were only a couple of young prentice-dreamers over on the benches, and they had both gone fast asleep.

“I don’t know what would give a man such scars as he has on his face,” said the healer, “and much less, such a wound as that in his arm. A very queer wound.”

“It’s a queer engine he wore on his belt,” said Coro Mena.

“I saw it and didn’t see it.”

“I put it under his bench. It looks like polished iron, but not like the handiwork of men.”

“He comes from Sornol, he said to you.”

They were both silent a while. Coro Mena felt unreasoning fear press upon him, and slipped into dream to find the reason for the fear; for he was an old man, and long adept. In the dream the giants walked, heavy and dire. Their dry scaly limbs were swathed in cloths; their eyes were little and light, like tin beads. Behind them crawled huge moving things made of polished iron. The trees fell down in front of them.

Out from among the falling trees a man ran, crying aloud, with blood on his mouth. The path he ran on was the doorpath of the Lodge of Cadast.

“Well, there’s little doubt of it,” Coro Mena said, sliding out of the dream. “He came oversea straight from Sornol, or else came afoot from the coast of Kelme Deva on our own land. The giants are in both those places, travelers say.”

“Will they follow him,” said Torber; neither answered the question, which was no question but a statement of possibility.

“You saw the giants once, Coro?”

“Once,” the old man said.

He dreamed; sometimes, being very old and not so strong as he had been, he slipped off to sleep for a while. Day broke, noon passed. Outside the Lodge a hunting-party went out, children chirped, women talked in voices like running water.

A dryer voice called Coro Mena from the door. He crawled out into the evening sunlight. His sister stood outside, sniffing the aromatic wind with pleasure, but looking stern all the same. “Has the stranger waked up, Coro?”

“Not yet. Torber’s looking after him.”

“We must hear his story.”

“No doubt he’ll wake soon.”

Ebor Dendep frowned. Headwoman of Cadast, she was anxious for her people; but she did not want to ask that a hurt man be disturbed, nor to offend the Dreamers by insisting on her right to enter their Lodge. “Can’t you wake him, Coro?” she asked at last. “What if he is...being pursued?”

He could not run his sister’s emotions on the same rein with his own, yet he felt them; her anxiety bit him. “If Torber permits, I will,” he said.

“Try to learn his news, quickly. I wish he was a woman and would talk sense...”

The stranger had roused himself, and lay feverish in the halfdark of the Lodge.

The unreined dreams of illness moved in his eyes. He sat up, however, and spoke with control. As he listened, Coro Mena’s bones seemed to shrink within him, trying to hide from this terrible story, this new thing.

“I was Selver Thele, when I lived in Eshreth in Sornol. My city was destroyed by the yumens when they cut down the trees in that region. I was one of those made to serve them, with my wife, Thele. She was raped by one of them and died. I attacked the yumen that killed her. He would have killed me then, but another of them saved me and set me free. I left Sornol, where no town is safe from the yumens now, and came here to the North Isle, and lived on the coast of Kelme Deva in the Red Groves.

There presently the yumens came and began to cut down the world. They destroyed a city there, Penle. They caught a hundred of the men and women and made them serve them, and live in the pen. I was not caught. I lived with others who had escaped from Penle, in the bogland north of Kelme Deva. Sometimes at night I went among the people in the yumen's pens. They told me that one was there. That one whom I had tried to kill. I thought at first to try again; or else to set the people in the pen free. But all the time I watched the trees fall and saw the world cut open and left to rot. The men might have escaped, but the women were locked in more safely and could not, and they were beginning to die. I talked with the people hiding there in the boglands.

We were all very frightened and very angry, and had no way to let our fear and anger free. So at last after long talking, and long dreaming, and the making of a plan, we went in daylight, and killed the yumens of Kelme Deva with arrows and hunting-lances, and burned their city and their engines. We left nothing. But that one had gone away. He came back alone. I sang over him, and let him go."

Selver fell silent.

"Then," Coro Mena whispered.

"Then a flying ship came from Sornol, and hunted us in the forest, but found nobody. So they set fire to the forest; but it rained, and they did little harm. Most of the people freed from the pens and the others have gone farther north and east, toward the Holle Hills, for we were afraid many yumens might come hunting us. I went alone. The yumens know me, you see, they know my face; and this frightens me, and those I stay with."

"What is your wound?" Torber asked.

"That one, he shot me with their kind of weapon; but I sang him down and let him go."

"Alone you downed a giant?" said Torber with a fierce grin, wishing to believe.

"Not alone. With three hunters, and with his weapon in my hand—this."

Torber drew back from the thing.

None of them spoke for a while. At last Coro Mena said, "What you tell us is very black, and the road goes down. Are you a Dreamer of your Lodge?"

"I was. There's no Lodge of Eshreth any more."

"That's all one; we speak the Old Tongue together. Among the willows of Asta you first spoke to me calling me Lord Dreamer. So I am. Do you dream, Selver?"

"Seldom now," Selver answered, obedient to the catechism, his scarred, feverish face bowed.

"Awake?"

"Awake."

“Do you dream well, Selver?”

“Not well.”

“Do you hold the dream in your hands?”

“Yes.”

“Do you weave and shape, direct and follow, start and cease at will?”

“Sometimes, not always.”

“Can you walk the road your dream goes?”

“Sometimes. Sometimes I am afraid to.”

“Who is not? It is not altogether bad with you, Selver.”

“No, it is altogether bad,” Selver said, “there’s nothing good left,” and he began to shake.

Torber gave him the willow-draft to drink and made him lie down. Coro Mena still had the headwoman’s question to ask; reluctantly he did so, kneeling by the sick man. “Will the giants, the yumens you call them, will they follow your trail, Selver?”

“I left no trail. No one has seen me between Kelme Deva and this place, six days.

That’s not the danger.” He struggled to sit up again. “Listen, listen. You don’t see the danger. How can you see it? You haven’t done what I did, you have never dreamed of it, making two hundred people die. They will not follow me, but they may follow us all. Hunt us, as hunters drive coneys. That is the danger. They may try to kill us. To kill us all, all men.”

“Lie down—”

“No, I’m not raving, this is true fact and dream. There were two hundred yumens at Kelme Deva and they are dead. We killed them. We killed them as if they were not men. So will they not turn and do the same? They have killed us by ones, now they will kill us as they kill the trees, by hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds.”

“Be still,” Torber said. “Such things happen in the fever-dream, Selver. They do not happen in the world.”

“The world is always new,” said Coro Mena, “however old its roots. Selver, how is it with these creatures, then? They look like men and talk like men, are they not men?”

“I don’t know. Do men kill men, except in madness? Does any beast kill its own kind? Only the insects. These yumens kill us as lightly as we kill snakes. The one who taught me said that they kill one another, in quarrels, and also in groups, like ants fighting. I haven’t seen that. But I know they don’t spare one who asks life. They will strike a bowed neck, I have seen it! There is a wish to kill in them, and therefore I saw fit to put them to death.”

“And all men’s dreams,” said Coro Mena, cross-legged in shadow, “will be changed. They will never be the same again. I shall never walk again that path I came with you yesterday, the way up from the willow grove that I’ve walked on all my life.

It is changed. You have walked on it and it is utterly changed. Before this day the thing we had to do was the right thing to do; the way we had to go was the right way and led us home. Where is our home now? For you’ve done what you had to do, and it was not right. You have killed men. I saw them, five years ago, in the Lemgan Valley, where they came in a flying ship; I hid and watched the giants, six of them, and saw them speak, and look at rocks and plants, and cook food. They are men. But you have lived among them, tell me, Selver: do they dream?”

“As children do, in sleep.”

“They have no training?”

“No. Sometimes they talk of their dreams, the healers try to use them in healing, but none of them are trained, or have any skill in dreaming. Lyubov, who taught me, understood me when I showed him how to dream, and yet even so he called the world-time ‘real’ and the dream-time ‘unreal,’ as if that were the difference between them.”

“You have done what you had to do,” Coro Mena repeated after a silence. His eyes met Selver’s, across shadows. The desperate tension lessened in Selver’s face; his scarred mouth relaxed, and he lay back without saying more. In a little while he was asleep.

“He’s a god,” Coro Mena said.

Torber nodded, accepting the old man’s judgment almost with relief.

“But not like the others. Not like the Pursuer, nor the Friend who has no face, nor the Aspen-leaf Woman who walks in the forest of dreams. He is not the Gatekeeper, nor the Snake. Nor the Lyre-player nor the Carver nor the Hunter, though he comes in the world-time like them. We may have dreamed of Selver these last few years, but we shall no longer; he has left the dream-time. In the forest, through the forest he comes, where leaves fall, where trees fall, a god that knows death, a god that kills and is not himself reborn.”

The headwoman listened to Coro Mena’s reports and prophecies, and acted. She put the town of Cadast on alert, making sure that each family was ready to move out, with some food packed, and litters ready for the old and ill. She sent young women scouting south and east for news of the yumens. She kept one armed hunting-group always around town, though the others went out as usual every night. And when Selver grew stronger she insisted that he come out of the Lodge and tell his story: how the yumens killed and enslaved people in Sornol, and cut down the forests; how the people of Kelme Deva had killed the yumens. She forced women and undreaming men who did not understand these things to listen again, until they understood, and were frightened. For Ebor Dendep was a practical woman. When a Great Dreamer, her brother, told her that Selver was a god, a changer, a bridge between realities, she believed and acted. It was the Dreamer’s responsibility to be careful, to

be certain that his judgment was true. Her responsibility was then to take that judgment and act upon it. He saw what must be done; she saw that it was done.

“All the cities of the forest must hear,” Coro Mena said. So the headwoman sent out her young runners, and headwomen in other towns listened, and sent out their runners. The killing at Kelme Deva and the name of Selver went over North Island and oversea to the other lands, from voice to voice, or in writing; not very fast, for the Forest People had no quicker messengers than footrunners; yet fast enough.

They were not all one people on the Forty Lands of the world. There were more languages than lands, and each with a different dialect for every town that spoke it; there were infinite ramifications of manners, morals, customs, crafts; physical types differed on each of the five Great Lands. The people of Sornol were tall, and pale, and great traders; the people of Rieshwel were short, and many had black fur, and they ate monkeys; and so on and on. But the climate varied little, and the forest little, and the sea not at all. Curiosity, regular trade-routes, and the necessity of finding a husband or wife of the proper Tree, kept up an easy movement of people among the towns and between the lands, and so there were certain likenesses among all but the remotest extremes, the half-rumored barbarian isles of the Far East and South. In all the Forty Lands, women ran the cities and towns, and almost every town had a Men’s Lodge. Within the Lodges the Dreamers spoke an old tongue, and this varied little from land to land. It was rarely learned by women or by men who remained hunters, fishers, weavers, builders, those who dreamed only small dreams outside the Lodge.

As most writing was in this Lodge-tongue, when headwomen sent fleet girls carrying messages, the letters went from Lodge to Lodge, and so were interpreted by the Dreamers to the Old Women, as were other documents, rumors, problems, myths, and dreams. But it was always the Old Women’s choice whether to believe or not.

Selver was in a small room at Eshsen. The door was not locked, but he knew if he opened it something bad would come in. So long as he kept it shut everything would be all right. The trouble was that there were young trees, a sapling orchard, planted out in front of the house; not fruit or nut trees but some other kind, he could not remember what kind. He went out to see what kind of trees they were. They all lay broken and uprooted. He picked up the silvery branch of one and a little blood ran out of the broken end. No, not here, not again, Thele, he said: O Thele, come to me before your death! But she did not come. Only her death was there, the broken birchtree, the opened door. Selver turned and went quickly back into the house, discovering that it was all built above ground like a yumen house, very tall and full of light. Outside the other door, across the tall room, was the long street of the yumen city Central. Selver had the gun in his belt. If Davidson came, he could shoot him. He waited, just inside the open door, looking out into the sunlight. Davidson came, huge, running so fast that Selver could not keep him in the sights of the gun as he doubled crazily back and forth across the wide street, very fast, always closer. The gun was heavy. Selver fired it but no fire came out of it, and in rage and terror he threw the gun and the dream away.

Disgusted and depressed, he spat, and sighed.

“A bad dream?” Ebor Dendep inquired.

“They’re all bad, and all the same,” he said, but the deep unease and misery lessened a little as he answered. Cool morning sunlight fell flecked and shafted through the fine leaves and branches of the birch grove of Cadast. There the headwoman sat weaving a basket of blackstem fern, for she liked to keep her fingers busy, while Selver lay beside her in halfdream and dream. He had been fifteen days at Cadast, and his wound was healing well. He still slept much, but for the first time in many months he had begun to dream waking again, regularly, not once or twice in a day and night but in the true pulse and rhythm of dreaming which should rise and fall ten to fourteen times in the diurnal cycle. Bad as his dreams were, all terror and shame, yet he welcomed them. He had feared that he was cut off from his roots, that he had gone too far into the dead land of action ever to find his way back to the springs of reality. Now, though the water was very bitter, he drank again.

Briefly he had Davidson down again among the ashes of the burned camp, and instead of singing over him this time he hit him in the mouth with a rock. Davidson’s teeth broke, and blood ran between the white splinters.

The dream was useful, a straight wish-fulfillment, but he stopped it there, having dreamed it many times, before he met Davidson in the ashes of Kelme Deva, and since. There was nothing to that dream but relief. A sip of bland water. It was the bitter he needed. He must go clear back, not to Kelme Deva but to the long dreadful street in the alien city called Central, where he had attacked Death, and had been defeated.

Ebor Dendep hummed as she worked. Her thin hands, their silky green down silvered with age, worked black fern-stems in and out, fast and neat. She sang a song about gathering ferns, a girl’s song: I’m picking ferns, I wonder if he’ll come back...

Her faint old voice trilled like a cricket’s. Sun trembled in birch leaves. Selver put his head down on his arms.

The birch grove was more or less in the center of the town of Cadast. Eight paths led away from it, winding narrowly off among trees. There was a whiff of woodsmoke in the air; where the branches were thin at the south edge of the grove you could see smoke rise from a house-chimney, like a bit of blue yarn unravelling among the leaves. If you looked closely among the live-oaks and other trees you would find houseroofs sticking up a couple of feet above ground, between a hundred and two hundred of them, it was very hard to count. The timber houses were three-quarters sunk, fitted in among tree-roots like badgers’ setts. The beam roofs were mounded over with a thatch of small branches, pinestraw, reeds, earth-mold. They were insulating, waterproof, almost invisible. The forest and the community of eight hundred people went about their business all around the birch grove where Ebor Dendep sat making a basket of fern. A bird among the branches over her head said, “Te-whet,” sweetly. There was more people-noise than usual, for fifty or sixty strangers, young men and women mostly, had come drifting in these last few days, drawn by Selver’s presence. Some were from other cities of the North, some were those who had done the killing at Kelme Deva with him; they had followed rumor here to follow him. Yet the voices calling here and there and the babble of women bathing or children playing down by the stream, were not so loud as the morning birdsong and insect-drone and under-noise of the living forest of which the town was one element.

A girl came quickly, a young huntress the color of the pale birch leaves. “Word of mouth from the southern coast, mother,” she said. “The runner’s at the Women’s Lodge.”

“Send her here when she’s eaten,” the headwoman said softly. “Sh, Tolbar, can’t you see he’s asleep?”

The girl stooped to pick a large leaf of wild tobacco, and laid it lightly over Selver’s eyes, on which a shaft of the steepening, bright sunlight had fallen. He lay with his hands half open and his scarred, damaged face turned upward, vulnerable and foolish, a Great Dreamer gone to sleep like a child. But it was the girl’s face that Ebor Dendep watched. It shone, in that uneasy shade, with pity and terror, with adoration.

Tolbar darted away. Presently two of the Old Women came with the messenger, moving silent in single file along the sun-flecked path. Ebor Dendep raised her hand, enjoining silence. The messenger promptly lay down flat, and rested; her brown-dappled green fur was dusty and sweaty, she had run far and fast. The Old Women sat down in patches of sun, and became still. Like two old gray-green stones they sat there, with bright living eyes.

Selver, struggling with a sleep-dream beyond his control, cried out as if in great fear, and woke.

He went to drink from the stream; when he came back he was followed by six or seven of those who always followed him. The headwoman put down her half-finished work and said, “Now be welcome, runner, and speak.”

The runner stood up, bowed her head to Ebor Dendep, and spoke her message: “I come from Trethat. My words come from Sorbron Deva, before that from sailors of the Strait, before that from Broter in Sornol. They are for the hearing of all Cadast but they are to be spoken to the man called Selver who was born of the Ash in Eshreth.

Here are the words: There are new giants in the great city of the giants in Sornol, and many of these new ones are females. The yellow ship of fire goes up and down at the place that was called Peha. It is known in Sornol that Selver of Eshreth burned the city of the giants at Kelme Deva. The Great Dreamers of the Exiles in Broter have dreamed giants more numerous than the trees of the Forty Lands. These are all the words of the message I bear.”

After the singsong recitation they were all silent. The bird, a little farther off, said, “Whet-whet?” experimentally.

“This is a very bad world-time,” said one of the Old Women, rubbing a rheumatic knee.

A gray bird flew from a huge oak that marked the north edge of town, and went up in circles, riding the morning updraft on lazy wings. There was always a roosting-tree of these gray kites near a town; they were the garbage service.

A small, fat boy ran through the birch grove, pursued by a slightly larger sister, both shrieking in tiny voices like bats. The boy fell down and cried, the girl stood him up and scrubbed his tears off with a large leaf. They scuttled off into the forest hand in hand.

“There was one called Lyubov,” Selver said to the headwoman. “I have spoken of him to Coro Mena, but not to you. When that one was killing me, it was Lyubov who saved me. It was Lyubov who healed me, and set me free. He wanted to know about us; so I would tell him what he asked, and he too would tell me what I asked. Once I asked how his race could survive, having so few women. He said that in the place where they come from, half the race is women; but the men would not bring women to the Forty Lands until they had made a place ready for them.”

“Until the men made a fit place for the women? Well! they may have quite a wait,” said Ebor Dendep. “They’re like the people in the Elm Dream who come at you rump-first, with their heads put on front to back. They make the forest into a dry beach”—her language had no word for ‘desert’—“and call that making things ready for the women? They should have sent the women first. Maybe with them the women do the Great Dreaming, who knows? They are backward, Selver. They are insane.”

“A people can’t be insane.”

“But they only dream in sleep, you said; if they want to dream waking they take poisons so that the dreams go out of control, you said! How can people be any madder? They don’t know the dream-time from the world-time, any more than a baby does. Maybe when they kill a tree they think it will come alive again!”

Selver shook his head. He still spoke to the headwoman as if he and she were alone in the birch grove, in a quiet hesitant voice, almost drowsily.

“No, they understand death very well...Certainly they don’t see as we do, but they know more and understand more about certain things than we do. Lyubov mostly understood what I told him. Much of what he told me, I couldn’t understand. It wasn’t the language that kept me from understanding; I know his tongue, and he learned ours; we made a writing of the two languages together. Yet there were things he said I could never understand. He said the yumens are from outside the forest. That’s quite clear. He said they want the forest: the trees for wood, the land to plant grass on.” Selver’s voice, though still soft, had taken on resonance; the people among the silver trees listened. “That too is clear, to those of us who’ve seen them cutting down the world. He said the yumens are men like us, that we’re indeed related, as close kin maybe as the Red Deer to the Greybuck. He said that they come from another place which is not the forest; the trees there are all cut down; it has a sun, not our sun, which is a star. All this, as you see, wasn’t clear to me. I say his words but don’t know what they mean. It does not matter much. It is clear that they want our forest for themselves. They are twice our stature, they have weapons that outshoot ours by far, and firethrowers, and flying ships. Now they have brought more women, and will have children. There are maybe two thousand, maybe three thousand of them here now, mostly in Sornol. But if we wait a lifetime or two they will breed; their numbers will double and redouble. They kill men and women; they do not spare those who ask life. They cannot sing in contest. They have left their roots behind them, perhaps, in this other forest from which they came, this forest with no trees. So they take poison to let loose the dreams in them, but it only makes them drunk or sick. No one can say certainly whether they’re men or not men, whether they’re sane or insane, but that does not matter. They must be made to leave the forest, because they are dangerous.

If they will not go they must be burned out of the Lands, as nests of stinging-ants must be burned out of the groves of cities. If we wait, it is we that will be smoked out and burned. They can step on us as we step on stinging-ants. Once I saw a woman, it was when they burned my city Eshreth, she lay down in the path before a yumen to ask him for life, and he stepped on her back and broke the spine, and then kicked her aside as if she was a dead snake. I saw that. If the yumens are men, they are men unfit or untaught to dream and to act as men. Therefore they go about in torment killing and destroying, driven by the gods within, whom they will not set free but try to uproot and deny. If they are men, they are evil men, having denied their own gods, afraid to see their own faces in the dark. Headwoman of Cadast, hear me.” Selver stood up, tall and abrupt among the seated women. “It’s time, I think, that I go back to my own land, to Sornol, to those that are in exile and those that are enslaved. Tell any people who dream of a city burning to come after me to Broter.” He bowed to Ebor Dendep and left the birch grove, still walking lame, his arm bandaged; yet there was a quickness to his walk, a poise to his head, that made him seem more whole than other men. The young people followed quietly after him.

“Who is he?” asked the runner from Trethat, her eyes following him.

“The man to whom your message came, Selver of Eshreth, a god among us. Have you ever seen a god before, daughter?”

“When I was ten, the Lyre-Player came to our town.”

“Old Ertel, yes. He was of my Tree, and from the North Vales like me. Well, now you’ve seen a second god, and a greater. Tell your people in Trethat of him.”

“Which god is he, mother?”

“A new one,” Ebor Dendep said in her dry old voice. “The son of forest-fire, the brother of the murdered. He is the one who is not reborn. Now go on, all of you, go on to the Lodge. See who’ll be going with Selver, see about food for them to carry. Let me be a while. I’m as full of forebodings as a stupid old man, I must dream...”

Coro Mena went with Selver that night as far as the place where they first met, under the copper willows by the stream. Many people were following Selver south, some sixty in all, as great a troop as most people had ever seen on the move at once. They would cause great stir and thus gather many more to them, on their way to the sea-crossing to Sornol. Selver had claimed his Dreamer’s privilege of solitude for this one night. He was setting off alone. His followers would catch him up in the morning; and thenceforth, implicated in crowd and act, he would have little time for the slow and deep running of the great dreams.

“Here we met,” the old man said, stopping among the bowing branches, the veils of drooping leaves, “and here part. This will be called Selver’s Grove, no doubt, by the people who walk our paths hereafter.”

Selver said nothing for a while, standing still as a tree, the restless leaves about him darkening from silver as clouds thickened over the stars. “You are surer of me than I am,” he said at last, a voice in darkness.

“Yes, I’m sure, Selver...I was well taught in dreaming, and then I’m old. I dream very little for myself any more. Why should I? Little is new to me. And what I wanted from my life, I have had, and more. I have had my whole life. Days like the leaves of the forest. I’m an old hollow tree, only the roots live. And so I dream only what all men dream. I have no visions and no wishes. I see what is. I see the fruit ripening on the branch. Four years it has been ripening, that fruit of the deep-planted tree. We have all been afraid for four years, even we who live far from the yumens’ cities, and have only glimpsed them from hiding, or seen their ships fly over, or looked at the dead places where they cut down the world, or heard mere tales of these things. We are all afraid. Children wake from sleep crying of giants; women will not go far on their trading-journeys; men in the Lodges cannot sing. The fruit of fear is ripening. And I see you gather it. You are the harvester. All that we fear to know, you have seen, you have known: exile, shame, pain, the roof and walls of the world fallen, the mother dead in misery, the children untaught, uncherished...This is a new time for the world: a bad time. And you have suffered it all. You have gone farthest. And at the farthest, at the end of the black path, there grows the Tree; there the fruit ripens; now you reach up, Selver, now you gather it. And the world changes wholly, when a man holds in his hand the fruit of that tree, whose roots are deeper than the forest. Men will know it. They will know you, as we did. It doesn’t take an old man or a Great Dreamer to recognize a god! Where you go, fire burns; only the blind cannot see it. But listen, Selver, this is what I see that perhaps others do not, this is why I have loved you: I dreamed of you before we met here. You were walking on a path, and behind you the young trees grew up, oak and birch, willow and holly, fir and pine, alder, elm, white-flowering ash, all the roof and walls of the world, forever renewed. Now farewell, dear god and son, go safely.”

The night darkened as Selver went, until even his night-seeing eyes saw nothing but masses and planes of black. It began to rain. He had gone only a few miles from Cadast when he must either light a torch, or halt. He chose to halt, and groping found a place among the roots of a great chestnut tree. There he sat, his back against the broad, twisting bole that seemed to hold a little sun-warmth in it still. The fine rain, falling unseen in darkness, pattered on the leaves overhead, on his arms and neck and head protected by their thick silk-fine hair, on the earth and ferns and undergrowth nearby, on all the leaves of the forest, near and far. Selver sat as quiet as the gray owl on a branch above him, unsleeping, his eyes wide open in the rainy dark.

Chapter Three

CAPTAIN Raj Lyubov had a headache. It began softly in the muscles of his right shoulder, and mounted crescendo to a smashing drumbeat over his right ear. The speech centers are in the left cerebral cortex, he thought, but he couldn’t have said it; couldn’t speak, or read, or sleep, or think. Cortex, vortex. Migraine headache, margarine breadache, ow, ow, ow. Of course he had been cured of migraine once at college and again during his obligatory Army Prophylactic Psychotherapy Sessions, but he had brought along some ergotamine pills when he left Earth, just in case. He had taken two,

and a superhyperduper-analgesic, and a tranquilizer, and a digestive pill to counteract the caffeine which counteracted the ergotamine, but the awl still bored out from within, just over his right ear, to the beat of the big bass drum. Awl, drill, ill, pill, oh God. Lord deliver us. Liver sausage. What would the Athsheans do for a migraine? They wouldn't have one, they would have daydreamed the tensions away a week before they got them. Try it, try daydreaming. Begin as Selver taught you. Although knowing nothing of electricity he could not really grasp the principle of the EEG, as soon as he heard about alpha waves and when they appear he had said, "Oh yes, you mean this," and there appeared the unmistakable alpha-squiggles on the graph recording what went on inside his small green head; and he had taught Lyubov how to turn on and off the alpha-rhythms in one half-hour lesson. There really was nothing to it. But not now, the world is too much with us, ow, ow, ow above the right ear I always hear Time's winged chariot hurrying near, for the Athsheans had burned Smith Camp day before yesterday and killed two hundred men. Two hundred and seven to be precise. Every man alive except the Captain. No wonder pills couldn't get at the center of his migraine, for it was on an island two hundred miles away two days ago. Over the hills and far away. Ashes, ashes, all fall down. And among the ashes, all his knowledge of the High Intelligence Life Forms of World 41. Dust, rubbish, a mess of false data and fake hypotheses. Nearly five E-years here, and he had believed the Athsheans to be incapable of killing men, his kind or their kind. He had written long papers to explain how and why they couldn't kill men. All wrong. Dead wrong.

What had he failed to see?

It was nearly time to be going over to the meeting at HQ. Cautiously Lyubov stood up, moving all in one piece so that the right side of his head would not fall off; he approached his desk with the gait of a man underwater, poured out a shot of General Issue vodka, and drank it. It turned him inside out: it extraverted him: it normalized him. He felt better. He went out, and unable to stand the jouncing of his motorbike, started to walk down the long, dusty main street of Centralville to HQ.

Passing the Luau, he thought with greed of another vodka; but Captain Davidson was just going in the door, and Lyubov went on.

The people from the Shackleton were already in the conference room.

Commander Yung, whom he had met before, had brought some new faces down from orbit this time. They were not in Navy uniform; after a moment Lyubov recognized them, with a slight shock, as non-Terran humans. He sought an introduction at once.

One, Mr. Or, was a Hairy Cetian, dark gray, stocky, and dour; the other, Mr. Lepennon, was tall, white, and comely: a Hainishman. They greeted Lyubov with interest, and Lepennon said, "I've just been reading your report on the conscious control of paradoxical sleep among the Athsheans, Dr. Lyubov," which was pleasant, and it was pleasant also to be called by his own, earned title of doctor. Their conversation indicated that they had spent some years on Earth, and that they might be hilfers, or something like it; but the Commander, introducing them, had not mentioned their status or position.

The room was filling up. Gosse, the colony ecologist, came in; so did all the high brass; so did Captain Susun, head of Planet Development—logging operations— whose captaincy like Lyubov’s was an invention necessary to the peace of the military mind. Captain Davidson came in alone, straight-backed and handsome, his lean, rugged face calm and rather stern. Guards stood at all the doors. The Army necks were all stiff as crowbars. The conference was plainly an Investigation. Whose fault? My fault, Lyubov thought despairingly; but out of his despair he looked across the table at Captain Don Davidson with detestation and contempt.

Commander Yung had a very quiet voice. “As you know, gentlemen, my ship stopped here at World 41 to drop you off a new load of colonists, and nothing more; Shackleton’s mission is to World 88, Prestno, one of the Hainish Group. However, this attack on your outpost camp, since it chanced to occur during our week here, can’t be simply ignored; particularly in the light of certain developments which you would have been informed of a little later, in the normal course of events. The fact is that the status of World 41 as an Earth Colony is now subject to revision, and the massacre at your camp may precipitate the Administration’s decisions on it. Certainly the decisions we can make must be made quickly, for I can’t keep my ship here long.

Now first, we wish to make sure that the relevant facts are all in the possession of those present. Captain Davidson’s report on the events at Smith Camp was taped and heard by all of us on ship; by all of you here also? Good. Now if there are questions any of you wish to ask Captain Davidson, go ahead. I have one myself. You returned to the site of the camp the following day, Captain Davidson, in a large hopper with eight soldiers; had you the permission of a senior officer here at Central for that flight?”

Davidson stood up. “I did, sir.”

“Were you authorized to land and to set fires in the forest near the campsite?”

“No, sir.”

“You did, however, set fires?”

“I did, sir. I was trying to smoke out the creechies that killed my men.”

“Very well. Mr. Lepennon?”

The tall Hainishman cleared his throat. “Captain Davidson,” he said, “do you think that the people under your command at Smith Camp were mostly content?”

“Yes, I do.”

Davidson’s manner was firm and forthright; he seemed indifferent to the fact that he was in trouble. Of course these Navy officers and foreigners had no authority over him; it was to his own Colonel that he must answer for losing two hundred men and making unauthorized reprisals. But his Colonel was right there, listening.

“They were well fed, well housed, not overworked, then, as well as can be managed in a frontier camp?”

“Yes.”

“Was the discipline maintained very harsh?”

“No, it was not.”

“What, then, do you think motivated the revolt?”

“I don’t understand.”

“If none of them were discontented, why did some of them massacre the rest and destroy the camp?”

There was a worried silence.

“May I put in a word,” Lyubov said. “It was the native hilfs, the Athsheans employed in the camp, who joined with an attack by the forest people against the Terran humans. In his report Captain Davidson referred to the Athsheans as ‘creechies.’ ”

Lepennon looked embarrassed and anxious.

“Thank you, Dr. Lyubov. I misunderstood entirely. Actually I took the word ‘creechie’ to stand for a Terran caste that did rather menial work in the logging camps. Believing, as we all did, that the Athsheans were intraspecies non-aggressive, I never thought they might be the group meant. In fact I didn’t realize that they cooperated with you in your camps.— However, I am more at a loss than ever to understand what provoked the attack and mutiny.”

“I don’t know, sir.”

“When he said the people under his command were content, did the Captain include native people?” said the Cetian, Or, in a dry mumble. The Hainishman picked it up at once, and asked Davidson, in his concerned, courteous voice, “Were the Athsheans living at the camp content, do you think?”

“So far as I know.”

“There was nothing unusual in their position there, or the work they had to do?”

Lyubov felt the heightening of tension, one turn of the screw, in Colonel Dongh and his staff, and also in the starship commander. Davidson remained calm and easy.

“Nothing unusual.”

Lyubov knew now that only his scientific studies had been sent up to the Shackleton; his protests, even his annual assessments of “Native Adjustment to Colonial Presence” required by the Administration, had been kept in some desk drawer deep in HQ. These two N.-T.H.’s knew nothing about the exploitation of the Athsheans. Commander Yung did, of course; he had been down before today and had probably seen the creechie-pens. In any case a Navy commander on Colony runs

wouldn't have much to learn about Terran-hilf relations. Whether or not he approved of how the Colonial Administration ran its business, not much would come as a shock to him. But a Cetian and a Hainishman, how much would they know about Terran colonies, unless chance brought them to one on the way to somewhere else?

Lepennon and Or had not intended to come on-planet here at all. Or possibly they had not been intended to come on-planet, but, hearing of trouble, had insisted. Why had the commander brought them down: his will, or theirs? Whoever they were, they had about them a hint of authority, a whiff of the dry, intoxicating odor of power.

Lyubov's headache had gone, he felt alert and excited, his face was rather hot.

"Captain Davidson," he said,

"I have a couple of questions concerning your confrontation with the four natives day before yesterday. You're certain that one of them was Sam, or Selver Thele?"

"I believe so."

"You're aware that he has a personal grudge against you."

"I don't know."

"You don't? Since his wife died in your quarters immediately subsequent to sexual intercourse with you, he holds you responsible for her death; you didn't know that? He attacked you once before, here in Centralville; you had forgotten that? Well, the point is, that Selver's personal hatred for Captain Davidson may serve as a partial explanation or motivation for this unprecedented assault. The Athsheans aren't incapable of personal violence, that's never been asserted in any of my studies of them. Adolescents who haven't mastered controlled dreaming or competitive singing do a lot of wrestling and fist-fighting, not all of it good-tempered. But Selver is an adult and an adept; and his first, personal attack on Captain Davidson, which I happened to witness part of, was pretty certainly an attempt to kill. As was the Captain's retaliation, incidentally. At the time, I thought that attack an isolated psychotic incident, resulting from grief and stress, not likely to be repeated. I was wrong.— Captain, when the four Athsheans jumped you from ambush, as you describe in your report, did you end up prone on the ground?"

"Yes."

"In what position?"

Davidson's calm face tensed and stiffened, and Lyubov felt a pang of compunction. He wanted to corner Davidson in his lies, to force him into speaking truth once, but not to humiliate him before others. Accusations of rape and murder supported Davidson's image of himself as the totally virile man, but now that image was endangered: Lyubov had called up a picture of him, the soldier, the fighter, the cool tough man, being knocked down by enemies the size of six-year-olds...What did it cost Davidson, then, to recall that moment when he had lain looking up at the little green men, for once, not down at them?

“I was on my back.”

“Was your head thrown back, or turned aside?”

“I don’t know.”

“I’m trying to establish a fact here, Captain, one that might help explain why Selver didn’t kill you, although he had a grudge against you and had helped kill two hundred men a few hours earlier. I wondered if you might by chance have been in one of the positions which, when assumed by an Athshean, prevent his opponent from further physical aggression.”

“I don’t know.”

Lyubov glanced round the conference table; all the faces showed curiosity and some tension. “These aggression-halting gestures and positions may have some innate basis, may rise from a surviving trigger-response, but they are socially developed and expanded, and of course learned. The strongest and completest of them is a prone position, on the back, eyes shut, head turned so the throat is fully exposed. I think an Athshean of the local cultures might find it impossible to hurt an enemy who took that position. He would have to do something else to release his anger or aggressive drive. When they had all got you down, Captain, did Selver by any chance sing?”

“Did he what?”

“Sing.”

“I don’t know.”

Block. No go. Lyubov was about to shrug and give it up when the Cetian said, “Why, Mr. Lyubov?” The most winning characteristic of the rather harsh Cetian temperament was curiosity, inopportune and inexhaustible curiosity; Cetians died eagerly, curious as to what came next.

“You see,” Lyubov said, “the Athsheans use a kind of ritualised singing to replace physical combat. Again it’s a universal social phenomenon that might have a physiological foundation, though it’s very hard to establish anything as ‘innate’ in human beings. However the higher primates here all go in for vocal competing between two males, a lot of howling and whistling; the dominant male may finally give the other a cuff, but usually they just spend an hour or so trying to outbellow each other. The Athsheans themselves see the similarity to their singing-matches, which are also only between males; but as they observe, theirs are not only aggression-releases, but an art-form. The better artist wins. I wondered if Selver sang over Captain Davidson, and if so, whether he did because he could not kill, or because he preferred the bloodless victory. These questions have suddenly become rather urgent.”

“Dr. Lyubov,” said Lepennon, “how effective are these aggression-channeling devices? Are they universal?”

“Among adults, yes. So my informants state, and all my observation supported them, until day before yesterday. Rape, violent assault, and murder virtually don’t exist among them. There are accidents, of course. And there are psychotics. Not many of the latter.”

“What do they do with dangerous psychotics?”

“Isolate them. Literally. On small islands.”

“The Athsheans are carnivorous, they hunt animals?”

“Yes, meat is a staple.”

“Wonderful,” Lepennon said, and his white skin paled further with pure excitement. “A human society with an effective war-barrier! What’s the cost, Dr. Lyubov?”

“I’m not sure, Mr. Lepennon. Perhaps change. They’re a static, stable, uniform society. They have no history. Perfectly integrated, and wholly unprogressive. You might say that like the forest they live in, they’ve attained a climax state. But I don’t mean to imply that they’re incapable of adaptation.”

“Gentlemen, this is very interesting but in a somewhat specialist frame of reference, and it may be somewhat out of the context which we’re attempting to clarify here—”

“No, excuse me, Colonel Dongh, this may be the point. Yes, Dr. Lyubov?”

“Well, I wonder if they’re not proving their adaptability, now. By adapting their behavior to us. To the Earth Colony. For four years they’ve behaved to us as they do to one another. Despite the physical differences, they recognized us as members of their species, as men. However, we have not responded as members of their species should respond. We have ignored the responses, the rights and obligations of non- violence. We have killed, raped, dispersed, and enslaved the native humans, destroyed their communities, and cut down their forests. It wouldn’t be surprising if they’d decided that we are not human.”

“And therefore can be killed, like animals, yes yes,” said the Cetian, enjoying logic; but Lepennon’s face now was stiff as white stone. “Enslaved?” he said.

“Captain Lyubov is expressing his personal opinions and theories,” said Colonel Dongh, “which I should state I consider possibly to be erroneous, and he and I have discussed this type of thing previously, although the present context is unsuitable. We do not employ slaves, sir. Some of the natives serve a useful role in our community.

The Voluntary Autochthonous Labor Corps is a part of all but the temporary camps here. We have very limited personnel to accomplish our tasks here and we need workers and use all we can get, but on any kind of basis that could be called a slavery basis, certainly not.”

Lepennon was about to speak, but deferred to the Cetian, who said only, “How many of each race?”

Gosse replied:

“2641 Terrans, now. Lyubov and I estimate the native hilf population very roughly at 3 million.”

“You should have considered these statistics, gentlemen, before you altered the native traditions!” said Or, with a disagreeable but perfectly genuine laugh.

“We are adequately armed and equipped to resist any type of aggression these natives could offer,” said the Colonel. “However there was a general consensus by both the first Exploratory Missions and our own research staff of specialists here headed by Captain Lyubov, giving us to understand that the New Tahitians are a primitive, harmless, peace-loving species. Now this information was obviously erroneous—”

Or interrupted the Colonel. “Obviously! You consider the human species to be primitive, harmless, and peace-loving, Colonel? No. But you knew that the hilfs of this planet are human? As human as you or I or Lepennon—since we all came from the same, original, Hainish stock?”

“That is the scientific theory, I am aware—”

“Colonel, it is the historic fact.”

“I am not forced to accept it as a fact,” the old Colonel said, getting hot, “and I don’t like opinions stuffed into my own mouth. The fact is that these creechies are a meter tall, they’re covered with green fur, they don’t sleep, and they’re not human beings in my frame of reference!”

“Captain Davidson,” said the Cetian, “do you consider the native hilfs human, or not?”

“I don’t know.”

“But you had sexual intercourse with one—this Selver’s wife. Would you have sexual intercourse with a female animal? What about the rest of you?” He looked about at the purple colonel, the glowering majors, the livid captains, the cringing specialists. Contempt came into his face. “You have not thought things through,” he said. By his standards it was a brutal insult.

The Commander of the Shackleton at last salvaged words from the gulf of embarrassed silence. “Well, gentlemen, the tragedy at Smith Camp clearly is involved with the entire colony-native relationship, and is not by any means an insignificant or isolated episode. That’s what we had to establish. And this being the case, we can make a certain contribution toward easing your problems here. The main purpose of our journey was not to drop off a couple of hundred girls here, though I know you’ve been waiting for ’em, but to get to Prestno, which has been having some difficulties, and give the government there an ansible. That is, an ICD transmitter.”

“What?” said Sereng, an engineer. Stares became fixed, all round the table.

“The one we have aboard is an early model, and it cost a planetary annual revenue, roughly. That, of course, was twenty-seven years ago planetary time, when we left Earth. Nowadays they’re making them relatively cheaply; they’re SI on Navy ships; and in the normal course of things a robo or manned ship would be coming out here to give your colony one. As a matter of fact it’s a manned Administration ship, and is on the way, due here in 9.4 E-years if I recall the figure.”

“How do you know that?” somebody said, setting it up for Commander Yung, who replied smiling, “By the ansible: the one we have aboard. Mr. Or, your people invented the device, perhaps you’d explain it to those here who are unfamiliar with the terms?”

The Cetian did not unbend. "I shall not attempt to explain the principles of ansible operation to those present," he said. "Its effect can be stated simply: the instantaneous transmission of a message over any distance. One element must be on a large-mass body, the other can be anywhere in the cosmos. Since arrival in orbit the Shackleton has been in daily communication with Terra, now twenty-seven lightyears distant.

The message does not take 54 years for delivery and response, as it does on an electromagnetic device. It takes no time. There is no more time-gap between worlds."

"As soon as we came out of NAFAL time-dilatation into planetary space-time, here, we rang up home, as you might say," the soft-voice Commander went on. "And were told what had happened during the twenty-seven years we were traveling. The time-gap for bodies remains, but the information lag does not. As you can see, this is as important to us as an interstellar species, as speech itself was to us earlier in our evolution. It'll have the same effect: to make a society possible."

"Mr. Or and I left Earth, twenty-seven years ago, as Legates for our respective governments, Tau II and Hain," said Lepennon. His voice was still gentle and civil, but the warmth had gone out of it. "When we left, people were talking about the possibility of forming some kind of league among the civilized worlds, now that communication was possible. The League of Worlds now exists. It has existed for eighteen years. Mr. Or and I are now Emissaries of the Council of the League, and so have certain powers and responsibilities we did not have when we left Earth."

The three of them from the ship kept saying these things: an instantaneous communicator exists, an interstellar supergovernment exists...Believe it or not. They were in league, and lying. This thought went through Lyubov's mind; he considered it, decided it was a reasonable but unwarranted suspicion, a defense-mechanism, and discarded it. Some of the military staff, however, trained to compartmentalize their thinking, specialists in self-defense, would accept it as unhesitatingly as he discarded it. They must believe that anyone claiming a sudden new authority was a liar or conspirator. They were no more constrained than Lyubov, who had been trained to keep his mind open whether he wanted to or not.

"Are we to take all—all this simply on your word, sir?" said Colonel Dongh, with dignity and some pathos; for he, too muddleheaded to compartmentalize neatly, knew that he shouldn't believe Lepennon and Or and Yung, but did believe them, and was frightened.

"No," said the Cetian. "That's done with. A colony like this had to believe what passing ships and outdated radio-messages told them. Now you don't. You can verify. We are going to give you the ansible destined for Prestno. We have League authority to do so. Received, of course, by ansible. Your colony here is in a bad way. Worse than I thought from your reports. Your reports are very incomplete; censorship or stupidity have been at work. Now, however, you'll have the ansible, and can talk with your Terran Administration; you can ask for orders, so you'll know how to proceed. Given the profound changes that have been occurring in the organization of the Terran Government since we left there, I should recommend that you do so at once. There is no longer any excuse for acting on outdated orders; for ignorance; for irresponsible autonomy."

Sour a Cetian and, like milk, he stayed sour. Mr. Or was being overbearing, and Commander Yung should shut him up. But could he? How did an “Emissary of the Council of the League of Worlds” rank? Who’s in charge here, thought Lyubov, and he too felt a qualm of fear. His headache had returned as a sense of constriction, a sort of tight headband over the temples.

He looked across the table at Lepennon’s white, long-fingered hands, lying left over right, quiet, on the bare polished wood of the table. The white skin was a defect to Lyubov’s Earth-formed aesthetic taste, but the serenity and strength of those hands pleased him very much. To the Hainish, he thought, civilization came naturally. They had been at it so long. They lived the social-intellectual life with the grace of a cat hunting in a garden, the certainty of a swallow following summer over the sea. They were experts. They never had to pose, to fake. They were what they were. Nobody seemed to fit the human skin so well. Except, perhaps, the little green men? The deviant, dwarfed, over-adapted, stagnated creechies, who were as absolutely, as honestly, as serenely what they were...

An officer, Benton, was asking Lepennon if he and Or were on this planet as observers for the (he hesitated) League of Worlds, or if they claimed any authority to...Lepennon took him up politely: “We are observers here, not empowered to command, only to report. You are still answerable only to your own government on Earth.”

Colonel Dongh said with relief, “Then nothing has essentially changed—”

“You forget the ansible,” Or interrupted.

“I’ll instruct you in its operation, Colonel, as soon as this discussion is over. You can then consult with your Colonial Administration.”

“Since your problem here is rather urgent, and since Earth is now a League member and may have changed the Colonial Code somewhat during recent years, Mr. Or’s advice is both proper and timely. We should be very grateful to Mr. Or and Mr. Lepennon for their decision to give this Terran colony the ansible destined for Prestno. It was their decision; I can only applaud it. Now, one more decision remains to be made, and this one I have to make, using your judgment as my guide. If you feel the colony is in imminent peril of further and more massive attacks from the natives, I can keep my ship here for a week or two as a defense arsenal; I can also evacuate the women. No children yet, right?”

“No, sir,” said Gosse. “482 women, now.”

“Well, I have space for 380 passengers; we might crowd a hundred more in; the extra mass would add a year or so to the trip home, but it could be done. Unfortunately that’s all I can do. We must proceed to Prestno; your nearest neighbor, as you know, 1.8 lightyears distant. We’ll stop here on the way home to Terra, but that’s going to be three and a half more E-years at least. Can you stick it out?”

“Yes,” said the Colonel, and others echoed him. “We’ve had warning now and we won’t be caught napping again.”

“Equally,” said the Cetian, “can the native inhabitants stick it out for three and a half Earth-years more?”

“Yes,” said the Colonel. “No,” said Lyubov. He had been watching Davidson’s face, and a kind of panic had taken hold of him.

“Colonel?” said Lepennon, politely.

“We’ve been here four years now and the natives are flourishing. There’s room enough and to spare for all of us, as you can see the planet’s heavily underpopulated and the Administration wouldn’t have cleared it for colonization purposes if that hadn’t been as it is. As for if this entered anyone’s head, they won’t catch us off guard again, we were erroneously briefed concerning the nature of these natives, but we’re fully armed and able to defend ourselves, but we aren’t planning any reprisals. That is expressly forbidden in the Colonial Code, though I don’t know what new rules this new government may have added on, but we’ll just stick to our own as we have been doing and they definitely negative mass reprisals or genocide. We won’t be sending any messages for help out, after all a colony twenty-seven lightyears from home has come out expecting to be on its own and to in fact be completely self-sufficient, and I don’t see that the ICD really changes that, due to ship and men and material still have to travel at near lightspeed. We’ll just keep on shipping the lumber home, and look out for ourselves. The women are in no danger.”

“Mr. Lyubov?” said Lepennon.

“We’ve been here four years. I don’t know if the native human culture will survive four more. As for the total land ecology, I think Gosse will back me if I say that we’ve irrecoverably wrecked the native life-systems on one large island, have done great damage on this subcontinent Sornol, and if we go on logging at the present rate, may reduce the major habitable lands to desert within ten years. This isn’t the fault of the colony’s HQ or Forestry Bureau; they’ve simply been following a Development Plan drawn up on Earth without sufficient knowledge of the planet to be exploited, its life-systems, or its native human inhabitants.”

“Mr. Gosse?” said the polite voice.

“Well, Raj, you’re stretching things a bit. There’s no denying that Dump Island, which was overlogged in direct contravention to my recommendations, is a dead loss. If more than a certain percentage of the forest is cut over a certain area, then the fibreweed doesn’t reseed, you see, gentlemen, and the fibreweed root-system is the main soil-binder on clear land; without it the soil goes dusty and drifts off very fast under wind-erosion and the heavy rainfall. But I can’t agree that our basic directives are at fault, so long as they’re scrupulously followed. They were based on careful study of the planet. We’ve succeeded, here on Central, by following the Plan: erosion is minimal, and the cleared soil is highly arable. To log off a forest doesn’t, after all, mean to make a desert—except perhaps from the point of view of a squirrel. We can’t forecast precisely how the native forest life-systems will adapt to a new woodland- prairie-plowland ambiance foreseen in the Development Plan, but we know the chances are good for a large percentage of adaptation and survival.”

“That’s what the Bureau of Land Management said about Alaska during the First Famine,” said Lyubov. His throat had tightened so that his voice came out high and husky. He had counted on Gosse for support. “How many Sitka spruce have you seen in your lifetime, Gosse? Or snowy owl? or wolf?”

or Eskimo? The survival percentage of native Alaskan species in habitat, after 15 years of the Development Program, was .3%. It's now zero.—A forest ecology is a delicate one. If the forest perishes, its fauna may go with it. The Athsanean word for world is also the word for forest. I submit, Commander Yung, that though the colony may not be in imminent danger, the planet is—”

“Captain Lyubov,” said the old Colonel, “such submissions are not properly submitted by staff specialist officers to officers of other branches of the service but should rest on the judgment of the senior officers of the Colony, and I cannot tolerate any further such attempts as this to give advice without previous clearance.”

Caught off guard by his own outburst, Lyubov apologized and tried to look calm.

If only he didn't lose his temper, if his voice didn't go weak and husky, if he had poise...

The Colonel went on. “It appears to us that you made some serious erroneous judgments concerning the peacefulness and non-aggressiveness of the natives here, and because we counted on this specialist description of them as non-aggressive is why we left ourselves open to this terrible tragedy at Smith Camp, Captain Lyubov. So I think we have to wait until some other specialists in hilfs have had time to study them, because evidently your theories were basically erroneous to some extent.”

Lyubov sat and took it. Let the men from the ship see them all passing the blame around like a hot brick: all the better. The more dissension they showed, the likelier were these Emissaries to have them checked and watched over. And he was to blame; he had been wrong. To hell with my self-respect so long as the forest people get a chance, Lyubov thought, and so strong a sense of his own humiliation and self- sacrifice came over him that tears rose to his eyes.

He was aware that Davidson was watching him.

He sat up stiff, the blood hot in his face, his temples drumming. He would not be sneered at by that bastard Davidson. Couldn't Or and Lepennon see what kind of man Davidson was, and how much power he had here, while Lyubov's powers, called “advisory,” were simply derisory? If the colonists were left to go on with no check on them but a super-radio, the Smith Camp massacre would almost certainly become the excuse for systematic aggression against the natives. Bacteriological extermination, most likely. The Shackleton would come back in three and a half or four years to “New Tahiti,” and find a thriving Terran colony, and no more Creechie Problem.

None at all. Pity about the plague, we took all precautions required by the Code, but it must have been some kind of mutation, they had no natural resistance, but we did manage to save a group of them by transporting them to the New Falkland Isles in the southern hemisphere and they're doing fine there, all sixty-two of them...

The conference did not last much longer. When it ended he stood up and leaned across the table to Lepennon. “You must tell the League to do something to save the forests, the forest people,” he said almost inaudibly, his throat constricted, “you must, please, you must.”

The Hainishman met his eyes; his gaze was reserved, kindly, and deep as a well.

He said nothing.

Chapter Four

IT was unbelievable. They'd all gone insane. This damned alien world had sent them all right round the bend, into goodbye dreamland, along with the creechies. He still wouldn't believe what he'd seen at that 'conference' and the briefing after it, if he saw it all over again on film. A Starfleet ship's commander bootlicking two humanoids. Engineers and techs cooing and oooing over a fancy radio presented to them by a Hairy Cetian with a lot of sneering and boasting, as if ICD's hadn't been predicted by Terran science years ago! The humanoids had stolen the idea, implemented it, and called it an 'ansible' so nobody would realize it was just an ICD.

But the worst part of it had been the conference, with that psycho Lyubov raving and crying, and Colonel Dongh letting him do it, letting him insult Davidson and HQ staff and the whole Colony; and all the time the two aliens sitting and grinning, the little gray ape and the big white fairy, sneering at humans.

It had been pretty bad. It hadn't got any better since the Shackleton left. He didn't mind being sent down to New Java Camp under Major Muhamed. The Colonel had to discipline him; old Ding Dong might actually be very happy about that fire-raid he'd pulled in reprisal on Smith Island, but the raid had been a breach of discipline and he had to reprimand Davidson. All right, rules of the game. But what wasn't in the rules was this stuff coming over that overgrown TV set they called the ansible—their new little tin god at HQ.

Orders from the Bureau of Colonial Administration in Karachi: Restrict Terran- Athshean contact to occasions arranged by Athsheans. In other words you couldn't go into a creechie warren and round up a work-force any more. Employment of volunteer labor is not advised; employment of forced labor is forbidden. More of same. How the hell were they supposed to get the work done? Did Earth want this wood or didn't it? They were still sending the robot cargo ships to New Tahiti, weren't they, four a year, each carrying about 30 million new-dollars worth of prime lumber back to Mother Earth. Sure the Development people wanted those millions.

They were businessmen. These messages weren't coming from them, any fool could see that.

The colonial status of World 41—why didn't they call it New Tahiti any more?— is under consideration. Until decision is reached colonists should observe extreme caution in all dealings with native inhabitants...The use of weapons of any kind except small side-arms carried in self-defense is absolutely forbidden—just as on Earth, except that there a man couldn't even carry side-arms any more. But what the hell was the use coming twenty-seven lightyears to a frontier world and then get told no guns, no firejelly, no bugbombs, no, no, just sit like nice little boys and let the creechies come spit in your faces and sing songs at you and then stick a knife in your guts and burn down your camp, but don't you hurt the cute little green fellers, no sir!

A policy of avoidance is strongly advised; a policy of aggression or retaliation is strictly forbidden.

That was the gist of all the messages actually, and any fool could tell that that wasn't the Colonial Administration talking. They couldn't have changed that much in thirty years. They were practical, realistic men who knew what life was like on frontier planets. It was clear, to anybody who hadn't gone spla from geoshock, that the 'ansible' messages were phonies. They might be planted right in the machine, a whole set of answers to high-probability questions, computer run. The engineers said they could have spotted that; maybe so. In that case the thing did communicate instantaneously with another world. But that world wasn't Earth. Not by a long long shot! There weren't any men typing the answers onto the other end of that little trick: they were aliens, humanoids. Probably Cetians, for the machine was Cetian-made, and they were a smart bunch of devils. They were the kind that might make a real bid for interstellar supremacy. The Hainish would be in the conspiracy with them, of course; all that bleeding-heart stuff in the so-called directives had a Hainish sound to it. What the long-term objective of the aliens was, was hard to guess from here; it probably involved weakening the Terran Government by tying it up in this 'league of worlds' business, until the aliens were strong enough to make an armed takeover. But their plan for New Tahiti was easy to see. They'd let the creechies wipe out the humans for them. Just tie the humans' hands with a lot of fake 'ansible' directives and let the slaughter begin. Humanoids help humanoids: rats help rats.

And Colonel Dongh had swallowed it. He intended to obey orders. He had actually said that to Davidson. "I intend to obey my orders from Terra-HQ, and by God, Don, you'll obey my orders the same way, and in New Java you'll obey Major Muhamed's orders there." He was stupid, old Ding Dong, but he liked Davidson, and Davidson liked him. If it meant betraying the human race to an alien conspiracy then he couldn't obey his orders, but he still felt sorry for the old soldier. A fool, but a loyal and brave one. Not a born traitor like that whining, tattling prig Lyubov. If there was one man he hoped the creechies did get, it was big-dome Raj Lyubov, the alien-lover.

Some men, especially the asiatic forms and hindi types, are actually born traitors.

Not all, but some. Certain other men are born saviors. It just happened to be the way they were made, like being of euraf descent, or like having a good physique; it wasn't anything he claimed credit for. If he could save the men and women of New Tahiti, he would; if he couldn't, he'd make a damn good try; and that was all there was to it, actually.

The women, now, that rankled. They'd pulled out the 10 Collies who'd been in New Java and none of the new ones were being sent out from Centralville. "Not safe yet," HQ bleated. Pretty rough on the three outpost camps. What did they expect the outposters to do when it was hands off the she-creechies, and all the she-humans were for the lucky bastards at Central? It was going to cause terrific resentment. But it couldn't last long, the whole situation was too crazy to be stable. If they didn't start easing back to normal now that Shackleton was gone, then Captain D. Davidson would just have to do a little extra work to get things headed back toward normalcy.

The morning of the day he left Central, they had let loose the whole creechie work-force. Made a big noble speech in pidgin, opened the compound gates, and let out every single tame creechie, carriers, diggers, cooks, dustmen, houseboys, maids, the lot. Not one had stayed. Some of them had been with their masters ever since the start of the colony, four E-years ago. But they had no loyalty. A dog, a

chimp would have hung around. These things weren't even that highly developed, they were just about like snakes or rats, just smart enough to turn around and bite you as soon as you let 'em out of the cage. Ding Dong was spla, letting all those creechies loose right in the vicinity. Dumping them on Dump Island and letting them starve would have been actually the best final solution. But Dongh was still panicked by that pair of humanoids and their talky-box. So if the wild creechies on Central were planning to imitate the Smith Camp atrocity, they now had lots of real handy new recruits, who knew the layout of the whole town, the routines, where the arsenal was, where guards were posted, and the rest. If Centralville got burned down, HQ could thank themselves. It would be what they deserved, actually. For letting traitors dupe them, for listening to humanoids and ignoring the advice of men who really knew what the creechies were like.

None of those guys at HQ had come back to camp and found ashes and wreckage and burned bodies, like he had. And Ok's body, out where they'd slaughtered the logging crew, it had had an arrow sticking out of each eye like some sort of weird insect with antennae sticking out feeling the air, Christ, he kept seeing that.

One thing anyhow, whatever the phony 'directives' said, the boys at Central wouldn't be stuck with trying to use 'small side-arms' for self-defense. They had fire throwers and machine guns; the 16 little hoppers had machine guns and were useful for dropping firejelly cans from; the five big hoppers had full armament. But they wouldn't need the big stuff. Just take up a hopper over one of the deforested areas and catch a mess of creechies there, with their damned bows and arrows, and start dropping firejelly cans and watch them run around and burn. It would be all right. It made his belly churn a little to imagine it, just like when he thought about making a woman, or whenever he remembered about when that Sam creechie had attacked him and he had smashed in his whole face with four blows one right after the other. It was eidetic memory plus a more vivid imagination than most men had, no credit due, just happened to be the way he was made.

The fact is, the only time a man is really and entirely a man is when he's just had a woman or just killed another man. That wasn't original, he'd read it in some old books; but it was true. That was why he liked to imagine scenes like that. Even if the creechies weren't actually men.

New Java was the southernmost of the five big lands, just north of the equator, and so was hotter than Central or Smith which were just about perfect climate-wise.

Hotter and a lot wetter. It rained all the time in the wet seasons anywhere on New Tahiti, but in the northern lands it was a kind of quiet fine rain that went on and on and never really got you wet or cold. Down here it came in buckets, and there was a monsoon-type storm that you couldn't even walk in, let alone work in. Only a solid roof kept the rain off you, or else the forest. The damn forest was so thick it kept out the storms. You'd get wet from all the dripping off the leaves, of course, but if you were really inside the forest during one of those monsoons you'd hardly notice the wind was blowing; then you came out in the open and wham! got knocked off your feet by the wind and slobbered all over with the red liquid mud that the rain turned the cleared ground into, and you couldn't duck back into the forest quick enough; and inside the forest it was dark, and hot, and easy to get lost.

Then the C.O., Major Muhamed, was a sticky bastard. Everything at N. J. was done by the book: the logging all in kilo-strips, the fibreweed crap planted in the logged strips, leave to Central granted in strictly non-preferential rotation, hallucinogens rationed and their use on duty punished, and so on and so on. However, one good thing about Muhamed was he wasn't always radioing Central. New Java was his camp, and he ran it his way. He didn't like orders from HQ. He obeyed them all right, he'd let the creechies go, and locked up all the guns except little popgun pistols, as soon as the orders came. But he didn't go looking for orders, or for advice.

Not from Central or anybody else. He was a self-righteous type: knew he was right.

That was his big fault.

When he was on Dongh's staff at HQ Davidson had had occasion sometimes to see the officers' records. His unusual memory held on to such things, and he could recall for instance that Muhamed's IQ was 107. Whereas his own happened to be 118.

There was a difference of 11 points; but of course he couldn't say that to old Moo, and Moo couldn't see it, and so there was no way to get him to listen. He thought he knew better than Davidson, and that was that.

They were all a bit sticky at first, actually. None of these men at N. J. knew anything about the Smith Camp atrocity, except that the camp C.O. had left for Central an hour before it happened, and so was the only human that escaped alive.

Put like that, it did sound bad. You could see why at first they looked at him like a kind of Jonah, or worse, a kind of Judas even. But when they got to know him they'd know better. They'd begin to see that, far from being a deserter or traitor, he was dedicated to preventing the colony of New Tahiti from betrayal. And they'd realize that getting rid of the creechies was going to be the only way to make this world safe for the Terran way of life.

It wasn't too hard to start getting that message across to the loggers. They'd never liked the little green rats, having to drive them to work all day and guard them all night; but now they began to understand that the creechies were not only repulsive but dangerous. When Davidson told them what he'd found at Smith; when he explained how the two humanoids on the Fleet ship had brainwashed HQ; when he showed them that wiping out the Terrans on New Tahiti was just a small part of the whole alien conspiracy against Earth; when he reminded them of the cold hard figures, twenty-five hundred humans to three million creechies—then they began to really get behind him.

Even the Ecological Control Officer here was with him. Not like poor old Kees, mad because men shot red deer and then getting shot in the guts himself by the sneaking creechies. This fellow, Atranda, was a creechie-hater. Actually he was kind of spla about them, he had geoshock or something; he was so afraid the creechies were going to attack the camp that he acted like some woman afraid of getting raped.

But it was useful to have the local spesh on his side anyhow.

No use trying to line up the C.O.; a good judge of men, Davidson had seen it was no use almost at once. Muhamed was rigid-minded. Also he had a prejudice against Davidson which he wouldn't drop; it had something to do with the Smith Camp affair. He as much as told Davidson he didn't consider him a trustworthy officer.

He was a self-righteous bastard, but his running N.J. camp on such rigid lines was an advantage. A tight organization, used to obeying orders, was easier to take over than a loose one full of independent characters, and easier to keep together as a unit for defensive and offensive military operations, once he was in command. He would have to take command. Moo was a good logging-camp boss, but no soldier.

Davidson kept busy getting some of the best loggers and junior officers really firmly with him. He didn't hurry. When he had enough of them he could really trust, a squad of ten lifted a few items from old Moo's locked-up room in the Rec House basement full of war toys, and then went off one Sunday into the woods to play.

Davidson had located the creechie town some weeks ago, and had saved up the treat for his men. He could have done it singlehanded, but it was better this way. You got the sense of comradeship, of a real bond among men. They just walked into the place in broad open daylight, and coated all the creechies caught above-ground with firejelly and burned them, then poured kerosene over the warren-roofs and roasted the rest. Those that tried to get out got jellied; that was the artistic part, waiting at the rat-holes for the little rats to come out, letting them think they'd made it, and then just frying them from the feet up so they made torches. That green fur sizzled like crazy.

It actually wasn't much more exciting than hunting real rats, which were about the only wild animals left on Mother Earth, but there was more thrill to it; the creechies were a lot bigger than rats, and you knew they could fight back, though this time they didn't. In fact some of them even lay down instead of running away, just lay there on their backs with their eyes shut. It was sickening. The other fellows thought so too, and one of them actually got sick and vomited after he'd burned up one of the lying-down ones.

Hard up as the men were, they didn't leave even one of the females alive to rape.

They had all agreed with Davidson beforehand that it was too damn near perversity.

Homosexuality was with other humans, it was normal. These things might be built like human women but they weren't human, and it was better to get your kicks from killing them, and stay clean. That had made good sense to all of them, and they stuck to it.

Every one of them kept his trap shut back at camp, no boasting even to their buddies. They were sound men. Not a word of the expedition got to Muhamed's ears. So far as old Moo knew, all his men were good little boys just sawing up logs and keeping away from creechies, yes sir; and he could go on believing that until D-Day came.

For the creechies would attack. Somewhere. Here, or one of the camps on King Island, or Central. Davidson knew that. He was the only officer in the entire colony that did know it. No credit due, he

just happened to know he was right. Nobody else had believed him, except these men here whom he'd had time to convince. But the others would all see, sooner or later, that he was right.

And he was right.

Other Suggested Works by Ursula K Le Guin

Novels:

The Dispossessed

The Lathe of Heaven

The Left Hand of Darkness

The Earthsea Cycle:

A Wizard of Earthsea

The Tombs of Atuan

The Farthest Shore

Tehanu

Tales from Earthsea

The Other Wind

Short Stories:

“The Ones Who Walked Away From Omelas”

“She Unnames Them”

“The Wife’s Story”



Ursula K Le Guin was born in Berkeley, California on October 21, 1929. She was first published in 1959, and her literary career lasted nearly sixty years, resulting in more than 20 novels and over a hundred short stories. Adopted by the anarchist community for her portrayal of communities and societies that function without coercive structures, as well as her explicit criticism of capitalism and its exploitative nature, Ursula was an incredibly important figure in feminist circles and one of the first women to break out in the otherwise male-dominated literary genres. She's won a number of awards, including the prestigious Hugo award and the Nebula awards for her book *The Left Hand of Darkness*. She was also a committed and generous community activist, a fighter for feminism, peace, freedom of speech, access to knowledge for everyone, and radical democracy. She died at the age of 88 in Portland, Oregon on January 22, 2018.

“We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art, the art of words.”

—Ursula K. Le Guin in her 2014 speech accepting the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters



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