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Title: Anchorite

Author: Randall Garrett

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Release date: November 20, 2007 [eBook #23561]

Most recently updated: January 18, 2009

Language: English

\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ANCHORITE \*\*\*

E-text prepared by Greg Weeks, Mary Meehan,  
and the Project Gutenberg Online Distributed Proofreading Team  
(<http://www.pgdp.net>)

### Transcriber's Note:

This etext was produced from *Analog Science Fact Science Fiction*, November, 1962.  
Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication  
was renewed.

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# Anchorite

by **Johnathan Blake Mackenzie**

Illustrated by **Schelling**

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There are two basic kinds of fools—the ones who know they are fools, and the kind  
that, because they do not know that, are utterly deadly menaces!

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The mountain was spinning.

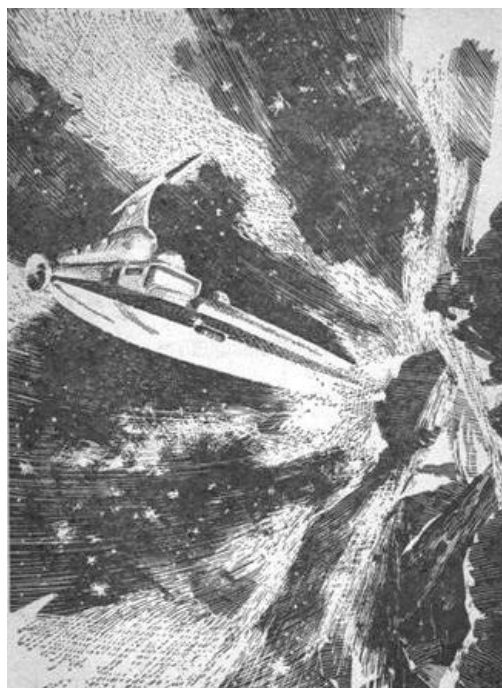
Not dizzily, not even rapidly, but very perceptibly, the great mass of jagged rock was turning on its axis.

Captain St. Simon scowled at it. "By damn, Jules," he said, "if you can see 'em spinning, it's too damn fast!" He expected no answer, and got none.

He tapped the drive pedal gently with his right foot, his gaze shifting alternately from the instrument board to the looming hulk of stone before him. As the little spacecraft moved in closer, he tapped the reverse pedal with his left foot. He was now ten meters from the surface of the asteroid. It was moving, all right. "Well, Jules," he said in his most commanding voice, "we'll see just how fast she's moving. Prepare to fire Torpedo Number One!"

"Yassuh, boss! Yassuh, Cap'n Sain' Simon, suh! All ready on the firin' line!"

He touched a button with his right thumb. The ship quivered almost imperceptibly as a jet of liquid leaped from the gun mounted in the nose of the ship. At the same time, he hit the reverse pedal and backed the ship away from the asteroid's surface. No point getting any more gunk on the hull than necessary.



The jet of liquid struck the surface of the rotating mountain and splashed, leaving a big splotch of silvery glitter. Even in the vacuum of space, the silicone-based solvents of the paint vehicle took time to boil off.

"How's that for pinpoint accuracy, Jules?"

"Veddy good, M'lud. Top hole, if I may say so, m'lud."

"You may." He jockeyed the little spacecraft around until he was reasonably stationary with respect to the great hunk of whirling rock and had the silver-white blotch centered on the crosshairs of the peeper in front of him. Then he punched the button that started the timer and waited for the silver spot to come round again.

The asteroid was roughly spherical—which was unusual, but not remarkable. The radar gave him the distance from the surface of the asteroid, and he measured the diameter and punched it through the calculator. "Observe," he said in a dry, didactic voice. "The diameter is on the order of five times ten to the fourteenth micromicrons." He kept punching at the calculator. "If we assume a mean density of two point six six times ten to the minus thirty-sixth metric tons per cubic micromicron, we attain a mean mass of some one point seven four times ten to the eleventh kilograms." More punching, while he kept his eye on the meteorite, waiting for the spot to show up again. "And that, my dear Jules, gives us a surface gravity of approximately two times ten to the minus sixth standard gees."

"*Jawohl, Herr Oberstleutnant.*"

"Und zo, mine dear Chules, ve haff at least der grave zuspicion dot der zurface gravity iss less dan der zentrifugal force at der eqvator! *Nein? Ja! Zo.*"

"*Jawohl, Herr Konzertmeister.*"

Then there was a long, silent wait, while the asteroid went its leisurely way around its own axis.

"There it comes," said Captain St. Simon. He kept his eyes on the crosshair of the peeper, one hand over the timer button. When the silver splotch drifted by the crosshair, he punched the stop button and looked at the indicator.

"Sixteen minutes, forty seconds. How handy." He punched at the calculator again. "Ah! You see, Jules! Just as we suspected! Negative gees at the surface, on the equator, comes to ten to the minus third standard gees—almost exactly one centimeter per second squared. So?"

"Ah, so, honorabu copton! Is somesing rike five hundred times as great as gravitationar attraction, is not so?"

"Sukiyaki, my dear chap, sometimes your brilliance amazes me."

Well, at least it meant that there would be no loose rubble on the surface. It would have been tossed off long ago by the centrifugal force, flying off on a tangent to become more of the tiny rubble of the belt. Perhaps "flying" wasn't exactly the right word, though, when applied to a velocity of less than one centimeter per second. *Drifting* off, then.

"What do you think, Jules?" said St. Simon.

"Waal, Ah reckon we can do it, cap'n. Ef'n we go to the one o' them thar poles ... well, let's see—" He leaned over and punched more figures into the calculator. "Ain't that purty! 'Cordin' ter this, thar's a spot at each pole, 'bout a meter in diameter, whar the gee-pull is *greater* than the centry-foogle force!"

Captain St. Simon looked at the figures on the calculator. The forces, in any case, were negligibly small. On Earth, where the surface gravity was ninety-eight per cent of a Standard Gee, St. Simon weighed close to two hundred pounds. Discounting the spin, he would weigh about four ten-thousandths of a pound on the asteroid he was inspecting. The spin at the equator would try to push him off with a force of about two tenths of a pound.

But a man who didn't take those forces into account could get himself killed in the Belt.

"Very well, Jules," he said, "we'll inspect the poles."

"Do you think they vill velcome us in Kraukau, *Herr Erzbischof?*"

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The area around the North Pole—defined as that pole from which the body appears to be spinning counterclockwise—looked more suitable for operations than the South Pole. Theoretically, St. Simon could have stopped the spin, but that would have required an energy expenditure of some twenty-three thousand kilowatt-hours in the first place, and it would have required an anchor to be set somewhere on the equator. Since his purpose in landing on the asteroid was to set just such an anchor, stopping the spin would be a waste of time and energy.

Captain St. Simon positioned his little spacecraft a couple of meters above the North Pole. It would take better than six minutes to fall that far, so he had plenty of time. "Perhaps a boarding party, Mr. Christian! On the double!"

"Aye, sir! On the double it is, sir!"

St. Simon pushed himself over to the locker, took out his vacuum suit, and climbed into it. After checking it thoroughly, he said: "Prepare to evacuate main control room, Mr. Christian!"

"Aye, aye, Sir! All prepared and ready. I hope."

Captain St. Simon looked around to make sure he hadn't left a bottle of coffee sitting somewhere. He'd done that once, and the stuff had boiled out all over everywhere when he pulled the air out of the little room. Nope, no coffee. No obstacles to turning on the pump. He thumbed the button, and the pumps started to whine. The whine built up to a crescendo, then began to die away until finally it could only be felt through the walls or floor. The air was gone.

Then he checked the manometer to make sure that most of the air had actually been pumped back into the reserve tanks. Satisfied, he touched the button that would open the door. There was a faint jar as the remaining wisps of air shot out into the vacuum of space.

St. Simon sat back down at the controls and carefully repositioned the ship. It was now less than a meter from the surface. He pushed himself over to the open door and looked out.

He clipped one end of his safety cable to the steel eye-bolt at the edge of the door. "Fasten on carefully, Jules," he said. "We don't want to lose anything."

"Like what, *mon capitain*?"

"Like this spaceship, *mon petit tête de mouton*."

"Ah, but no, my old and raw; we could not afford to lose the so-dear *Nancy Bell*, could we?"

The other end of the long cable was connected to the belt of the suit. Then St. Simon launched himself out the open door toward the surface of the planetoid. The ship began to drift—very slowly, but not so slowly as it had been falling—off in the other direction.

He had picked the spot he was aiming for. There was a jagged hunk of rock sticking out that looked as though it would make a good handhold. Right nearby, there was a fairly smooth spot that would do to brake his "fall". He struck it with his palm and took up the slight shock with his elbow while his other hand grasped the outcropping.

He had not pushed himself very hard. There is not much weathering on the surface of an asteroid. Micro-meteorites soften the contours of the rock a little over the millions of millennia, but not much, since the debris in the Belt all has roughly the same velocity. Collisions do occur, but they aren't the violent smashes that make the brilliant meteor displays of Earth. (And there is still a standing argument among the men of the Belt as to whether that sort of action can be called "weathering".) Most of the collisions tend to cause fracturing of the surface, which results in jagged edges. A man in a vacuum suit does not push himself against a surface like that with any great velocity.

St. Simon knew to a nicety that he could propel himself against a bed of nails and broken glass at just the right velocity to be able to stop himself without so much as scratching his glove. And he could see that there was no ragged stuff on the spot he had selected. The slanting rays of the sun would have made them stand out in relief.

Now he was clinging to the surface of the mountain of rock like a bug on the side of a cliff. On a nickel-iron asteroid, he could have walked around on the surface, using the magnetic soles of his vacuum suit. But silicate rock is notably lacking in response to that attractive force. No soul, maybe.

But directly and indirectly, that lack of response to magnetic forces was the reason for St. Simon's crawling around on the surface of that asteroid. Directly, because there was no other way he could move about on a nonmetallic asteroid. Indirectly, because there was no way the big space tugs could get a grip on such an asteroid, either.

The nickel-iron brutes were a dead cinch to haul off to the smelters. All a space tug had to do was latch on to one of them with a magnetic grapple and start hauling. There was no such simple answer for the silicate rocks.

The nickel-iron asteroids were necessary. They supplied the building material and the major export of the Belt cities. They averaged around eighty to ninety per cent iron, anywhere from five to twenty per cent nickel, and perhaps half a per cent cobalt, with smatterings of phosphorous, sulfur, carbon, copper, and chromium. Necessary—but not sufficient.

The silicate rocks ran only about twenty-five per cent iron—in the form of nonmagnetic compounds. They averaged eighteen per cent silicon, fourteen per cent magnesium, between one and one point five per cent each of aluminum, nickel, and calcium, and good-sized dollops of sodium, chromium, phosphorous, manganese, cobalt, potassium, and titanium.

But more important than these, as far as the immediate needs of the Belt cities were concerned, was a big, whopping thirty-six per cent oxygen. In the Belt cities, they had soon learned that, physically speaking, the stuff of life was *not* bread. And no matter how carefully oxygen is conserved, no process is one hundred per cent efficient. There will be leakage into space, and that which is lost must be replaced.

There is plenty of oxygen locked up in those silicates; the problem is towing them to the processing plants where the stuff can be extracted.

Captain St. Simon's job was simple. All he had to do was sink an anchor into the asteroid so that the space tugs could get a grip on it. Once he had done that, the rest of the job was up to the tug crew.

He crawled across the face of the floating mountain. At the spot where the North Pole was, he braced himself and then took a quick look around at the *Nancy Bell*. She wasn't moving very fast, he had plenty of time. He took a steel piton out of his tool pack, transferred it to his left hand, and took out a hammer. Then, working carefully, he hammered the piton into a narrow cleft in the rock. Three more of the steel spikes were hammered into the surface, forming a rough quadrilateral around the Pole.

"That looks good enough to me, Jules," he said when he had finished. "Now that we have our little anchors, we can put the monster in."

Then he grabbed his safety line, and pulled himself back to the *Nancy Bell*.

The small craft had floated away from the asteroid a little, but not much. He repositioned it after he got the rocket drill out of the storage compartment.

"Make way for the stovepipe!" he said as he pushed the drill ahead of him, out the door. This time, he pulled himself back to his drilling site by means of a cable which he had attached to one of the pitons.

The setting up of the drill didn't take much time, but it was done with a great deal of care. He set the four-foot tube in the center of the quadrilateral formed by the pitons and braced it in position by attaching lines to the eyes on a detachable collar that encircled the drill. Once the drill started working, it wouldn't need bracing, but until it did, it had to be held down.

All the time he worked, he kept his eyes on his lines and on his ship. The planetoid was turning under him, which made the ship appear to be circling slowly around his worksite. He had to make sure that his lines didn't get tangled or twisted while he was working.

As he set up the bracing on the six-inch diameter drill, he sang a song that Kipling might have been startled to recognize:

*"To the tables down at Mory's,  
To the place where Louie dwells,  
Where it's always double drill and no canteen,  
Sit the Whiffenpoofs assembled,  
With their glasses raised on high,  
And they'll get a swig in Hell from Gunga Din."*

When the drill was firmly based on the surface of the planetoid, St. Simon hauled his way back to his ship along his safety line. Inside, he sat down in the control chair and backed well away from the slowly spinning hunk of rock. Now there was only one thin pair of wires stretching between his ship and the drill on the asteroid.

When he was a good fifty meters away, he took one last look to make sure everything was as it should be.

"Stand by for a broadside!"

"Standing by, sir!"

"You may fire when ready, Gridley!"

"Aye, sir! Rockets away!" His forefinger descended on a button which sent a pulse of current through the pair of wires that trailed out the open door to the drill fifty meters away.

A flare of light appeared on the top of the drill. Almost immediately, it developed into a tongue of rocket flame. Then a glow appeared at the base of the drill and flame began to billow out from beneath the tube. The drill began to sink into the surface, and the planetoid began to move ever so slowly.

The drill was essentially a pair of opposed rockets. The upper one, which tried to push the drill into the surface of the planetoid, developed nearly forty per cent more thrust than the lower one. Thus, the lower one, which was trying to push the drill *off* the rock, was outmatched. It had to back up, if possible. And it was certainly possible; the exhaust flame of the lower rocket easily burrowed a hole that the rocket could back into, while the silicate rock boiled and vaporized in order to get out of the way.

Soon there was no sign of the drill body itself. There was only a small volcano, spewing up gas and liquid from a hole in the rock. On the surface of a good-sized planet, the drill would have built up a little volcanic cone around the lip of the hole, but building a cone like that requires enough gravity to pull the hot matter back to the edge of the hole.

The fireworks didn't last long. The drill wasn't built to go in too deep. A drill of that type could be built which would burrow its way right through a small planetoid, but that was hardly necessary for planting an anchor. Ten meters was quite enough.

Now came the hard work.

On the outside of the *Nancy Bell*, locked into place, was a specially-treated nickel-steel eye-bolt—thirty feet long and eight inches in diameter. There had been ten of them, just as there had been ten drills in the storage locker. Now the last drill had been used, and there was but one eye-bolt left. The *Nancy Bell* would have to go back for more supplies after this job.

The anchor bolts had a mass of four metric tons each. Maneuvering them around, even when they were practically weightless, was no easy job.

St. Simon again matched the velocity of the *Nancy Bell* with that of the planetoid, which had been accelerated by the drill's action. He positioned the ship above the hole which had been drilled into the huge rock. Not directly above it—rocket drills had been known to show spurts of life after they were supposed to be dead. St. Simon had timed the drill, and it had apparently behaved as it should, but there was no need to take chances.

"Fire brigade, stand by!"

"Fire brigade standing by, sir!"

A nozzle came out of the nose of the *Nancy Bell* and peeped over the rim of the freshly-drilled hole.

"Ready! Aim! Squirt!"

A jet of kerosene-like fluosilicone oil shot down the shaft. When it had finished its work, there was little possibility that anything could happen at the bottom. Any unburned rocket fuel would have a hard time catching fire with that stuff soaking into it.

"Ready to lower the boom, Mr. Christian!" bellowed St. Simon.

"Aye, sir! Ready, sir!"

"Lower away!"

His fingers played rapidly over the control board.

Outside the ship, the lower end of the great eye-bolt was released from its clamp, and a small piston gave it a little shove. In a long, slow, graceful arc, it swung away from the hull, swiveling around the pivot clamp that held the eye. The braking effect of the pivot clamp was precisely set to stop the eye-bolt when it was at right angles to the hull. Moving carefully, St. Simon maneuvered the ship until the far end of the bolt was directly over the shaft. Then he nudged the *Nancy Bell* sideways, pushing the bolt down into the planetoid. It grated a couple of times, but between the power of the ship and the mass of the planetoid, there was enough pressure to push it past the obstacles. The rocket drill and the eye-bolt had been designed to work together; the hole made by the first was only a trifle larger than the second. The anchor settled firmly into place.

St. Simon released the clamps that held the eye-bolt to the hull of the ship, and backed away again. As he did, a power cord unreeled, for the eye-bolt was still connected to the vessel electrically.

Several meters away, St. Simon pushed another button. There was no sound, but his practiced eye saw the eye of the anchor quiver. A small explosive charge, set in the buried end of the anchor, had detonated, expanding the far end of the bolt, wedging it firmly in the hole. At the same time, a piston had been forced up a small shaft in the center of the bolt, forcing a catalyst to mix with a fast-setting resin, and extruding the mixture out through half a dozen holes in the side of the bolt. When the stuff set, the anchor was locked securely to the sides of the shaft and thus to the planetoid itself.

St. Simon waited for a few minutes to make sure the resin had set completely. Then he clambered outside again and attached a heavy towing cable to the eye of the anchor, which projected above the surface of the asteroid. Back inside the ship again, he slowly applied power. The cable straightened and pulled at the anchor as the *Nancy Bell* tried to get away from the asteroid.

"Jules, old bunion," he said as he watched the needle of the tension gauge, "we have set her well."

"Yes, m'lud. So it would appear, m'lud."

St. Simon cut the power. "Very good, Jules. Now we shall see if the beeper is functioning as it should." He flipped a switch that turned on the finder pickup, then turned the selector to his own frequency band.

*Beep!* said the radio importantly. *Beep!*

The explosion had also triggered on a small but powerful transmitter built into the anchor. The tugs would be able to find the planetoid by following the beeps.

"Ah, Jules! Success!"

"Yes, m'lud. Success. For the tenth time in a row, this trip. And how many trips does this make?"

"Ah, but who's counting? Think of the money!"

"And the monotony, m'lud. To say nothing of molasses, muchness, and other things that begin with an M."

"Quite so, Jules; quite so. Well, let's detach the towing cable and be on our way."

"Whither, m'lud, Vesta?"

"I rather thought Pallas this time, old thimble."

"Still, m'lud, Vesta—"

"Pallas, Jules."

"Vesta?"

"Hum, hi, ho," said Captain St. Simon thoughtfully. "Pallas?"

The argument continued while the tow cable was detached from the freshly-placed anchor, and while the air was being let back into the control chamber, and while St. Simon divested himself of his suit. Actually, although he would like to go to Vesta, it was out of the question. Energywise and timewise, Pallas was much closer.

He settled back in the bucket seat and shot toward Pallas.

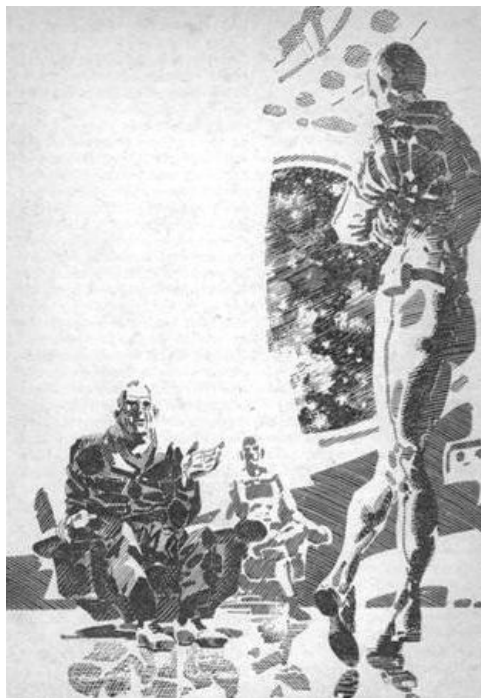
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Mr. Edway Tarnhorst was from San Pedro, Greater Los Angeles, California, Earth. He was a businessman of executive rank, and was fairly rich. In his left lapel was the Magistral Knight's Cross of the Sovereign Hierosolymitan Order of Malta, reproduced in miniature. In his wallet was a card identifying him as a Representative of the Constituency of Southern California to the Supreme Congress of the People of the United Nations of Earth. He was just past his fifty-third birthday, and his lean, ascetic face and graying hair gave him a look of saintly wisdom. Aside from the eight-pointed cross in his lapel, the only ornamentation or jewelry he wore consisted of a small, exquisitely thin gold watch on his left wrist, and, on the ring finger of his left hand, a gold signet ring set with a single, flat, uncut diamond which was delicately engraved with the Tarnhorst coat of arms. His clothing was quietly but impressively expensive, and under Earth gravity would probably have draped impeccably, but it tended to fluff oddly away from his body under a gee-pull only a twentieth of Earth's.

He sat in his chair with both feet planted firmly on the metal floor, and his hands gripping the armrests as though he were afraid he might float off toward the ceiling if he let go. But only his body betrayed his unease; his face was impassive and calm.

The man sitting next to him looked a great deal more comfortable. This was Mr. Peter Danley, who was twenty years younger than Mr. Tarnhorst and looked it. Instead of the Earth-cut clothing that the older man was wearing, he was wearing the close-fitting tights that were the common dress of the Belt cities. His hair was cropped close, and the fine blond strands made a sort of golden halo about his head when the light from the panels overhead shone on them. His eyes were pale blue, and the lashes and eyebrows were so light as to be almost invisible. That effect, combined with his thin-lined, almost lipless mouth, gave his face a rather expressionless expression. He carried himself like a man who was used to low-gravity or null-gravity conditions, but he talked like an Earthman, not a Belt man. The identification card in his belt explained that; he was a pilot on the Earth-Moon shuttle service. In the eyes of anyone from the Belt cities, he was still an Earthman, not a true spaceman. He was looked upon in the same way that the captain of a transatlantic liner might have looked upon the skipper of the Staten Island ferry two centuries before. The very fact that he was seated in a chair gave away his Earth habits.

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The third man was standing, leaning at a slight angle, so that his back touched the wall behind him. He was not tall—five nine—and his face and body were thin. His tanned skin seemed to be stretched tightly over this scanty padding, and in places the bones appeared to be trying to poke their way through to the surface. His ears were small and lay nearly flat against his head, and the hair on his skull was so sparse that the tanned scalp could be easily seen beneath it, although there was no actual bald spot anywhere. Only his large, luminous brown eyes showed that Nature had not skimmed on everything when he was formed. His name was lettered neatly on the outside of the door to the office: Georges Alhamid. In spite of the French spelling, he pronounced the name "George," in the English manner.

He had welcomed the two Earthmen into his office, smiling the automatic smile of the diplomat as he welcomed them to Pallas. As soon as they were comfortably seated—though perhaps that word did not exactly apply to Edway Tarnhorst—Georges Alhamid said:

"Now, gentlemen, what can I do for you?"

He asked it as though he were completely unaware of what had brought the two men to Pallas.

Tarnhorst looked as though he were privately astonished that his host could speak grammatically. "Mr. Alhamid," he began, "I don't know whether you're aware that the industrial death rate here in the Belt has been the subject of a great deal of discussion in both industrial and governmental circles on Earth." It was a half question, and he let it hang in the air, waiting to see whether he got an answer.

"Certainly my office has received a great deal of correspondence on the subject," Alhamid said. His voice sounded as though Tarnhorst had mentioned nothing more serious than a commercial deal. Important, but nothing to get into a heavy sweat over.

Tarnhorst nodded and then held his head very still. His actions betrayed the fact that he was not used to the messages his semicircular canals were sending his brain when he moved his head under low gee.

"Exactly," he said after a moment's pause. "I have 'stat copies of a part of that correspondence. To be specific, the correspondence between your office and the Workers' Union Safety Control Board, and between your office and the Workingman's Compensation Insurance Corporation."

"I see. Well, then, you're fully aware of what our trouble is, Mr. Tarnhorst. I'm glad to see that an official of the insurance company is taking an interest in our troubles."

Tarnhorst's head twitched, as though he were going to shake his head and had thought better of it a fraction of a second too late. It didn't matter. The fluid in his inner ears sloshed anyway.

"I am not here in my capacity as an officer of the Workingman's Compensation Insurance Corporation," he said carefully. "I am here as a representative of the People's Congress."

Alhamid's face showed a mild surprise which he did not feel. "I'm honored, of course, Mr. Tarnhorst," he said, "but you must understand that I am not an official of the government of Pallas."

Tarnhorst's ascetic face betrayed nothing. "Since you have no unified government out here," he said, "I cannot, of course, presume to deal with you in a governmental capacity. I have spoken to the Governor of Pallas, however, and he assures me that you are the man to speak to."

"If it's about the industrial death rate," Alhamid agreed, "then he's perfectly correct. But if you're here as a governmental representative of Earth, I don't understand—"



"Please, Mr. Alhamid," Tarnhorst interrupted with a touch of irritation in his voice. "This is not my first trip to the Belt, nor my first attempt to deal with the official workings of the Confederated Cities."

Alhamid nodded gently. It was, as a matter of fact, Mr. Tarnhorst's second trip beyond the Martian orbit, the first having taken place some three years before. But the complaint was common enough; Earth, with its strong centralized government, simply could not understand the functioning of the Belt Confederacy. A man like Tarnhorst apparently couldn't distinguish between *government* and *business*. Knowing that, Alhamid could confidently predict what the general sense of Tarnhorst's next sentence would be.

"I am well aware," said Tarnhorst, "that the Belt Companies not only have the various governors under their collective thumb, but have thus far prevented the formation of any kind of centralized government. Let us not quibble, Mr. Alhamid; the Belt Companies run the Belt, and that means that I must deal with officials of those companies—such as yourself."

Alhamid felt it necessary to make a mild speech in rebuttal. "I cannot agree with you, Mr. Tarnhorst. I have nothing to do with the government of Pallas or any of the other asteroids. I am neither an elected nor an appointed official of any government. Nor, for that matter, am I an advisor in either an official or unofficial capacity to any government. I do not make the laws designed to keep the peace, nor do I enforce them, except in so far as I am a registered voter and therefore have some voice in those laws in that respect. Nor, again, do I serve any judiciary function in any Belt government, except inasmuch as I may be called upon for jury duty.

"I am a business executive, Mr. Tarnhorst. Nothing more. If you have governmental problems to discuss, then I can't help you, since I'm not authorized to make any decisions for any government."

Edway Tarnhorst closed his eyes and massaged the bridge of his thin nose between thumb and forefinger. "I understand that. I understand that perfectly. But out here, the Companies have taken over certain functions of government, shall we say?"

"Shall we say, rather, that on Earth the government has usurped certain functions which rightfully belong to private enterprise?" Alhamid said gently. "Historically, I think, that is the correct view."

Tarnhorst opened his eyes and smiled. "You may be quite correct. Historically speaking, perhaps, the Earth government has usurped the functions that rightfully belong to kings, dictators, and warlords. To say nothing of local satraps and petty chieftains. Hm-m-m. Perhaps we should return to that? Perhaps we should return to the human suffering that was endemic in those times?"

"You might try it," said Alhamid with a straight face. "Say, one year out of every ten. It would give the people something to look forward to with anticipation and to look back upon with nostalgia." Then he changed his tone. "If you wish to debate theories of government, Mr. Tarnhorst, possibly we could get up a couple of teams. Make a public affair of it. It could be taped and televised here and on Earth, and we could charge royalties on each—"

Peter Danley's blond, blank face became suddenly animated. He looked as though he were trying to suppress a laugh. He almost succeeded. It came out as a cough.

At the same time, Tarnhorst interrupted Alhamid. "You have made your point, Mr. Alhamid," he said in a brittle voice. "Permit me to make mine. I have come to discuss business with you. But, as a member of the Congressional Committee for Industrial Welfare, I am also in search of facts. Proper legislation requires facts, and legislation passed by the Congress will depend to a great extent upon the report on my findings here."

"I understand," said Alhamid. "I'll certainly be happy to provide you with whatever data you want—with the exception of data on industrial processes, of course. That's not mine to give. But anything else—" He gestured with one hand, opening it palm upwards, as though dispensing a gift.

"I'm not interested in industrial secrets," said Tarnhorst, somewhat mollified. "It's a matter of the welfare of your workers. We feel that we should do something to help. As you know, there have been protests from the Worker's Union Safety Control Board and from the Workingman's Compensation Insurance Corporation."

Alhamid nodded. "I know. The insurance company is complaining about the high rate of claims for deaths. They've threatened to raise our premium rates."

"Considering the expense, don't you, as a businessman, think that a fair thing to do?"

"No," Alhamid said. "I have pointed out to them that the total amount of the claims is far less per capita than, for instance, the Steel Construction Workers' Union of Earth. Granted, there are more death claims, but these are more than compensated for by the fact that the claims for disability and hospitalization are almost negligible."

"That's another thing we don't understand," Tarnhorst said carefully. "It appears that not only are the safety precautions insufficient, but the post-accident care is ... er ... inefficient."

"I assure you that what post-accident care there is," Alhamid said, "is quite efficient. But there is a high mortality rate because of the very nature of the job. Do you know anything about anchor-

placing, Mr. Tarnhorst?"

"Very little," Tarnhorst admitted. "That is one of the things I am here to get information on. You used the phrase 'what post-accident care there is'—just how do you mean that?"

"Mr. Tarnhorst, when a man is out in space, completely surrounded by a hard vacuum, *any* accident is very likely to be fatal. On Earth, if a man sticks his thumb in a punch press, he loses his thumb. Out here, if a man's thumb is crushed off while he's in space, he loses his air and his life long before he can bleed to death. Anything that disables a man in space is deadly ninety-nine times out of a hundred.

"I can give you a parallel case. In the early days of oil drilling, wells occasionally caught fire. One of the ways to put them out was to literally blow them out with a charge of nitroglycerine. Naturally, the nitroglycerine had to be transported from where it was made to where it was to be used. Sensibly enough, it was not transported in tank-car lots; it was carried in small special containers by a single man in an automobile, who used the back roads and avoided traffic and stayed away from thickly populated areas—which was possible in those days. In many places these carriers were required to paint their cars red, and have the words *Danger Nitroglycerine* painted on the vehicle in yellow.

"Now, the interesting thing about that situation is that, whereas insurance companies in those days were reluctant to give policies to those men, even at astronomical premium rates, disability insurance cost practically nothing—provided the insured would allow the insertion of a clause that restricted the covered period to those times when he was actually engaged in transporting nitroglycerine. You can see why."

"I am not familiar with explosives," Tarnhorst said. "I take it that the substance is ... er ... easily detonated?"

"That's right," said Alhamid. "It's not only sensitive, but it's unreliable. You might actually drop a jar of the stuff and do nothing but shatter the jar. Another jar, apparently exactly similar, might go off because it got jiggled by a seismic wave from a passing truck half a mile away. But the latter was a great deal more likely than the former."

"Very well," said Tarnhorst after a moment, "I accept that analogy. I'd like to know more about the work itself. What does the job entail, exactly? What safety precautions are taken?"

It required the better part of three hours to explain exactly what an anchor setter did and how he did it—and what safety precautions were being taken. Through it all, Peter Danley just sat there, listening, saying nothing.

Finally, Edway Tarnhorst said: "Well, thank you very much for your information, Mr. Alhamid. I'd like to think this over. May I see you in the morning?"

"Certainly, sir. You're welcome at any time."

"Thank you." The two Earthmen rose from their seats—Tarnhorst carefully, Danley with the ease of long practice. "Would nine in the morning be convenient?"

"Quite convenient. I'll expect you."

Danley glided over to the door and held it open for Tarnhorst. He was wearing magnetic glide-shoes, the standard footwear of the Belt, which had three ball-bearings in the forward part of the sole, allowing the foot to move smoothly in any direction, while the rubber heel could be brought down to act as a brake when necessary. He didn't handle them with the adeptness of a Belt man, but he wasn't too awkward. Tarnhorst was wearing plain magnetic-soled boots—the lift-'em-up-and-lay-'em-down type. He had no intention of having his dignity compromised by shoes that might treacherously scoot out from under him.

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As soon as the door had closed behind them, Georges Alhamid picked up the telephone on his desk and punched a number.

When a woman's voice answered at the other end, he said: "Miss Lehman, this is Mr. Alhamid. I'd like to speak to the governor." There was a pause. Then:

"George? Larry here."

Alhamid leaned back comfortably against the wall. "I just saw your guests, Larry. I spent damn near three hours explaining why it was necessary to put anchors in rocks, how it was done, and why it was dangerous."

"Did you convince him? Tarnhorst, I mean."

"I doubt it. Oh, I don't mean he thinks I'm lying or anything like that. He's too sharp for that. But he *is* convinced that we're negligent, that we're a bunch of barbarians who care nothing about human life."

"You've got to unconvince him, George," the governor said worriedly. "The Belt still isn't self-sufficient enough to be able to afford an Earth embargo. They can hold out longer than we can."

"I know," Alhamid said. "Give us another generation, and we can tell the World Welfare State where to head in—but right now, things are touchy, and you and I are in the big fat middle of it." He paused, rubbing thoughtfully at his lean blade of a nose with a bony forefinger. "Larry, what did you think of that blond nonentity Tarnhorst brought with him?"

"He's not a nonentity," the governor objected gently. "He just looks it. He's Tarnhorst's 'expert' on space industry, if you want my opinion. Did he say much of anything while he was with you?"

"Hardly anything."

"Same here. I have a feeling that his job is to evaluate every word you say and report his evaluation to Tarnhorst. You'll have to be careful."

"I agree," Alhamid said. "But he complicates things. I have a feeling that if I tell Tarnhorst a straight story he'll believe it. He seems to be a pretty shrewd judge. But Danley just might be the case of the man who is dangerous because of his little learning. He obviously knows a devil of a lot more about operations in space than Tarnhorst does, and he's evidently a hand-picked man, so that Tarnhorst will value his opinion. But it's evident that Danley doesn't know anything about space by our standards. Put him out on a boat as an anchor man, and he'd be lucky if he set a single anchor."

"Well, there's not much chance of that. How do you mean, he's dangerous?"

"I'll give you a frinstance. Suppose you've got a complex circuit using alternatic current, and you're trying to explain to a reasonably intelligent man how it works and what it does. If he doesn't know anything about electricity, he mightn't understand the explanation, but he'll believe that you're telling him the truth even if he doesn't understand it. But if he knows the basic theory of direct currents, you're likely to find yourself in trouble because he'll know just enough to see that what you're telling him doesn't jibe with what he already knows. Volts times amperes equal watts, as far as he's concerned, and the term 'power factor' does nothing but confuse him. He knows that copper is a conductor, so he can't see how a current could be cut off by a choke coil. He knows that a current can't pass through an insulator, so a condenser obviously can't be what you say it is. Mentally, he tags you as a liar, and he begins to try to dig in to see how your gadget *really* works."

"Hm-m-m. I see what you mean. Bad." He snorted. "Blast Earthmen, anyway! Have you ever been there?"

"Earth? Nope. By careful self-restraint, I've managed to forego that pleasure so far, Larry. Why?"

"Brrr! It's the feel of the place that I can't stand. I don't mean the constant high-gee; I take my daily exercise spin in the centrifuge just like anyone else, and you soon get used to the steady pull on Earth. I mean the constant, oppressive *psychic* tension, if you see what I mean. The feeling that everyone hates and distrusts everyone else. The curious impression of fear underneath every word and action.

"I'm older than you are, George, and I've lived with a kind of fear all my life—just as you and everyone else in the Belt has. A single mistake can kill out here, and the fear that it will be some fool who makes a mistake that will kill hundreds is always with us. We've learned to live with that kind of fear; we've learned to take steps to prevent any idiot from throwing the wrong switch that would shut down a power plant or open an air lock at the wrong time.

"But the fear on Earth is different. It's the fear that everyone else is out to get you, the fear that someone will stick a figurative knife in your back and reduce you to the basic subsistence level. And that fear is solidly based, believe me. The only way to climb up from basic subsistence is to climb over everyone else, to knock aside those in your way, to get rid of whoever is occupying the position you want. And once you get there, the only way you can hold your position is to make sure that nobody below you gets too big for his britches. The rule is: Pull down those above you, hold down those below you.

"I've seen it, George. The big cities are packed with people whose sole ambition in life is to badger their local welfare worker out of another check—they need new clothes, they need a new bed, they need a new table, they need more food for the new baby, they need this, they need that. All they ever do is *need*! But, of course, they're far to aristocratic to *work*.

"Those who do have ambition have to become politicians—in the worst sense of the word. They have to gain some measure of control over the dispersal of largesse to the mob; they have to get themselves into a position where they can give away other people's money, so that they can get their cut, too.

"And even then, the man who gets to be a big shot doesn't dare show it. Take a look at Tarnhorst. He's probably one of the best of a bad lot. He has his fingers in a lot of business pies which make him money, and he's in a high enough position in the government to enable him to keep some of his money. But his clothing is only a little bit better than the average, just as the man who is on basic subsistence wears clothes that are only a little bit worse than the average. That diamond ring of his is a real diamond, but you can buy imitations that can't be told from the real thing except by an expert, so his diamond doesn't offend anyone by being ostentatious. And it's unafaceted, to eliminate offensive flash.

"All the color has gone out of life on Earth, George. Women held out longer than men did, but

now no man or woman would be caught wearing a bright-colored suit. You don't see any reds or yellows or blues or greens or oranges—only grays and browns and black.

"It's not for me, George. I'd much rather live in fear of the few fools who might pull a stupid trick that would kill me than live in the constant fear of everyone around me, who all want to destroy me deliberately."

"I know what you mean," said Alhamid, "but I think you've put the wrong label on what you're calling 'fear'; there's a difference between fear and having a healthy respect for something that is dangerous but not malignant. That vacuum out there isn't out to 'get' anybody. The only people it kills are the fools who have no respect for it and the neurotics who think that it wants to murder them. You're neither, and I know it."

The governor laughed. "That's the advantage we have over Earthmen, George. We went through the same school of hard knocks together—all of us. And we know how we stack up against each other."

"True," Alhamid said darkly, "but how long will that hold if Tarnhorst closes the school down?"

"That's what you've got to prevent," said the governor flatly. "If you need help, yell."

"I will," Alhamid said. "Very loudly." He hung up, wishing he knew what Tarnhorst—and Danley—had in mind.

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"The trouble with these people, Danley," said Edway Tarnhorst, "is that they have no respect whatever for human dignity. They have a tendency to overlook the basic rights of the individual."

"They're certainly—different," Peter Danley said.

Tarnhorst juggled himself up and down on the easy-chair in which he was seated, as though he could hardly believe that he had weight again. He hated low gee. It made him feel awkward and undignified. The only thing that reminded him that this was not "real" gravity was the faint, but all-pervasive hum of the huge engines that drove the big centrifuge. The rooms had cost more, but they were well worth it, as far as Tarnhorst was concerned.

"How do you mean, 'different'?" he asked almost absently, settling himself comfortably into the cushions.

"I don't know exactly. There's a hardness, a toughness—I can't quite put my finger on it, but it's in the way they act, the way they talk."

"Surely you'd noticed that before?" Tarnhorst asked in mild surprise. "You've met these Belt men on Luna."

"And their women," Danley said with a nod. "But the impact is somewhat more pronounced on their own home ground—seeing them *en masse*."

"Their women!" Tarnhorst said, caught by the phrase. "*Fah!* Bright-colored birds! Giggling children! And no more morals than a common house-cat!"

"Oh, they're not as bad as all that," Danley objected. "Their clothing is a little bright, I'll admit, and they laugh and kid around a lot, but I wouldn't say that their morals were any worse than those of a girl from New York or London."

"Arrogance is the word," said Tarnhorst. "Arrogance. Like the way that Alhamid kept standing all the time we were talking, towering over us that way."

"Just habit," Danley said. "When you don't weigh more than six or seven pounds, there's not much point in sitting down. Besides, it leaves them on their feet in case of emergency."

"He could have sat down out of politeness," Tarnhorst said. "But no. They try to put on an air of superiority that is offensive to human dignity." He leaned back in his chair, stretched out his legs, and crossed his ankles. "However, attitude itself needn't concern us until it translates itself into anti-social behavior. What cannot be tolerated is this callous attitude toward the dignity and well-being of the workers out here. What did you think of Alhamid's explanation of this anchor-setting business?"

Danley hesitated. "It sounded straightforward enough, as far as it went."

"You think he's concealing something, then?"

"I don't know. I don't have all the information." He frowned, putting furrows between his almost invisible blond brows. "I know that neither government business nor insurance business are my specialty, but I would like to know a little more about the background before I render any decision."

"Hm-m-m. Well." Tarnhorst frowned in thought for a moment, then came to a decision. "I can't give you the detailed data, of course; that would be a violation of the People's Mutual Welfare Code. But I can give you the general story."

"I just want to know what sort of thing to look for," Danley said.

"Certainly. Certainly. Well." Tarnhorst paused to collect his thoughts, then launched into his speech. "It has now been over eighty years since the first colonists came out here to the Belt. At first, the ties with Earth were quite strong, naturally. Only a few actually intended to stay out there the rest of their lives; most of them intended to make themselves a nice little nest egg, come back home, and retire. At the same time, the World State was slowly evolving from its original loosely tied group of independent nations toward what it is today.

"The people who came out here were mostly misfits, sociologically speaking." He smiled sardonically. "They haven't changed much.

"At any rate, as I said, they were strongly tied to Earth. There was the matter of food, air, and equipment, all of which had to be shipped out from Earth to begin with. Only the tremendous supply of metal—almost free for the taking—made such a venture commercially possible. Within twenty-five years, however, the various industrial concerns that managed the Belt mining had become self-supporting. The robot scoopers which are used to mine methane and ammonia from Jupiter's atmosphere gave them plenty of organic raw material. Now they grow plants of all kinds and even raise food animals.

"They began, as every misfit does, to complain about the taxes the government put on their incomes. The government, in my opinion, made an error back then. They wanted to keep people out in the Belt, since the mines on Earth were not only rapidly being depleted, but the mining sites were needed for living space. Besides, asteroid metals were cheaper than metals mined on Earth. To induce the colonists to remain in the Belt, no income tax was levied; the income tax was replaced by an eighty per cent tax on the savings accumulated when the colonist returned to Earth to retire.

"They resented even that. It was explained to them that the asteroids were, after all, natural resources, and that they had no moral right to make a large profit and deprive others of their fair share of the income from a natural resource, but they insisted that they had earned it and had a right to keep it.

"In other words, the then government bribed them to stay out here, and the bribe was more effective than they had intended."

"So they stayed out here and kept their money," Danley said.

"Exactly. At that time, if you will recall, there was a great deal of agitation against colonialism—there had been for a long time, as a matter of fact. That agitation was directed against certain industrialist robber-baron nations who had enslaved the populace of parts of Asia and Africa solely to produce wealth, and not for the benefit of the people themselves. But the Belt operators took advantage of the anticolonialism of the times and declared that the Belt cities were, and by right ought to be, free and independent political entities. It was a ridiculous assumption, of course, but since the various Belt cities were, at that time, under the nominal control of three or four of the larger nations, the political picture required that they be allowed to declare themselves independent. It was not anticipated at the time that they would be so resistant toward the World Government."

He smiled slightly. "Of course, by refusing to send representatives to the People's Congress, they have, in effect, cut themselves off from any voice in human government."

Then he shrugged. "At the moment, that is neither here nor there. What interests us at the moment is the death rate curve of the anchor-sinkers or whatever they are. Did you know that it is practically impossible for anyone to get a job out there in the Belt unless he has had experience in the anchor-setting field?"

"No," Danley admitted.

"It's true. For every other job, they want only men with space experience. And by 'space experience' they mean anchor-setting, because that's the only job a man can get without previous space experience. They spend six months in a special school, learning to do the work, according to our friend, Mr. Georges Alhamid. Then they are sent out to set anchors. Small ones, at first, in rocks only a few meters in diameter—then larger ones. After a year or so at that kind of work, they can apply for more lucrative positions.

"I see nothing intrinsically wrong in that, I will admit, but the indications are that the schooling, which should have been getting more efficient over the years, has evidently been getting more lax. The death rate has gone up."

"Just a minute," Danley interrupted. "Do you mean that a man has to have what they call 'space experience' before he can get *any* kind of job?"

Tarnhorst shook his head and was pleased to find that no nausea resulted. "No, of course not. Clerical jobs, teaching jobs, and the like don't require that sort of training. But there's very little chance for advancement unless you're one of the elite. A physician, for example, wouldn't have many patients unless he had had 'space experience'; he wouldn't be allowed to own or drive a space boat, and he wouldn't be allowed to go anywhere near what are called 'critical areas'—such as air locks, power plants, or heavy industry installations."

"It sounds to me as though they have a very strong union," said Danley.

"If you want to call it that, yes," Tarnhorst said. "Anything that has anything to do with operations in space requires that sort of experience—and there are very few jobs out here that can avoid having anything to do with space. Space is only a few kilometers away." The expression on his face showed that he didn't much care for the thought.

"I don't see that that's so bad," Danley said. "Going out there isn't something for the unexperienced. A man who doesn't know what he's doing can get himself killed easily, and, what's worse, he's likely to take others with him."

"You speak, of course, from experience," Tarnhorst said with no trace of sarcasm. "I accept that. By not allowing inexperienced persons in critical areas, the Belt Companies are, at least indirectly, looking out for the welfare of the people. But we mustn't delude ourselves into thinking that that is their prime objective. These Belt Companies are no better than the so-called 'industrial giants' of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The government here is farcical. The sole job is to prevent crime and to adjudicate small civil cases. Every other function of proper government—the organization of industry, the regulation of standards the subsidizing of research, the control of prices, and so on—are left to the Belt Companies or to the people. The Belt Cities are no more than what used to be called 'company towns'."

"I understand that," Danley said. "But they seem to function fairly smoothly."

Tarnhorst eyed him. "If, by, 'smoothly functioning', you mean the denial of the common rights of human freedom and dignity yes. Oh, they give their sop to such basic human needs as the right of every individual to be respected—but only because Earth has put pressure on them. Otherwise, people who, through no fault of their own, were unable to work or get 'space experience' would be unable to get jobs and would be looked down upon as pariahs."

"You mean there are people here who have no jobs? I wouldn't think that unemployment would be a problem out here."

"It isn't," said Tarnhorst, "yet. But there are always those unfortunates who are psychologically incapable of work, and society must provide for them. The Belt Cities provide for a basic education, of course. As long as a person is going to school, he is given a stipend. But a person who has neither the ability to work nor the ability to study is an outcast, even though he is provided for by the companies. He is forced to do something to earn what should be his by right; he is given menial and degrading tasks to do. We would like to put a stop to that sort of thing, but we ... ah ... have no ... ah ... means of doing so." He paused, as though considering whether he had said too much.

"The problem at hand," he went on hurriedly, "is the death curve. When this technique for taking the rocks to the smelters was being worked out, the death rate was—as you might imagine—quite high. The Belt Companies had already been operating out here for a long time before the stony meteorites were mined commercially. At first, the big thing was nickel-iron. That's what they came here to get in the beginning. That's where most of the money still is. But the stony asteroids provide them with their oxygen.

"This anchor-setting technique was worked out at a time when the Belt Companies were trying to find ways to make the Belt self-sufficient. After they got the technique worked out so that it operated smoothly, the death rate dropped 'way down. It stayed down for a little while, and then began to rise again. It has nearly reached an all-time high. Obviously, something is wrong, and we have to find out what it is."

Danley scratched ruminatively behind his right ear and wished he'd had the opportunity to study history. He had been vaguely aware, of the broad outlines, but the details had never been brought to his attention before. "Suppose Alhamid *is* trying to hide something," he said after a moment. "What would it be, do you think?"

Tarnhorst shrugged and spread his hands. "What could it be but some sort of money-saving scheme? Inferior materials being used at a critical spot, perhaps. Skimping on quality or quantity. Somewhere, somehow, they are shaving costs at the risk of the workers' lives. We have to find out what it is."

Peter Danley nodded. *You don't mean "we,"* Danley thought to himself. *I am the one who's going to have to go out there and find it, while you sit here safe.* He felt that there was a pretty good chance that these Belt operators might kill him to keep him from finding out what it was they were saving money on.

Aloud, he said: "I'll do what I can, Mr. Tarnhorst."

Tarnhorst smiled. "I'm certain you will. That's why I needed someone who knows more about this business than I."

"And when we do find it—what then?"

"Then? Why, then we will force them to make the proper changes or there will be trouble."

Georges Alhamid heard the whole conversation early the next morning. The governor himself brought the recording over to his office.

"Do you think he knew he was being overheard?"

The governor shrugged. "Who knows. He waltzed all around what he was trying to say, but that may have been just native caution. Or he may not want Danley to know what's on his mind."

"How could he bring Danley out here without telling him anything beforehand?" Alhamid asked thoughtfully. "Is Danley really that ignorant, or was the whole conversation for our ears?"

"I'm inclined to think that Danley really didn't know. Remember, George, the best way to hold down the ones below you is to keep them from gaining any knowledge, to keep data out of their hands—except for the carefully doctored data you want them to have."

"I know," Alhamid said. "History isn't exactly a popular subject on Earth." He tapped his fingers gently on the case of the playback and looked at it as if he were trying to read the minds of the persons who had spoken the words he had just heard.

"I really think he believed that his nullifying equipment was doing its job," the governor continued. "He wouldn't have any way of knowing we could counteract it."

Alhamid shrugged. "It doesn't matter much. We still have to assume that he's primarily out to bring the Belt Cities under Earth control. To do that, all he'd have to do is find something that could be built up into a scandal on Earth."

"Not, *all*, George," the governor said. "It would take a lot more than that alone. But it would certainly be a start in the right direction."

"One thing we do know," Alhamid said, "is that nobody on Earth will allow any action against the Belt unless popular sentiment is definitely against us. As long as we are apparently right-thinking people, we're all right. I wonder why Tarnhorst is so anxious to get us under the thumb of the People's Congress? Is it purely that half-baked idealism of his?"

"Mostly. He has the notion that everybody has a right to be accorded the respect of his fellow man, and that that right is something that every person is automatically given at birth, not something he has to earn. What gave him his particular gripe against us, I don't know, but he's been out to get us ever since his trip here three years ago."

"You know, Larry," Alhamid said slowly, "I'm not quite sure which is harder to understand: How a whole civilization could believe that sort of thing, or how a single intelligent man could."

"It's a positive feedback," the governor said. "That sort of thing has wrecked civilizations before and will do it again. Let's not let it wreck ours. Are you ready for the conference with our friend now?"

Georges Alhamid looked at the clock on the wall. "Ready as I'll ever be. You'd better scram, Larry. We mustn't give Mr. Tarnhorst the impression that there's some sort of collusion between business and government out there in the Belt."

"Heaven forfend! I'll get."

When he left, the governor took the playback with him. The recording would have to be filed in the special secret files.

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Captain St. Simon eased his spaceboat down to the surface of Pallas and threw on the magnetic anchor which held the little craft solidly to the metal surface of the landing field. The traffic around Pallas was fairly heavy this time of year, since the planetoid was on the same side of the sun as Earth, and the big cargo haulers were moving in and out, loading refined metals and raw materials, unloading manufactured goods from Earth. He'd had to wait several minutes in the traffic pattern before being given clearance for anchoring.

He was already dressed in his vacuum suit, and the cabin of the boat was exhausted of its air. He checked his control board, making sure every switch and dial was in the proper position. Only then did he open the door and step out to the gray surface of the landing field. His suitcase—a spherical, sealed container that the Belt men jokingly referred to as a "bomb"—went with him. He locked the door of his boat and walked down the yellow-painted safety lane toward the nearest air lock leading into the interior of the planetoid.

He lifted his feet and set them down with precision—nobody but a fool wears glide boots on the outside. He kept his eyes moving—up and around, on both sides, above, and behind. The yellow path was supposed to be a safety lane, but there was no need of taking the chance of having an out-of-control ship come sliding in on him. Of course, if it was coming in really fast, he'd have no chance to move; he might not even see it at all. But why get sluggish by a slow one?

He waited outside the air-lock door for the green light to come on. There were several other space-suited figures around him, but he didn't recognize any of them. He hummed softly to himself.

The green light came on, and the door of the air lock slid open. The small crowd trooped inside, and, after a minute, the door slid shut again. As the elevator dropped, St. Simon heard the familiar *whoosh* as the air came rushing in. By the time it had reached the lower level, the elevator was up to pressure.

On Earth, there might have been a sign in such an elevator, reading: *DO NOT REMOVE VACUUM SUITS IN ELEVATOR*. There was no need for it here; every man there knew how to handle himself in an air lock. If he hadn't, he wouldn't have been there.

After he had stepped out of the elevator, along with the others, and the door had closed behind him, St. Simon carefully opened the cracking valve on his helmet. There was a faint hiss of incoming air, adjusting the slight pressure differential. He took off his helmet, tucked it under his arm, and headed for the check-in station.

He was walking down the corridor toward the checker's office when a hand clapped him on the shoulder. "Bless me if it isn't St. Simon the Silent! Long time no, if you'll pardon the cliché, see!"



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St. Simon turned, grinning. He had recognized the voice. "Hi, Kerry. Good to see you."

"Good to see me? Forsooth! Od's bodkins! Hast turned liar on top of everything else, Good Saint? Good to see me, indeed! 'From such a face and form as mine, the noblest sentiments sound like the black utterances of a depraved imagination.' No, dear old holy pillar-sitter, no indeed! It may be a pleasure to hear my mellifluous voice—a pleasure I often indulge in, myself—but it couldn't possibly be a pleasure to *see me!*" And all the while, St. Simon was being pummeled heartily on the shoulder, while his hand was pumped as though the other man was expecting to strike oil at any moment.

His assailant was not a handsome man. Years before, a rare, fast-moving meteor had punched its way through his helmet and taken part of his face with it. He had managed to get back to his ship and pump air in before he lost consciousness. He had had to stay conscious, because the only thing that held the air in his helmet had been his hand pressed over the quarter-inch hole. Even so, the drop in pressure had done its damage. The surgeons had done their best to repair the smashed face, but Kerry Brand's face hadn't been much to look at to begin with. And the mottled purple of the distended veins and capillaries did little to improve his looks.

But his ruined face was a badge of honor, and Kerry Brand knew the fact as well as anyone.

Like St. Simon, Captain Brand was a professional anchor-setter. Most of the men who put in the necessary two years went on to better jobs after they had the required space experience. But there were some who liked the job and stuck with it. It was only these men—the real experts among the anchor-setting fraternity—who rated the title of "Captain". They were free-lancers who ran things pretty much their own way.

"Just going to the checker?" St. Simon asked.

Kerry Brand shook his head. "I've already checked in, old sanctus. And I'll give you three and one-seventh guesses who got a blue ticket."



St. Simon said nothing, but he pointed a finger at Brand's chest.

"A mild surmise, but a true one," said Brand. "You are, indeed, gazing upon Professor Kerry Brand, B.A., M.A., Ph.D.—that is to say, Borer of Asteroids, Master of Anchors, and Planetoid-hauler De-luxe. No, no; don't look sorry for me. *Somebody* has to teach the tadpoles How To Survive In Space If You're Not Too Stupid To Live—a subject upon which I am an expert."

"On Being Too Stupid To Live?" St. Simon asked gently.

"A touch! A distinct touch! You are developing a certain unexpected vein of pawky humor, Watson, against which I must learn to guard myself." He looked at the watch on his wrist. "Why don't you go ahead and check in, and then we'll go pub-crawling. I have it on good authority that a few thousand gallons of Danish ale were piped aboard Pallas yesterday, and you and I should do our best to reduce the surplus."

"Sounds good to me," said St. Simon agreeably. They started on toward the checker's office.

"Consider, my dear St. Simon," said Brand, "how fortunate we are to be living in an age and a society where the dictum, 'Those who can, do; those who can't, teach,' no longer holds true. It means that we weary, work-hardened experts are called in every so often, handed our little blue ticket, and given six months off—*with* pay—if we will only do the younger generation the favor of pounding a modicum of knowledge into their heads. During that time, if we are very careful, we can try to prevent our muscles from going to flab and our brains from corroding with ennui, so that when we again debark into the infinite sea of emptiness which surrounds us to pursue our chosen profession, we don't get killed on the first try. Isn't it wonderful?"

"Cheer up," said St. Simon. "Teaching isn't such a bad lot. And, after all, you do get paid for it."

"And at a salary! A Pooh-Bah paid for his services! I a salaried minion! But I do it! It revolts me, but I do it!"

The short, balding man behind the checker's desk looked up as the two men approached. "Hello, captain," he said as St. Simon stepped up to the desk.

"How are you, Mr. Murtaugh?" St. Simon said politely. He handed over his log book. "There's the data on my last ten. I'll be staying here for a few days, so there's no need to rush the refill requisition. Any calls for me?"

The checker put the log book in the duplicator. "I'll see if there are, captain." He went over to the autofile and punched St. Simon's serial number.

Very few people write to an anchor man. Since he is free to check in and reload at any of the major Belt Cities, and since, in his search for asteroids, his erratic orbit is likely to take him anywhere, it might be months or years before a written letter caught up with him. On the other hand, a message could be beamed to every city, and he could pick it up wherever he was. It cost money, but it was sure.

"One call," the checker said. He handed St. Simon a message slip.

It was unimportant. Just a note from a girl on Vesta. He promised himself that he'd make his next break at Vesta, come what may. He stuck the flimsy in his pocket, and waited while the checker went through the routine of recording his log and making out a pay voucher.

There was no small talk between himself and the checker. Mr. Murtaugh had not elected to take the schooling necessary to qualify for other than a small desk job. He had no space experience. Unless and until he did, there would be an invisible, but nonetheless real barrier between himself and any spaceman. It was not that St. Simon looked down on the man, exactly; it was simply that Murtaugh had not proved himself, and, therefore, there was no way of knowing whether he could be trusted or not. And since trust is a positive quality, lack of it can only mean mistrust.

Murtaugh handed Captain St. Simon an envelope. "That's it, captain. Thank you."

St. Simon opened the envelope, took out his check—and a blue ticket.

Kerry Brand broke into a guffaw.

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When the phone on his desk rang, Georges Alhamid scooped it up and identified himself.

"This is Larry, George," said the governor's voice. "How are things so far?"

"So far, so good," Alhamid said. "For the past week, Mr. Peter Danley has been working his head off, under the tutelage of two of the toughest, smartest anchor men in the business. But you should have seen the looks on their faces when I told them they were going to have an Earthman for a pupil."

The governor laughed. "I'll bet! How's he coming along?"

"He's learning. How are you doing with your pet?"

"I think I'm softening him, George. I found out what it was that got his goat three years ago."

"Yeah?"

"Sure. On Ceres, where he went three years ago, he was treated as if he weren't as good as a Belt man."

Alhamid frowned. "Someone was disrespectful?"

"No—that is, not exactly. But he was treated as if we didn't trust his judgment, as though we were a little bit afraid of him."

"Oh-*ho!* I see what you mean."

"Sure. We treated him just as we would anyone who hasn't proved himself. And that meant we were treating him the same way we treated our own 'lower classes', as he thought of them. I had Governor Holger get his Ceres detectives to trace down everything that happened. You can read the transcript if you want. There's nothing particularly exciting in it, but you can see the pattern if you know what to look for.

"I'm not even certain it was fully conscious on his part; I'm not sure he knew why he disliked us. All he was convinced of was that we were arrogant and thought we were better than he is. It's kind of hard for us to see that a person would be that deeply hurt by seeing the plain truth that someone else is obviously better at something than he is, but you've got to remember that an Earthman is brought up to believe that every person is just exactly as good as every other—and no better. A man may have a skill that you don't have, but that doesn't make him superior—oh, my, no!

"Anyway, I started out by apologizing for our habit of standing up all the time. I managed to plant the idea in his mind that the only thing that made him think we felt superior was that habit. I've even got him to the point where he's standing up all the time, too. Makes him feel very superior. He's learned the native customs."

"I get you," Alhamid said. "I probably contributed to that inferiority feeling of his myself."

"Didn't we all? Anyway, the next step was to take him around and introduce him to some of the execs in the government and in a couple of the Companies—I briefed 'em beforehand. Friendly chats—that sort of thing. I think we're going to have to learn the ancient art of diplomacy out here if we're going to survive, George."

"The crowning glory came this afternoon. You should have been there."

"I was up to here in work, Larry. I just couldn't take the time off to attend a club luncheon. Did the great man give his speech?"

"Did he? I should hope to crack my helmet he did! We must all pull together, George, did you know that? We must care for the widow and the orphan—and the needy, George, the needy. We must be sure to provide the fools, the idiots, the malingerers, the moral degenerates, and such useful, lovable beings as that with the necessities and the luxuries of life. We must see to it that they are respected and permitted to have their dignity. We must see to it that the dear little things are permitted the rights of a human being to hold his head up and spit in your eye if he wishes. We must see to it that they be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the Earth."

"They've already done that," Alhamid said caustically. "And they can have it. Let's just see that they don't replenish the Belt. So what happened?"

"Why, George, you'll never realize how much we appreciated that speech. We gave him a three-minute rising ovation. I think he was surprised to see that we could stand for three minutes under a one-gee pull in the centrifuge. And you should have seen the smiles on our faces, George."

"I hope nobody broke out laughing."

"We managed to restrain ourselves," the governor said.

"What's next on the agenda?"

"Well, it'll be tricky, but I think I can pull it off. I'm going to take him around and show him that we *do* take care of the widow and the orphan, and hope that he assumes we are as solicitous toward the rest of his motley crew. Wish me luck."

"Good luck. You may need it."

"Same to you. Take care of Danley."

"Don't worry. He's in good hands. See you, Larry."

"Right."

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There were three space-suited men on the bleak rocky ground near the north pole of Pallas, a training area of several square miles known as the North Forty. Their helmets gleamed in the bright, hard light from a sun that looked uncomfortably small to an Earthman's eyes. Two of the

men were standing, facing each other some fifteen feet apart. The third, attached to them by safety lines, was hanging face down above the surface, rising slowly, like a balloon that has almost more weight than it can lift.



"No, no, *no*, Mr. Danley! You are not *crawling*, Mr. Danley, you are climbing! Do you understand that? *Climbing!* You have to *climb* an asteroid, just as you would climb a cliff on Earth. You have to hold on every second of the time, or you will fall off!" St. Simon's voice sounded harsh in Danley's earphones, and he felt irritatingly helpless poised floatingly above the ground that way.

His instructors were well anchored by metal eyes set into the rocky surface for just that purpose. Although Pallas was mostly nickel-iron, this end of it was stony, which was why it had been selected as a training ground.

"*Well?*" snapped St. Simon. "What do you do now? If this were a small rock, you'd be drifting a long ways away by now. Think, Mr. Danley, *think*."

"Then shut up and let me think!" Danley snarled.

"If small things distract you from thinking about the vital necessity of saving your own life, Mr. Danley, you would not live long in the Belt."

Danley reached out an arm to see if he could touch the ground. When he had pushed himself upwards with a thrust of his knee, he hadn't given himself too hard a shove. He had reached the apex of his slow flight, and was drifting downward again. He grasped a jutting rock and pulled himself back to the surface.

"Very good, Mr. Danley—but that wouldn't work on a small rock. You took too long. What would you have done on a rock with a millionth of a gee of pull?"

Danley was silent.

"*Well?*" St. Simon barked. "*What would you do?*"

"I ... I don't know," Danley admitted.

"Ye gods and little fishhooks!" This was Kerry Brand's voice. It was supposed to be St. Simon's turn to give the verbal instructions, but Brand allowed himself an occasional remark when it was appropriate.

St. Simon's voice was biting sweet. "What do you think those safety lines are for, Mr. Danley? Do you think they are for decorative purposes?"

"Well ... I thought I was supposed to think of some other way. I mean, that's so obvious—"

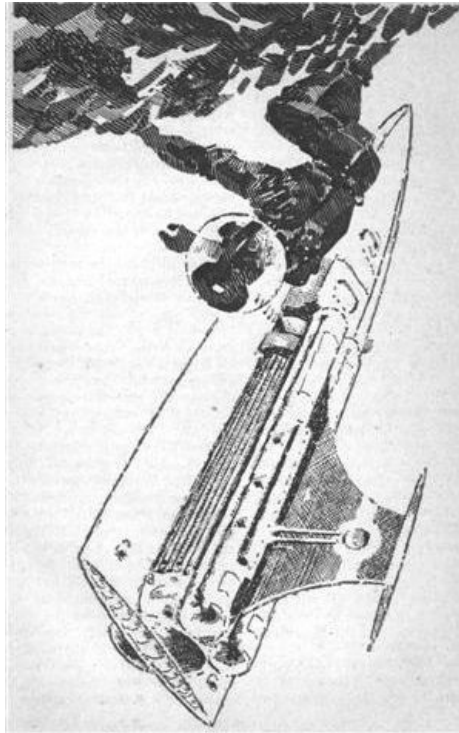
"Mr. Danley," St. Simon said with sudden patience, "we are not here to give you riddles to solve. We're here to teach you how to stay alive in the Belt. And one of the first rules you must learn is that you will *never* leave your boat without a safety line. *Never!*"

"An anchor man, Mr. Danley, is called that for more than one reason. You cannot anchor your boat to a rock unless there is an eye-bolt set in it. And if it already has an eye-bolt, you would have no purpose on that rock. In a way, *you* will be the anchor of your boat, since you will be tied to it by your safety line. If the boat drifts too far from your rock while you are working, it will pull you off the surface, since it has more mass than you do. That shouldn't be allowed to happen, but, if it does, you are still with your boat, rather than deserted on a rock for the rest of your life—which wouldn't be very long. When the power unit in your suit ran out of energy, it would stop breaking your exhaled carbon dioxide down into carbon and oxygen, and you would suffocate. Even with emergency tanks of oxygen, you would soon find yourself freezing to death. That sun up there isn't very warm, Mr. Danley."

Peter Danley was silent, but it was an effort to remain so. He wanted to remind St. Simon that he, Danley, had been a spaceman for nearly fifteen years. But he was also aware that he was learning things that weren't taught at Earthside schools. Most of his professional life had been spent

aboard big, comfortable ships that made the short Earth-Luna hop. He could probably count the total hours he had spent in a spacesuit on the fingers of his two hands.

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"All right, Mr. Danley; let's begin again. Climb along the surface. Use toeholds, handholds, and fingerholds. Feel your way along. Find those little crevices that will give you a grip. It doesn't take much. You're a lot better off than a mountain climber on Earth because you don't have to fight your weight. You have only your mass to worry about. That's it. Fine. Very good, Mr. Danley."

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And, later:

"Now, Mr. Danley," said Captain Brand, "you are at the end of your tether, so to speak."

The three men were in a space boat, several hundred miles from Pallas. Or, rather, two of them were in the boat, standing at the open door. Peter Danley was far out from it, at the end of his safety line.

"How far are you from us, Mr. Danley?" Brand asked.

"Three hundred meters, Captain Brand," Danley said promptly.

"Very good. How do you know?"

"I am at the end of my safety line, which is three hundred meters long when fully extended."

"Your memory is excellent, Mr. Danley. Now, how will you get back to the boat?"

"Pull myself hand over hand along the line."

"Think, Mr. Danley! *Think!*"

"Uh. Oh. Well, I wouldn't keep pulling. I'd just give myself a tug and then coast in, taking up the line slowly as I went."

"Excellent! What would happen if you, as you put it, pulled yourself in hand over hand, as if you were climbing a rope on Earth?"

"I would accelerate too much," Danley said. "I'd gain too much momentum and probably bash my brains out against the boat. And I'd have no way to stop myself."

"Bully for you, Mr. Danley! Now see if you can put into action that which you have so succinctly put into words. Come back to the boat. Gently the first time. We'll have plenty of practice, so that you can get the feel of the muscle pull that will give you a maximum of velocity with a minimum of impact at this end. Gently, now."

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Still later:

"Judgment, Mr. Danley!" St. Simon cautioned. "You have to use judgment! A space boat is not an automobile. There is no friction out here to slow it to a stop. Your accelerator is just exactly that—an accelerator. Taking your foot off it won't slow you down a bit; you've got to use your reverse."

Peter Danley was at the controls of the boat. There were tiny beads of perspiration on his forehead. Over a kilometer away was a good-sized hunk of rock; his instructors wouldn't let him get any closer. They wanted to be sure that they could take over before the boat struck the rock, just in case Danley should freeze to the accelerator a little too long.

He wasn't used to this sort of thing. He was used to a taped acceleration-deceleration program which lifted a big ship, aimed it, and went through the trip all automatically. All he had ever had to do was drop it the last few hundred feet to a landing field.

"Keep your eyes moving," St. Simon said. "Your radar can give you data that you need, just remember that it can't think for you."

*Your right foot controls your forward acceleration.*

*Your left foot controls your reverse acceleration.*

*They can't be pushed down together; when one goes down, the other goes up. Balance one against the other.*

*Turning your wheel controls the roll of the boat.*

*Pulling your wheel toward you, or pushing it away, controls the pitch.*

*Shifting the wheel left, or right, controls the yaw.*

The instructions had been pounded into his head until each one seemed to ring like a separate little bell. The problem was coordinating his body to act on those instructions.

One of the radar dials told him how far he was from the rock. Another told him his radial velocity relative to it. A third told him his angular velocity.

"Come to a dead stop exactly one thousand meters from the surface, Mr. Danley," St. Simon ordered.

Danley worked the controls until both his velocity meters read zero, and the distance meter read exactly one kilometer.

"Very good, Mr. Danley. Now assume that the surface of your rock is at nine hundred ninety-five meters. Bring your boat to a dead stop exactly fifty centimeters from that surface."

Danley worked the controls again. He grinned with satisfaction when the distance meter showed nine nine five point five on the nose.

Captain St. Simon sighed deeply. "Mr. Danley, do you feel a little shaken up? Banged around a little? Do you feel as though you'd just gotten a bone-rattling shock?"

"Uh ... no."

"You should. You slammed this boat a good two feet into the surface of that rock before you backed out again." His voice changed tone. "Dammit, Mr. Danley, when I say 'surface at nine nine five', I mean *surface!*"

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Edway Tarnhorst had been dictating notes for his reports into his recorder, and was rather tired, so when he asked Peter Danley what he had learned, he was rather irritated when the blond man closed his blue eyes and repeated, parrotlike:

"Due to the lack of a water-oxygen atmosphere, many minerals are found in the asteroids which are unknown on Earth. Among the more important of these are: Oldhamite (CaS); Daubréelite (FeCr<sub>2</sub>S<sub>4</sub>); Schreibersite and Rhabdite (Fe<sub>3</sub>Ni<sub>3</sub>P); Lawrencite (FeCl<sub>2</sub>); and Taenite, an alloy of iron containing—"

"That's not precisely the sort of thing I meant," Tarnhorst interrupted testily.

Danley smiled. "I know. I'm sorry. That's my lesson for tomorrow."

"So I gathered. May I sit down?" There were only two chairs in the room. Danley was occupying one, and a pile of books was occupying the other.

Danley quickly got to his feet and began putting the books on his desk. "Certainly, Mr. Tarnhorst. Sit down."

Tarnhorst lowered himself into the newly emptied chair. "I apologize for interrupting your studies," he said. "I realize how important they are. But there are a few points I'd like to discuss with you."

"Certainly." Danley seated himself and looked at the older man expectantly. "The nullifiers are on," he said.

"Of course," Tarnhorst said absently. Then, changing his manner, he said abruptly: "Have you found anything yet?"

Danley shook his head. "No. It looks to me as though they've done everything possible to make sure that these men get the best equipment and the best training. The training instructors have been through the whole affair themselves—they know the ropes. The equipment, as far as I can tell, is top grade stuff. From what I have seen so far, the Company isn't stinting on the equipment or the training."

Tarnhorst nodded. "After nearly three months of investigation, I have come to the same conclusion myself. The records show that expenditures on equipment has been steadily increasing. The equipment they have now, I understand, is almost failure-proof?" He looked questioningly at Danley.

Danley nodded. "Apparently. Certainly no one is killed because of equipment failure. It's the finest stuff I've ever seen."

"And yet," Tarnhorst said, "their books show that they are constantly seeking to improve it."

"I don't suppose there is any chance of juggling the books on you, is there?"

Tarnhorst smiled a superior smile. "Hardly. In the first place, I know bookkeeping. In the second, it would be impossible to whip up a complete set of balancing books—covering a period of nearly eighty years—overnight.

"I agree," Danley said. "I don't think they set up a special training course just for me overnight, either. I've seen classes on Vesta, Juno, and Eros—and they're all the same. There aren't any fancy false fronts to fool us, Mr. Tarnhorst: I've looked very closely."

"Have you talked to the men?"

"Yes. They have no complaints."

Again Tarnhorst nodded. "I have found the same thing. They all insist that if a man gets killed in space, it's not the fault of anyone but himself. Or, as it may be, an act of God."

"One of my instructors ran into an act of God some years ago," Danley said. "You've met him. Brand—the one with the scarred face." He explained to Tarnhorst what had caused Brand's disfigurement. "But he survived," he finished, "because he kept his wits about him even after he was hit."

"Commendable; very commendable," Tarnhorst said. "If he'd been an excitable fool, he'd have died."

"True. But what I was trying to point out was that it wasn't equipment failure that caused the accident."

"No. You're quite right." Tarnhorst was silent for a moment, then he looked into Danley's eyes. "Do you think you could take on a job as anchor man now?"

"I don't know," said Danley evenly. "But I'm going to find out tomorrow."

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Peter Danley took his final examination the following day. All by himself, he went through the procedure of positioning his ship, setting up a rocket drill, firing it, and setting in an anchor. It was only a small rock, nine meters through, but the job was almost the same as with the big ones. Not far away, Captain St. Simon watched the Earthman's procedure through a pair of high-powered field glasses. He breathed a deep sigh of relief when the job was done.

"Jules," he said softly, "I am sure glad that man didn't hurt himself any."

"Yes, *sub!* We'd of sho' been in trouble if he'd of killed hisself!"

"We will have to tell Captain Brand that our pupil has done pretty well for such a small amount of schooling."

"I think that would be proper, m'lud."

"And we will also have to tell Captain Brand that this boy wouldn't last a month. He wouldn't come back from his first trip."

There was no answer to that.

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Three days later, amid a cloud of generally satisfied feelings, Edway Tarnhorst and Peter Danley took the ship back to Earth.

"I cannot, of course, give you a copy of my report," Tarnhorst had told Georges Alhamid. "That is for the eyes of the Committee only. However, I may say that I do not find the Belt Companies or the governments of the Belt Cities at fault. Do you want to know my personal opinion?"

"I would appreciate it, Mr. Tarnhorst," Georges had said.

"Carelessness. Just plain carelessness on the part of the workers. That is what has caused your rise in death rates. You people out here in the Belt have become too used to being in space. Familiarity breeds contempt, Mr. Alhamid.

"Steps must be taken to curb that carelessness. I suggest a publicity campaign of some kind. The people must be thoroughly indoctrinated in safety procedures and warned against carelessness. Just a few months of schooling isn't enough, Mr. Alhamid. You've got to start pounding it into their heads early.

"If you don't—" He shook his head. (He had grown used to doing so in low gravity by now.) "If the death rate isn't cut down, we shall have to raise the premium rates, and I don't know what will happen on the floor of the People's Congress. However, I think I can guarantee six months to a year before any steps are taken. That will give you time to launch your safety campaign. I'm certain that as soon as this carelessness is curbed, the claims will drop down to their former low point."

"We'll certainly try that," Alhamid had said heartily. "Thank you very much, Mr. Tarnhorst."

When they had finally gone, Alhamid spoke to the governor.

"That's that, Larry. You can bring it up at the next meeting of the Board of Governors. Get some kind of publicity campaign going. Plug safety. Tell 'em carelessness is bad. It can't hurt anything and actually might help, who knows?"

"What are you going to do at your end?"

"What we should have done long ago: finance the insurance ourselves. For the next couple of years, we'll only make death claims to Earth for a part of the total. We'll pay off the rest ourselves. Then we'll tell 'em we've brought the cost down so much that we can afford to do our own insurance financing.

"We let this insurance thing ride too long, and it has damn near got us in a jam. We needed the income from Earth. We still could use it, but we need our independence more."

"I second the motion," the governor said fervently. "Look, suppose you come over to my place tonight, and we'll work out the details of this report. O.K.? Say at nine?"

"Fine, Larry. I'll see you then."

Alhamid went back to his office. He was met at the door by his secretary, who handed him a sealed envelope. "The Earthman left this here for you. He said you'd know what to do with it."

Alhamid took the envelope and looked at the name on the outside. "Which Earthman?" he asked.

"The young one," she said, "the blond one."

"It isn't even addressed to me," Alhamid said with a note of puzzled speculation in his voice.

"No. I noticed that. I told him he could send it straight to the school, but he said you would know how to handle it."

Alhamid looked at the envelope again, and his eyes narrowed a little. "Call Captain St. Simon, will you? Tell him I would like to have him come to my office. Don't mention this letter; I don't want it breezed all over Pallas."

It was nearly twenty minutes before St. Simon showed up. Alhamid handed him the envelope. "You have a message from your star pupil. For some reason, he wanted me to deliver it to you. I have a hunch you'll know what that reason is after you read it." He grinned. "I'd appreciate it if you'd tell me when you find out. This Mr. Danley has worried me all along."

St. Simon scowled at the envelope, then ripped off one end and took out the typed sheets. He read them carefully, then handed them over to Alhamid. "You'd better read this yourself, George."

Georges Alhamid took the pages and began to read.

Dear Captain St. Simon:

I am addressing this to you rather than anyone else because I think you will understand more than anyone else. Captain Brand is a fine person, but I have never felt very much at ease with him. (I won't go into the psychological reasons that may exist, other than admit that my reasons are purely emotional. I don't honestly know how much they are based on his disfigurement.) Mr. Alhamid is almost a stranger to me. You are the only Belt man I feel I know well.

First, I want to say that I honestly enjoyed our three months together. There were times when I could have cheerfully bashed your head in, I'll admit, but the

experience has left me feeling more like a real human being, more like a person in my own right, than I have ever felt before in my life. Believe me, I appreciate it deeply. I know now that I can do things on my own without being dependent on the support of a team or a committee, and for that I am grateful.

Tarnhorst has heard my report and accepted it. His report to the People's Congress will lay the entire blame for the death rate rise on individual carelessness rather than on any fault of management.

I think, in the main, I am justified in making such a report to Tarnhorst, although I am fully aware that it is incomplete. I know that if I had told him the whole truth there would be a ruckus kicked up on Earth that would cause more trouble in the Belt than I'd care to think about. I'm sure you're as aware of the political situation as I am.

You see, I know that anchor-setting could be made a great deal safer. I know that machines could be developed which would make the job so nearly automatic that the operator would never be exposed to any more danger than he would be in a ship on the Earth-Luna run. Perhaps that's a little exaggerated, but not much.

What puzzled me was: *Why?* Why shouldn't the Companies build these machines if they were more efficient? Why should every Belt man defend the system as it was? Why should men risk their necks when they could demand better equipment? (I don't mean that the equipment presently used is poor; I just mean that full mechanization would do away with the present type of equipment and replace it with a different type.)

Going through your course of instruction gave me the answer to that, even though I didn't take the full treatment.

All my life, I've belonged to an organization of some kind—the team, the crew, whatever it might be. But the Team was everything, and I was recognized only as a member of the Team. I was a replaceable plug-in unit, not an individual in my own right. I don't know that I can explain the difference exactly, but it seems to me that the Team is something outside of which the individual has no existence, while the men of the Belt can form a team because they know that each member is self-sufficient in his own right.

On Earth, we all depend on the Team, and, in the long run, that means that we are depending on each other—but none of us feels he can depend on himself. Every man hopes that, as a member of the Team, he will be saved from his own errors, his own failures. But he knows that everyone else is doing the same thing, and, deep down inside, he knows that they are not deserving of his reliance. So he puts his reliance in the Team, as if that were some sort of separate entity in itself, and had magical, infallible powers that were greater than the aggregate of the individuals that composed it.

In a way, this is certainly so, since teamwork can accomplish things that mobs cannot do. But the Team is a failure if each member assumes that he, himself, is helpless and can do nothing, but that the Team will do it for him.

Men who have gone through the Belt training program, men who have "space experience," as you so euphemistically put it, are men who can form a real team, one that will get things done because each man knows he can rely on the others, not only as a team, but as individuals. But to mechanize the anchor-setting phase would destroy all that completely.

I don't want to see that destroyed, because I have felt what it is to be a part of the Belt team, even though only a small and unreliable part. Actually, I know I was not and could never be a real member of that team, but I was and am proud to have scrimmaged with the team, and I'm glad to be able to sit on the side-lines and cheer even if I can't carry the ball. (It just occurred to me that those metaphors might be a little cloudy to you, since you don't have football in the Belt, but I think you see what I mean.) I imagine that most of the men who have no "space experience" feel the same way. They know they'd never make a go of it out in space, but they're happy to be water boys.

I wish I could stay in the Belt. I'm enough of a spaceman to appreciate what it really is to be a member of a space society. But I also know that I'd never last. I'm not fitted for it, really. I've had a small taste of it, but I know I couldn't take a full dose. I've worked hard for the influence and security I have in my job, and I couldn't give it up. Maybe this brands me as a coward in your eyes, and maybe I am a coward, but that's the way I'm built. I hope you'll take that into account when you think of me.

At any rate, I have done what I have done. On Earth, there are men who envy you and hate you, and there will be others who will try to destroy you, but I have done what I could to give you a chance to gain the strength you need to resist the encroachment of Earth's sickness.



I have a feeling that Tarnhorst saw your greatness, too, although he'd never admit it, even to himself. Certainly something changed him during the last months, even though he doesn't realize it. He came out wanting to help—and by that, he meant help the common people against the "tyranny" of the Companies. He still wants to help the common people, but now he wants to do it *through* the Companies. The change is so subtle that he doesn't think he's changed at all, but I can see it.

I don't deserve any thanks for what I have done. All I have done is repay you in the only way I knew how for what you have done for me. I may never see you again, captain, but I will always remember you. Please convey my warmest regards to Captain Brand and to Mr. Alhamid.

Sincerely,

Peter Danley

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Georges Alhamid handed the letter back to St. Simon. "There's your star pupil," he said gently.

St. Simon nodded. "The wise fool. The guy who's got sense enough to know that he isn't competent to do the job."

"Did you notice that he waltzed all around the real reason for the anchor-setting program without quite hitting it?"

St. Simon smiled humorlessly. "Sure. Notice the wording of the letter. He still thinks in terms of the Team, even when he's trying not to. He thinks we do this just to train men to have a real good Team Spirit. He can't see that that is only a very useful by-product."

"How could he think otherwise?" Alhamid asked. "To him, or to Tarnhorst, the notion of deliberately tailoring a program so that it would kill off the fools and the incompetents, setting up a program that will deliberately destroy the men who are dangerous to society, would be horrifying. They would accuse us of being soulless butchers who had no respect for the dignity of the human soul."

"We're not butchering anybody," St. Simon objected. "Nobody is forced to go through two years of anchor setting. Nobody is forced to die. We're not running people into gas chambers or anything like that."

"No; of course not. But would you expect an Earthman like Tarnhorst to see the difference? How could we explain to him that we have no objection to fools other than that we object to putting them in positions where they can harm others by their foolishness? Would you expect him to understand that we must have a method of eliminating those who are neither competent enough to be trusted with the lives of others nor wise enough to see that they are not competent? How would you tell him that the reason we send men out alone is so that if he destroys anyone by his foolishness—after we have taught him everything we know in the best way we know how—he will only destroy himself?"

"I wouldn't even try," St. Simon said. "There's an old saying that neither money, education, liquor, nor women ever made a fool of a man, they just give a born fool a chance to display his foolishness. Space ought to be added to that list."

"Did you notice something else about that letter?" Alhamid asked. "I mean, the very fact that he wrote a letter instead of telling you personally?"

"Sure. He didn't trust me. He was afraid I, or someone else, would dispose of him if we knew he knew our secret."

"I think that's it," Alhamid agreed. "He wanted to be safely away first."

"Killing him would have brought down the biggest investigation the Earth Congress has launched since the crack-up of the Earth-Luna ship thirty years ago. Does he think we are fools?"

"You can't blame him. He's been brought up that way, and three months of training isn't going to change him."

St. Simon frowned. "Suppose he changes his mind? Suppose he tells Tarnhorst what he thinks?"

"He won't. He's told his lie, and now he'll have to stick by it or lose his precious security. If he couldn't trade that for freedom, he sure isn't going to throw it away." Alhamid grinned. "But can you imagine a guy thinking that anchor setting could be completely mechanized?"

St. Simon grinned back. "I guess I'm not a very good teacher after all. I told him and told him and told him for three solid months that the job required judgment, but it evidently didn't sink in. He's got the heart of a romantic and the soul of an Earthman—a very bad combination."

"He has my sympathy," Alhamid said with feeling. "Now, about you. Your blue ticket still has three months to run, but I can't give you a class if you're only going to run through the first half of the course with them, and I don't have any more Earthmen for you to give special tutoring to. You have three choices: You can loaf with pay for three months; you can go back to space and get

double pay for three months; or you can take a regular six-month class and get double pay for the last three months. Which'll it be?"

St. Simon grinned widely. "I'm going to loaf until I get sick of it, then I'll go back to space and collect double pay for what's left of the three months. First off, I'm going to take a run over to Vesta. After that, who knows?"

"I thought so. Most of you guys would stay out there forever if you didn't have to come back for supplies."

St. Simon shook his head. "Nope. Not true. A man's got to come back every so often and get his feet on the ground. If you stay out there too long, you get to talking to yourself."

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An hour later, the spaceboat *Nancy Bell* lifted from the surface of Pallas and shot toward Vesta.

"Jules, old cobblestone, we have just saved civilization."

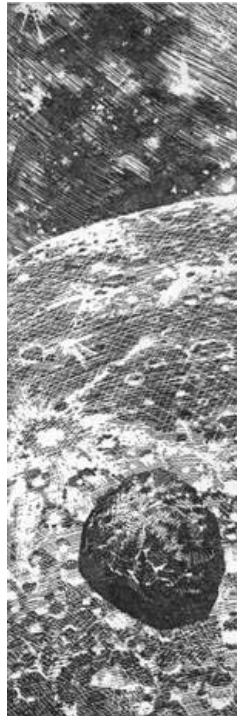
"*Jawohl, Herr Hassenpfefferesser! Und now ve go to find das Mädchen, nicht war?*"

"Herr *Professor* Hassenpfefferesser to you, my boy."

And then, all alone in his spaceboat, Captain Jules St. Simon burst into song:

"Oh, I'm the cook and the captain, too,  
And the men of the *Nancy's* brig;  
The bosun tight, and the midshipmite,  
And the crew of the captain's gig!"

And the *Nancy Bell* sped on toward Vesta and a rendezvous with Eros.



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