

In Congress Assembled—



H. Beam Piper

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Based upon this original text:

"When in the Course—," 1981
(original *Federation*¹ publication)

Cover illustration by John Schoenherr from original "Gunpowder God" publication².

Edited³ to remove elements which appear in Piper's Paratime canon⁴
and to better conform with the Terro-human Future History canon⁵.

This July 2010 version by David Johnson.

¹ *Federation*, H. Beam Piper (John F. Carr, editor), New York: Ace Books, February 1981, pp. 201-284.

² "Gunpowder God," H. Beam Piper, *Analog Science Fiction—Science Fact*, Vol. LXXIV, No. 3, November 1964, pp. 17-36.

³ As John F. Carr tells us in *H. Beam Piper: A Biography* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008, pp. 157-159), Piper failed to get this story published in early 1960 and eventually recast it as "Gunpowder God," the first installment of his Paratime novel *Lord Kalvan of Otherwhen*. Clearly set in Piper's Terro-human Future History (TFH) universe, the story includes a variety of elements associated with the indigenous civilization of Freya that were subsequently incorporated into the alternate timeline society of "Gunpowder God."

The only element of the indigenous Freyan society of "When in the Course—" referred to in any other TFH story is the interfertility of native Freyans with Terro-humans. (A Terro-human character in the novel *Uller Uprising* has an ancestor who is Freyan.) The alternative version of the story presented here removes all elements which are also included in "Gunpowder God" and adds some minor original material intended to improve the alignment of events portrayed on Freya with the rest of the TFH canon.

⁴ Piper's Paratime canon is comprised of the stories "He Walked Around the Horses" (*Astounding Science Fiction*, April 1948), "Police Operation" (*Astounding Science Fiction*, July 1948), "Last Enemy" (*Astounding Science Fiction*, August 1950), "Temple Trouble" (*Astounding Science Fiction*, April 1951), "Genesis" (*Future combined with Science Fiction Stories*, September 1951), "Time Crime" (*Astounding Science Fiction*, February 1955 and March 1955) "Gunpowder God" (*op. cit.*), and "Down Styphon!" (*Analog Science Fiction—Science Fact*, November 1965), and the novel *Lord Kalvan of Otherwhen* (Ace, 1965).

⁵ As Piper's commentary in "The Future History" (*Zenith*, May 4, 1964, edited by Peter Weston) makes clear, the TFH canon is comprised of the stories "Edge of the Knife" (*Amazing Stories*, May 1957), "Omnilingual" (*Astounding Science Fiction*, February 1957), "Naudsonce" (*Analog Science Fact—Science Fiction*, January 1962), "Oomphel in the Sky" (*Analog Science Fact—Science Fiction*, November 1960), "Graveyard of Dreams" (*Galaxy Science Fiction*, February 1958), "A Slave is a Slave" (*Analog Science Fact—Science Fiction*, April 1962), "Ministry of Disturbance" (*Astounding Science Fiction*, December 1958), and "The Keeper" (*Venture Science Fiction*, July 1957), and the novels *Four-Day Planet* (Putnam, 1961), *Uller Uprising* (originally published in *The Petrified Planet*, Twayne, 1952), *Little Fuzzy* (Avon, 1962), *Fuzzy Sapiens* (originally published as *The Other Human Race*, Avon, 1964), *Fuzzies and Other People* (Ace, 1984), *The Cosmic Computer* (originally published as *Junkyard Planet*, Putnam, 1963), and *Space Viking* (originally serialized in *Analog Science Fact—Science Fiction*, November 1962, December 1962, January 1963, and February 1963). Additionally, those portions of Piper's story "When in the Course—" (originally published in *Federation*, Ace 1981), published posthumously, which are not duplicated in his non-TFH story "Gunpowder God" (*Analog Science Fiction—Science Fact*, November 1964) are also treated as part of the TFH canon. Finally, background material found in the authorized novels *Fuzzy Bones* by William Tuning (Ace, 1981) and *Golden Dream* by Ardath Mayhar (Ace, 1982) is also treated as canonical when it does not contradict Piper's own work.

She closed her mind to the voices around her and stared at the map spread on the table between the two great candlesticks, trying to imagine herself high above everything, looking down like a bird. Here was Stursintir Castle, only a little mark of gold on the parchment, but she could see it all in imagination—the outer walls around the great enclosure with the sheds and stables against them; the citadel, and the inner bailey; the keep, and the watchtower, jutting up from the point of the ridge. And here, below, was the Fessu, and she could see it glinting in the sunlight as it rushed south to join the Echen, and here was Stursintir Town, and the bridge and the town-hall and the temple of Fremn, and, beyond, the farmlands and the squares of fields and the dark woods and the little villages. Oh, it must be wonderful to be a bird and fly above everything, and look down; ever since she had been a baby, she had dreamed. . . .

A voice, harsher than the others, brought her back to the present she had been trying to flee.

"King Leogene won't intervene? What's a king for, but to keep the peace? Great Fremn, is all Langeaks afraid of Yusunuch of Pintam?"

She looked from one to another of them, almost as though she were a stranger who had wandered unknowing into this windowless candlelit room. Guth, the Speaker for the Peasants, at the foot of the table, uncomfortable in his feast-day clothes and ill at ease seated among his betters. The other Speakers, for the artisans and the townfolk and the merchants. The landholders, and the lesser family-members. Old Kiarrune, the captain-in-chief, with his heavy frowning face and his golden beard splotted with gray like the gray lead-splotches on his gilded breastplate. Zwius, even older, with the cowl of his violet robe pushed back from his snowy head and trouble in his gentle blue eyes. And her father, Prince Vethir of Stursintir, with his pointed mustache and his small pointed beard and his mouth thin and grim between. How long it seemed since she had seen that mouth smiling!

Zwius was passing his hand across his face in the negative gesture.

"The King said that a prince must guard his own precedom," he replied. "He told me that it was Prince Vethir's duty to keep raiders out of his lands. And then he laughed and turned from me, and that was all."

"Did you tell him it wasn't just raiders from the Strip?" the voice that had spoken earlier demanded. "We don't care for them; I've killed a dozen with this hand!" The speaker banged it, large and hairy, on the table. "It's war! Yusunuch of Pintam means to take all Stursintir, the way his grandfather took the Strip, after the traitor we don't name sold him Yunsay Castle."

That was the part of the map her eyes had avoided—the two little rivers to the north, flowing together from east and west to form the Fessu. Once the land beyond, to the crest of the mountain, had all been Stursintir, until a brother of her great-grandfather had sold the castle that guarded Yunsay Pass to the prince who had then ruled Pintam, on the other side. Now the Pintamska called the country between the mountain and the rivers New Pintam, and the Stursintirska called it the Strip.

"Yusunuch's hiring mercenaries." That was a cousin on her mother's side. "He has near ten thousand of them, beside his own soldiers, and we have a scant two thousand, counting peasants with axes and scythes."

"We have five hundred mercenaries of our own," somebody mentioned.

Kiarrune snorted in contempt. "Bandits from Tetshech; all we can trust them to do is go over to Yusunuch the first chance they get. No free-captain in his right wits would take service with us, the case we're in."

"I wouldn't, if I were a free-captain," her father said wryly. "Well, you know how things are. Now, what is in your minds that we should do?" He turned to the man at the foot of the table. "Guth, you speak first."

That was the custom, for the least to speak first. The peasant representative cleared his throat.

"Prince, my cottage is as dear to me as this great castle is to you. I will fight for mine as you would for yours."

There was a quick mutter of approval—"Well said. An example to the rest of us!"—and the others spoke. The landholders and the lesser family-members agreed. Kiarrune said only: "Fight. What else?"

"Submission to evil men is the greatest of all sins," Zwius told them. "I am a priest of Fremn, and Fremn is a god of peace, but I say, fight with Fremn's blessing."

"Samme?" her father said.

She started slightly when she heard her name in that cold, distant tone.

"Better die in armor than live in chains," she said. "When the time comes, I will wear armor, too."

Her father nodded. "Then we are all agreed. Yusunuch of Pintam may take Stursintir, but we will not live to see it, and it will be long remembered what price we made him pay for our lives." He rose. "I thank you all. At an hour past sunset, we will dine together; the servants will attend you in the meantime. Now, if you please, leave me with my daughter. Zwius, do you and Kiarrune stay."

When they had gone, he drew his poignant and struck the gong with the flat, bidding a servant bring wine.

"Won't Tessetz of Tetz help us?" she asked, when they had sat down again. "If I were Tessetz, I'd rather have you as a neighbor than Yusunuch of Pintam."

"Tessetz of Tetz's a fool," Kiarrune declared. "He's gathering forces to join Yusunuch against us. Well, when we are dead and Stursintir is Yusunuch's, Tessetz's turn will come next."

"No, Tessetz is acting with wisdom," Zwius differed. "He's not joining Yusunuch; he hopes to gain enough ground north of the Echen to be able to fight Yusunuch off his own land. And he dare not aid us. We are under the ban of Eiraad's Forge. Even King Leogene dare not help those whom the priests of Eiraad would destroy."

Kiarrune fingered the hand-guard of his long sword, on the table in front of him. Then he raised his head.

"The priests of Eiraad," he said, dragging the words out as though by main strength, "want the land in the Yellowstone Valley. They want to build a temple in Stursintir, and they want you to give them land and workers for a temple farm. I know, that would be bad, but. . . ."

But not as bad as what Yusunuch and his ten thousand mercenaries would bring when they came over Yunsay Pass.

"Too late," Zwius said. "Eiraad's Forge has already made a compact with Yusunuch. They will help Yusunuch conquer Stursintir; Yusunuch will give them the Yellowstone Valley, and land for their farm, and the peasants he drives off their own farms will work for the priests. And all the world will see the fate of those who refuse Eiraad's Forge

anything." A look of pain came into his eyes. "It was on my advice, Prince, that you refused when they asked it of you."

Her father put a hand on the old priest-counselor's shoulder. "Blame yourself for nothing, Zwius; I'd have refused even against your advice. I swore long ago that Eiraad's Forge would never come into Stursintir. They build a temple. Then they demand land for a temple farm, and when they have it, they make thorn-hedges around it, and the workers on the farm never leave it and are never seen again. And they tax the ruler, and force him to tax the people until there is nothing left."

"Yes, you'd hardly believe it," Kiarrune said, "but they even make the peasants haul their manure to the temple farm, until⁶ they have none left for their own fields. There's nothing too petty for them to filch, once they get into you."

"I wonder why they want the Yellowstone," she said. "Is there something valuable there that we don't know about?"

"Something in the ground, that makes the water taste and smell badly," her father said. "They'd have mines there, and our own people would be the slaves that worked them. No, even if I'd known then that it would mean war with Yusunuch, I'd have refused. Better be shot with a musket than stung to death by gnats."

Roger Barron watched the coffee-concentrate tablet dissolve, and wished somebody would start a fight. It might help morale, which needed it. Adriaan de Ruyter and Reginald Fitzurse and Lourenço Narvaes had returned and the two hundred foot⁷ hyperyacht was berthed again inside the thousand foot sphere of the *Stellax*. Now they were all together in the ship's lounge, ten men and five women, and it was a worse gloom-session than six months ago, and with less reason. Adriaan was trying to point that out.

"Of course; if it had been uninhabited, we'd be able to get clear title of ownership for the whole planet. But look at the Thor Company, and the Loki

⁶ The original text, throughout, reads "till."

⁷ Common English units of measurement were generally in use in Britain and other Commonwealth countries—such as Australia and South Africa in the Southern Hemisphere where "second" Terran Federation civilization flourished—for several years after the time Piper was writing. Metric measurement was not widely used in Commonwealth countries before the 1970s.

Company, and the Yggdrasil⁸ Company. They were all chartered for inhabited planets, and they're all making money."

"But the people here are civilized!" That was Charley Clifford, the doctor, who doubled as carnivulturist. He'd made that point a couple of times before. "Good Lord, you all saw those cities."

"On only one continent," Karl Zahanov, the space-captain, said. He had a square-cut gray beard which gave him a professorial appearance to match his didactic manner. "There is no evidence of civilization on either of the other two, and one of them is even bigger than the Eurasian landmass on Terra."

"We didn't see any evidence of inhabitants on the other two continents," Fitzurse, on the couch beside him, said. He was a retired Terran Federation army officer, when he made positive statements he was certain of their correctness. "Any people whose works can't be seen at five hundred miles with a three hundred power telescope aren't civilized enough to mention. And I don't think much of this civilization, as such, either. It's confined to one river valley about the same area as the Mississippi-Missouri system in North Terra. There is nothing outside that except a small and apparently unrelated patch at the northern corner of the continent. A really high civilization spreads itself out more than that. Nancy, you saw all the photos; what do you think?"

Nancy Patterson was sitting at the table, beside Karl. She had dark hair and eyes, and a pleasant if slightly remote face. She had been a secretary in the social science division of the University of Montevideo.

"Well, it's pre-mechanical," she said. "Of course, that might be anything up to the level of say Sixteenth Century Europe. Fifth Century Pre-Atomic," he added, for which he was glad. They used Atomic Era dating exclusively on Venus, and he always had to count on his fingers to transpose to Christian Era, and he usually remembered too late that there was no C. E. Year Zero. "The cities are dark when they pass into the night-shadow, except

for a few gleams of what might be firelight. They are all sharply defined, and look as though they might be walled."

"They are; at least some of them," Fitzurse interrupted.

"That would indicate warfare as a serious possibility, which would mean competing national sovereignties. All the cities are surrounded by belts of farmland; each one grows its own food. That would indicate lack of large-scale powered transportation. And, of course, we detected no evidence of nuclear or electric energy, no radio-waves of any sort, and no sign of aircraft."

"The other two continents may be completely uninhabited," Luther Smith, the chief engineer said. He had reddish hair and a thin, intense face. "Can't we land on one of them and claim it, and let this civilized continent go?"

That would be Luther; he was worried about the possibility of conflict. Luther, he recalled, had protested vehemently about the quantity of arms and ammunition that had been taken aboard when they had been fitting out, four years ago. Luther was a pacifist.

"No." Adriaan was positive. "With our resources, or lack there of, we can't float a company on Terra without an exclusive-rights charter to operate on this planet, and we can't get that for one continent. What we will have to have is some kind of a treaty with some more or less sovereign power, guaranteeing us rights of entry and trade. Once we have that, we can get a charter. But on an inhabited planet, we must contact the inhabitants and establish friendly trade relations with at least some of them."

"Well, if that's what we have to do, let's get at it," he said. "We came out to find a Terra-type planet. We spent four years and visited six systems; now we've found one. We won't get another chance. Do I hear that statement disputed?"

He didn't. Luther looked at Margaret Hale, the hyperdrive engineer; she'd told him just how many more jumps her Dillinghams were good for. Charley and Sylvia Davock were silent; both of them knew that the law of diminishing returns was rapidly overtaking both the carnivulture vats and the hydroponic gardens, and Sylvia knew how much oxygen and water was escaping irrecoverably from the recycling systems. And they all knew how long the *Stellex* herself would last. The only reason they

had been able to buy her had been because her former owners could no longer get her insured.

Julio Almagro set down his drink—hydroponic potato schnapps and soda.

"Well," he said, in a weary voice, "we can always throw it in and go back to Terra."

He had a plump face and a black mustache; he looked soft, but under the fleshy upholstery he was hard as collapsium. He had more money in the *Stellex* than any three of the others, except Adriaan—and if he went back, his creditors would eat him alive.

"Most of us—I'm not speaking for myself or Roger—could stay out of jail. Some of us could even get jobs. I doubt if any of us would actually starve to death. But every cent any of us has is in this ship. If we want it back, here's where we'll have to get it."

Sylvia could get a job. So could Luther and Lourenço. Maybe Karl could get command of a ship, again, though he was pretty old for that. Fitzurse would have his army pension. Nancy could get her old job back—but she had put every cent she had inherited from her mother into Stellar Explorations to escape that job.

And if he went back, there was a warrant waiting for him from the Federation Member Republic of Venus. That was standard procedure. If you got voted out of office, they indicted you for corrupt practices. There were no other kind in Venusian politics.

"All right; for the record do I hear a motion that we land on this planet?" he asked.

Julio moved; Dave MacDonald, the scout, hunter and naturalist, seconded. Luther tried to shove in an amendment forbidding hostilities against the people of the planet. That brought Fitzurse to his feet, his mouth tight under his gray mustache.

"No. You've all made me responsible for landing operations; I'm not taking down a landing party to have them massacred because my hands are tied by instructions not to use firearms. I've seen that happen before. Let's vote on the motion as presented and seconded."

It passed. Karl wanted to know what Fitzurse wanted done first.

"We know that this is, roughly, a Terra-type planet," Fitzurse said. "We do not know, however, that it will support Terran life. Yggdrasil is

inhabited, and the Terran colonists there still have to eat hydroponic vegetables and carnivulture meat. For all we know, the animal life here may be silicone instead of carbon-hydrogen. The water may be deuterium-oxygen instead of hydrogen-oxygen. Or there may be fatal allergens. And Charley can tell you about some of the micro-organism possibilities.

"The first thing will be to make small-party landings, on the apparently uninhabited continents—and keep the adverb firmly in mind; you can't see everything through a telescope, and the woods may be full of characters who throw spears first and yell halt afterward. Then, after we have satisfied ourselves about the chemistry, biology and so forth, we will make a landing in force to contact the inhabitants. This will not be anywhere near that big city at the forks of the river. We will land in some isolated district where news will not be likely to leak out too quickly, and we will try to ingratiate ourselves with the people there, learn the language, and find out all we can about the customs, religion, level of technology, social organization, and, above all, the power situation. I don't mean your kind, Lourenço," he told the nuclear engineer. "I mean who rules whom and how. You agree, Roger? The actual making of contact will be your job."

He nodded. "We certainly don't want to go blundering into some royal court and wading up to our necks into some high level faction-fight without knowing what it's all about. Not in the middle of a big city. We don't have enough machine gun ammunition for that."

"Here's a place I'd had in mind," Fitzurse put on one of the projection screens. "This is three hundred power telephoto at two hundred miles."

It was a wide cultivated valley, hemmed in by mountains on three sides; two small rivers flowed in at one end from opposite directions to form a larger stream. There was a town, and something like a castle on the point of a ridge overlooking it. The distance was still too great for details, but it looked feudal—lord's castle, market-town, peasant villages, farms; self-contained and apart from everything else. It reminded him of pictures he had seen of Switzerland and the Tyrol before the Atomic Wars.

"I think so, Fitz," he said. "It looks like just the place for us to stay for a while, until we're ready

⁸ The fact that Yggdrasil, a more obscure Norse reference than Freya, has been selected as the name of a colonized world prior to the selection of Freya, suggests that Terran Federation naming conventions are generally tied to some specific characteristic of the colony world, as with the beautiful women which suggested the naming of Freya.

to move in on the big city. Which way is north, in the picture?"

"At the top. It's on the west of the big river valley."

He nodded. There was a road going north, beyond the juncture of the two smaller streams; it crossed the mountains at a pass guarded by another castle. He wondered if that were held by the lord of what he was beginning to think of as "our" valley. If not, mightn't it be held an by enemy? Better not mention that possibility in Luther's hearing.

It was another road, rutted and dusty, that entered "our" valley from the east; five hundred yards up the slope, it emerged from the woods into a broad meadow. The grass beside it grew almost waist high, topped with silvery plumes that rippled ceaselessly in the wind. Real wind; not fan-stirred ship air recycled thousands of times. And there was a blue sky above, peopled with roly-poly white clouds, a strange fragrance everywhere. It was all wonderful, after four years of the sealed steel world of the *Stellex*, and six airless, waterless, poisonous and otherwise abominable planets. But a day and a half here, and nothing. . . .

He turned back to the camp—the seventy foot oval landing-craft, with the marquee-tent in front of it and the lorries⁹ and aircars on either side—and as he did, a couple of the others shouted his name. They had all left what they had been doing and were crowding in front of the screen tuned to the pickup on the airjeep in which Dave and Arthur Muramoto were on watch.

"They have something," Fitzurse told him as he hurried over. "Mounted party—Dave calls it cavalry—about twenty, coming up the road on the other side. He has the pickup at top magnification and centered on a stretch of clear road."

Karl was talking into the screen to the ship, telling Adriaan. Luther was fussing with the photo reproducer on the jeep screen. Then Arthur, who must have been using the binoculars, gave a yell from the screen-speaker.

"I can see their dust; be along in a couple of minutes. Get set for them."

Then, briefly, the cavalcade appeared and passed. The mounts were ungainly things, with bovine heads and short, stumpy legs; he was surprised at their speed until he remembered having seen dachshunds run. These things had the same sort of gait, their short legs blurring until they almost looked like wheels. One of the riders wore a scarlet cloak and a wide plumed hat. The others were in armor, either back-and-breast cuirasses or mail hauberks or plated brigandines, and they wore conical helmets and orange-and-violet shoulder capes, and all carried long straight swords. A few had lances; the rest were armed with what looked like muskets.

Then they were out of sight, and the view shifted to another stretch of open road, and Arthur's voice, from the screen-speaker, estimated ten minutes until they reached it. Luther began getting photoprints out of the slot at the bottom of the screen and passing them to the others. Nancy took one.

"Why, they're human!"

If they weren't, they'd pass for it. Humanoid form, of course, was to be expected in any sapient race, with variations—the hairy, dog-faced Thorans, the faun-like Lokians, the grotesque but upright and biped naives of Yggdrasil. In this case, the variation but wasn't noticeable, Charley was a stickler.

"Humanoid," he corrected. "Homoform, approaching tenth degree. But there'll be all kinds of internal differences, of course."

"You can call them cavalry if you want to, Dave; I'll go along with it," Fitzurse said. "They're better than anything I ever saw."

All the mounted warriors he had ever seen had been Eurasian barbarians of North Terra, the human debris of the Atomic Wars, against whom he had campaigned to protect the reclamation projects. He began wondering, audibly, what sort of guns they had, and if there weren't pistol-holsters on the saddles.

"All right, watch for them!" Arthur called, and Luther went back to the screen and took the button-cord for the photo-printer.

They had a better view, this time. Details were clearer, and the riders on the short-legged, broad-tailed animals looked even more human. They were light-skinned and fair; most of them had blond or reddish beards. Julio became excited.

"The one in the orange cloak; that's a woman!"

That could be imagination; Julio's ran in that direction. The prints weren't positive evidence either way; the cloak and the wide-brimmed hat hid too much. Fitzurse was sure the guns were muzzleloaders, probably flintlocks.

"All right, we'll give them a fire-power demonstration," he said. "You all know the drill. Roger, you'd better take over from here."

Lourenço and Nancy went to the other airjeep, Nancy at the controls and Lourenço at the twin 15-mm machine guns. Everybody who wasn't wearing a pistol put one on and everybody got a rifle except Charley, who had a portable machinegun. They formed a line in front of the camp, with the jeep on the right and Charley on the left. He and Fitzurse took their position slightly front and center. Katherine Gower, at the screen, was giving instructions to the jeep at the top of the mountain.

Then the riders came out into the meadow, bunching at first and then forming a line of their own, with the orange cloak in the middle. Fitzurse raised the binoculars slung around his neck.

"Gad, it is a woman," he said. "Beauty, too." He started to lift the strap over his head, then let go of it and unslung his rifle. "Here they come," he said.

The line stirred; the orange-and-violet-pennoned lances came down; the musketeers rested the forestocks of their weapons on their bridle-arms. Then the woman in the orange cloak flung up her right hand, held it raised for a moment, and then swung it down and forward. The line advanced, first at a walk and then at a slow lope. Half way to the camp, they were at full speed, and the woman was lifting a long pistol from her saddle-bow. He brought his rifle to his shoulder, aiming fifty feet over the heads of the charging cavalry.

"Ready!" He waited until they were a scant hundred yards away. "Three rounds; fire!"

The rifle-butt punched his shoulder, and then punched it twice again. Other rifles banged, and the light machine gun chattered, stopped, and chattered again. Then the woman in the cloak flung up her right hand, the gold mountings of her pistol glinting, and pulled her mount back onto its flat beaver-like tail. The whole line piled up backward as the airjeep rose slightly, whizzed past in front of

them, and then turned. Its 15-mm's chugged and the bullets cut a swath through the grass. Then, before the woman and her troop could turn to flee, the other jeep, now directly behind them at a couple of hundred feet, fired a warning burst.

Angrily, the woman pushed her pistol back into its holster, said something to a man with a drawn sword beside her, and sat staring at them defiantly.

He handed his rifle to Fitzurse, who slung it, and went forward, his right hand raised in what was a peace-sign on Terra, Thor and Loki and ought to be one here. She was a beauty; hardly more than a girl, he guessed. He stopped twenty feet from her, lowered his hand, and bowed. She said something in a sharp, demanding voice. He smiled at her and asked her if she'd ever thought of going into tele-movies. She spoke again—different intonation, probably different language.¹⁰ He shook his head and replied from the *Iliad* in the original. She said something exasperated and quite possibly unladylike.

"Let's stop this foolishness," he said. Then he pointed to her and raised one finger. He pointed to the men on either side of her and raised three fingers. Then he dismounted from an imaginary—whatever they were—and pointed back to the striped canopy in front of the landing-craft, and pantomimed sitting down, pouring from a bottle, and drinking healths, wondering if that was one of their customs. Apparently it was; the girl smiled, jerked her chin toward her right shoulder in what looked like a nod, and spoke to the man beside her.

He and one or two others began raising objections. That convinced her that it was a good idea; kicking her feet out of the stirrups, she sprang to the ground, tossing her reins to one of the troopers, and started to unbuckle a belt on which she carried an unfemininely heavy and serviceable dagger.

"No! No!" He stopped her with a gesture and signed that she should keep the weapon, touching the butt of the 10-mm Colt-Argentine automatic on his own belt. She smiled and nodded

⁹ This British form of the American English "truck," generally in use in Commonwealth countries—such as Australia and South Africa in the Southern Hemisphere where "second" Terran Federation civilization flourished—appears throughout the original text.

¹⁰ Given that her native language, Sosti, is "spoken all over the river-valley system to which the Freyan civilization was confined," presumably this is the language spoken by the people of the civilization "at the northern corner of the continent." How she might have come to learn this language remains a mystery.

again. That made sense; an armed host should not expect his guests to disarm.

The man to whom she had first spoken—big and brawny, with a graying yellow beard and a gilded breastplate whose nicks and bullet-splashed showed that it wasn't ornamental—dismounted and beckoned to two musketeers, who slung their weapons and got to the ground. There was general dismounting along the line as the girl and her three companions went over to the marquee.

They sat down at a trestle-table which was provided with screens and recorders and writing and sketching equipment and a blackboard. Wine, or at least fermented apple-juice, was poured. A five gallon jug of the hydroponic hard cider, to which a half-gallon of pure medical alcohol had been added, was sent out to the troopers. They'd settled the point that the biochemistry of this planet was entirely Terra-type, and any people who had gotten as far as castles, riding animals and firearms must surely have discovered fermentation somewhere along the way.

It appeared that they had. They all drank with obvious pleasure, surprised at the coolness of the drink. Evidently they hadn't gotten as far as refrigeration. Then, after everybody had drunk everybody else's health, they settled down to language-learning.

He touched himself on the breast and said, "Me." He tapped Fitzurse on the chest and said, "You," speaking to him directly. Fitzurse repeated it to Charley, who passed it on to Margaret, who returned it to point of origin. He turned to the girl, touched himself again, and said:

"Me Roger Barron. You?"

"Me Sammeh-dad-Stursintir," she said. "Sammeh-dad-Stursintir *tsan vovaro*. Roger Barron *doru vovaron*."¹¹

That was picking it up smartly enough. There were introductions. The man with the graying beard and the battle-marred cuirass was Kiarrune. He didn't bother trying to remember the names of the other two; the audiovisual camera had them. They went on from there. Some of it involved moving pictures; they startled the newcomers only at first. After all, if people had things that went up off the ground and guns that kept on shooting, why shouldn't they have pictures

that moved and talked like live? More was done on the blackboard or on sketch-pads, or acted out. The girl thought it was fun. When she wasn't trying to keep an imperious expression on her face, she was lovely. She had a tilty little nose and a golden dusting of freckles across it.

Kiarrune and one of the musketeers tagged along faithfully. The third man dropped out, and he and Fitzurse began examining each other's weapons. Finally they strolled off to have a shooting-match between a 7-mm Sterberg and one of the big flintlocks.

"Place you come; where?" the girl was finally able to ask.

"Place name Terra; much far," he told her. "No word for say."

She gave one of her people's jerky nods. "Me place Stursintir." She pointed to the west and said something complicated.

"Place far?"

She grimaced and made a spread-fingered clawing gesture in front of her face. That was just what she had been trying to tell him. Then she caught up one of the seven-color pens she had learned to use and bent over a sketch-pad. First, a lance, with an orange-and-violet pennon; she gave him the word for that. Then numbers. Their numeration was something like the Roman system—dashes for digits from one to four, a half-circle for five, and a circle for ten. Circle with stroke across it, fifty, circle with cross, a hundred. A lance was the unit of measurement, about ten feet, and a hundred lances were a great-lance¹². It figured that she was about forty miles from home. One of the first blessings of Terran culture to be showered on these people would be Arabic numeration, he decided.

He took her to the other trestle-table, where the map Lourenço and Luther and Margaret had been making from air photos was thumb-tacked out, hoping that she knew what a map was. She did. As soon as she saw it, she clapped her hands delightedly and began babbling in excitement. After she became coherent, she began pointing things out, naming them.

The whole of "our" valley was Stursintir. So was the town beside the river; the castle on the ridge overlooking it was Stursintir Castle. It was

¹¹ These phonetic examples of the indigenous language do not appear in "Gunpowder God" and so are retained here.

¹² The reference to the prefix "*hos-*" meaning "great" has been eliminated.

her home. She went back to the other table and sat down with a pen, and this time she drew two little pictures, unmistakably if indelicately masculine and feminine. Evidently prudery wasn't one of the local shortcomings. She connected them with a horizontal line, dropped a vertical line from the female symbol, and drew another symbol like it.

"Me, Sammeh," she said. Then she pointed to the male symbol above. "Vethir." He was something-or-other—prince, duke, lord—of Stursintir. She drew a small stylized flame around the mother-symbol and made an equally stylized sound of lamentation. These people cremated their dead; her father, Prince Vethir of Stursintir, was a widower.

And they'd hoped to catch some wandering peddler or something of the sort for their first contact!

He touched the mark that represented the other castle, at the mountain-pass to the north.

"This Stursintir?"

"No! Pintam!" she replied. "Belong Prince Yusunuch." She used another word, and to explain it grimaced ferociously and drew her dagger in a threatening manner. The word would be enemy. He and Fitzurse exchanged glances.

"You go Stursintir Castle now?" he asked. "We go Stursintir Castle, make talk Prince Vethir. You, me, me people, you people, all go Stursintir Castle." He pointed to the contragravity vehicles. "All go up, high; go Stursintir Castle fast."

Her eyes widened in wonder. "Me? Go up? High?" She pointed to the sky, and then bent, looking down. "See everything, like map?" Then she turned to her bearded henchman Kiarrune and began babbling again.

As soon as Kiarrune understood what she was saying, he began protesting. Even the two musketeers joined him, and they all shouted objections. The girl shouted back at them, banging a small and shapely but very firm fist on the table. She must have been taunting them with being afraid; the objections now became indignant denials. Finally she turned to him.

"We all go Stursintir Castle in sky-things," she told him.

Kiarrune and the two musketeers went to break the news to the rank-and-file. For a moment, it looked like a mutiny in the making. Then they came over, some to help get the camp things into

the landing-craft and the rest leading the mounts—they were *oukry*¹³, plural the same as singular—to be put aboard.

It had been just as wonderful as she had imagined—everything spread out below like a map, but real instead of pictures on parchment. It had been the most wonderful thing in her whole life, and she wished that it could have gone on for hours. There had been a little trouble, at first, when they came to the castle; everybody saw the sky-things and Kiarrune's son, Jaessune, had manned the walls and fired a warning shot with one of the cannon. She had been afraid that there would be more shooting and that the—the *Terrans*—would shoot back. But the Terrans had another wonder, a little thing she could hold in her hand, that made her voice so loud that she could call down from above and everybody in Stursintir Castle heard her. So they had come down safely into the great enclosure in front of the citadel, and there had been no shooting.

But much excitement. Her father and Zwiuss and Jaessune met them in front of the main citadel gateway, acting as though somebody came down from the sky to visit them every day, she was clearly proud of how calmly they behaved, but the castle-folk went almost crazy. Jaessune got forty or fifty infantrymen to push them back with pike-staves and musket-butts, and the score of cavalymen of her escort got their *oukry* unloaded and helped. Finally things got a little quiet.

She had to help her father, using the few words of the Terrans' language she had learned and the words of her language that she knew they had learned, and her father made them welcome to Stursintir Castle, and sent Jaessune off to show them to rooms in the keep.

And now, at last, she and Kiarrune and her father and Zwiuss were alone in her father's little work-chamber.

Kiarrune sat down heavily, and then remembered to take off his helmet and his sword-belt.

"Wine, for the love of Fremn!" he said, and when Zwiuss poured him a cup, he emptied it at a gulp. "I have never been more afraid in all my life,

¹³ This animal name does not appear in "Gunpowder God" and so is retained here.

not even when we fought the Dazourska¹⁴ at Sykrys¹⁵. And this crazy daughter of yours thought it was all fun!"

"But it was! Father, it was—it was—" Even in her own language, she had no words for how wonderful it had been.

"Kiarrune, our Sammeh is still up in the sky," her father said, and he was truly smiling, even if it was only a wan ghost of his old smile. "Until she gets back on the ground, you'd better tell me about it."

Kiarrune thought for a moment, and then began to tell how they had seen the strangers camped by the road, and thought that they might be Pintamska, and how she had taken command and arrayed the little troop for a charge. And then he went on to tell what had happened.

"What could we do?" he asked. "They held our lives between thumb and finger; they could have wiped us out in less time than I speak of it. But they wanted to parley. It is my thought that they seek to be friends."

"But what do they want of us?" her father asked. "And where do they come from?"

"As to where they come from, they say it is a place called Terra, and that it is very far. It may be that they want to trade with us, or they may be exiles seeking a home. Or they may be scouts ahead of a great army."

"In that case, we had better make friends with them quickly," Zwiuss said. "And hope that Yusunuch of Pintam doesn't."

The smile came back to her father's face. "Tell me about these guns of theirs, Kiarrune."

"They have small ones, half as heavy as our muskets, which load ten shots at a time and fire as fast as the trigger is pulled. They have pistols that load with twelve shots. They have guns a little heavier than muskets, and guns like small cannon, that shoot very fast, *ah-ah-ah-ah!* as long as the trigger is held back."

He opened his belt-pouch and got out two brass tubes, as long as one of her fingers, necked like wine-bottles. One was empty; the other had a

pointed metal cork. He handed them across to her father.

"I stole these," Kiarrune admitted. "I had to; I was afraid of making them suspicious if I asked for them, and I wanted you to see them. These are what they load the guns with. The pointed thing is the bullet; the fire-seed is inside, and there must be something like a bit of flint inside, too, to make the spark. Look at the empty one; you can see where something in the gun punched it. Every time the guns fire, one of the empty holders flies out of it, and a new one is put into the barrel. I think they use the kick of the gun to do that," he added, as though he had just thought of it.

Her father looked at the brass things and nodded. "That could be." He thought for a moment. "If they would use their weapons to help us, we could laugh at Yusunuch, and Tsesetz wouldn't even be worth that. The question is, would they?"

"If they were here as our guests when Yusunuch invades, they'd have to help us to defend themselves," Kiarrune said.

"I think they will help us, any how," she said. "I don't know what they want here, but I think they want to be our friends." She felt herself smiling. "And the one who is called Roger likes me. He doesn't realize it yet, but he will."

"Princess!" Kiarrune was shocked.

"I think Sammeh likes the Terran called Roger," her father said. "It is to be seen in her face when she speaks about him."

And now, as her face warmed, she knew that what was to be seen on it was a blush.

"But we must learn their language," Zwiuss said. "We can't tell them about our troubles until we do."

"They'll learn ours first. They are very good at learning languages," Kiarrune said. "In just a short while, they were able to talk to us. Princess, tell them about the pictures that move and talk."

"Oh, yes!" And then she remembered the wonderful thing that Roger had given her, the silver thing that wrote like a pen, in black and red and blue and all the colors. "But let me show you this, first. . . ."

The rooms to which they had been conducted were at the top of the keep, on the east side. The outer walls were twelve feet thick, pierced with loopholes big enough for a man to

stand in and narrowing to apertures six inches by a foot. On the other side, wide arches gave on to a balcony, covered with flowering vines, above a garden in a central court. There was no window-glass, and the fireplaces had an unused look. Evidently it never got cold here.

The horde of servants who had helped install them had gaped in amazement at the contragravity skids on which they had floated their belongings up from the landing-craft, and then departed reluctantly. So, a few minutes later, had the young officer in the gilded armor—his name was Jaessune, and he was old Kiarrune's son—and now they were alone. They had a screen up and tuned to the ship; a crowd of them were in front of it, telling Adriaan and Lisette Krull and Sylvia about the castle and their reception there.

He strolled out on the balcony and found Fitzurse and Nancy looking down into the garden.

"Well, this was much better than we expected," he said.

"Yes," Fitzurse agreed. "I thought we'd have to spend a day or so convincing some backwoods farmer that we weren't really horrible monsters. I think you made rather an impression on the young lady."

"I wish I could be a little more sure of what we've gotten into," Nancy said.

"Ah. You were another who thought we were spending too much money on armament, when we were outfitting. Beginning to wish we'd have two or three times as much to spend, now?"

She looked at him sharply. "Are you getting that, too?" she asked.

"I got that the second little Sammeh formed up her troop and charged us. Around here, stranger equals enemy: hit them before they hit you."

"And this castle; these walls, and all these cannon," Nancy said, "You know, I doubt if there are more than twenty thousand people in this whole valley, and the agriculture, or what I saw of it from the air, is the most primitive sort. Yet there are at least two hundred soldiers, completely nonproductive, here at the castle. They wouldn't keep that many in idleness if they didn't have to."

"That's only a fraction of them," Fitzurse said. "I saw close to a thousand infantry drilling in the fields up the river, when we were coming in. And look how promptly they got the walls manned

and got off¹⁶ that warning shot, when they sighted us."

And Prince Whoozis of Whatzit, who holds the castle at the mountain-pass; he thought of the professionally trained manner in which Sammeh handled her big dagger to convey the idea of enmity. If she'd really had him in front of her—

"I've been thinking about that. Let's don't mention it around Luther or Sylvia or Charley, it would only start another infernal argument, but all this red-carpet treatment may be on account of our potential value as allies."

"Oh, heavens, I hope not!" Nancy said. "We don't want to get mixed up in any wars."

"Not without knowing what they're all about," Fitzurse agreed.

He and the retired soldier exchanged glances past Nancy. People who want allies make treaties with them. Stellar Explorations, Ltd., needed a treaty with somebody. Talk that over later in private. There was likely to be a serious division on policy.

They strolled into the big room where the screen was. Karl was talking to Adriaan, promising to get a relief ship-watch up as soon as possible. Charley, in the middle of a group sampling the wine the servants had left, was pontificating:

"No, we simply mustn't speak of them as 'human,' that is reserved for *Homo sapiens terra*. They're sapient beings, so we can call them people, but they are utterly alien to us, descended from a different though remarkably parallel line of evolution. We just can't call them human."

Phooie! He'd call them human, any day. Then another thought suddenly burgeoned within him. He'd go further than that. He'd be quite willing to call Prince Vethir father-in-law.

The feast had started at dusk and lasted until well past midnight. They knew, from the tests made by Sylvia and Lisette and Charley and Katherine, that the food of the planet was edible by Terrans, without deficiencies of any essential vitamins or trace-elements. Properly cooked, it was also delicious. Now, with the sun beginning to peep levelly through the eastern loopholes, their quarters had been invaded by a posse of servant-girls with breakfast. It was an informal meal; they sat on cushions on the floor, with the bowls of steaming

¹⁴ The place name "Dazour" does not appear in "Gunpowder God" and so is retained here but the adjectival modifier "Dazouri" has been modified to fit the pattern of similar new phrasings in this version.

¹⁵ This place name does not appear in "Gunpowder God" and so is retained here.

¹⁶ The original text reads "of."

food and the baskets of fruit and pots of hot spicy tea in front of them. Nancy wondered if the ancestors of these people hadn't been nomads, accustomed to eating on the ground around campfires.

They were talking about a name for the planet. They'd need one to file discovery claim, and even among themselves they couldn't go on calling it Eta Stellex II, or "this planet."

"What do the people here call it?" somebody asked.

"They don't know it is a planet," Karl said. "I was talking—well, sketching and making signs—with this old fellow Zwiuss. He took me to the castle library and showed me a map of what he called 'Everything.' The south-central part of this continent, a rough circle, with sea all around it. I tried to show him what a stellar system was. I don't think he understood. We hadn't enough idea words in common."

That would correct itself. Nancy was worried.

"Well, you know, he's some sort of a priest," she said. "On this culture-level, cosmology's part of the religion. You might have been committing all kinds of sacrilege and heresy."

Julio was watching a couple of the servant-girls, shapely and lightly-clad.

"Pity Venus is a planet already," he said. "How about Aphrodite?"

Karl passed his hand in front of his face in the negative gesture he was teaching himself to use.

"The Astrographic Commission won't accept Helleno-Roman names for anything outside the Sol System. They prefer names from Norse mythology, as long as they last."

Somebody mentioned that Freya was the Norse Venus. Karl jerked his chin at his right shoulder.

"Freya's good. The Chartered Freya Company," he said experimentally.

"We haven't been chartered, yet," Fitzurse mentioned. "We still have to get a treaty from somebody."

"I think we can get one from Vethir."

"Of course, there's the question of just how sovereign he is, here," Lourenço said. "I know, he has an army, but he may be just a minor nobleman in something big."

Luther wasn't thinking about that. "Look what we can give these people," he said. "Air transportation. Nuclear power. Telecast communication. Even take some of the minor things, like refrigeration, or paper and printing. . . ."

Julio took his eyes from the two girls—the two Freyan girls—and threw his bucket of cold water.

"If you think we're going to transform this planet with what we have here, think again, he advised. "We would need four or five shiploads of equipment, and fifty to a hundred technicians and engineers, just for a start. What we have is one ship that should have been junked ten years ago, Adriaan's yacht, and a couple of million sols in debts."

"If we get a charter, we can float a company, and then we'll have credit," Karl said.

"You can't float a company just by waving a charter and yelling, 'Lookit, we gotta planet!' If Freya weren't inhabited, yes. Anybody will invest in a colonization company. But there are too many restrictions to colonizing an inhabited planet, and investors don't like that. What we'll have to do is find something on this planet that can be sold on Terra at a profit after space-freight costs, and space-freight costs are murder."

"Well, there's this tea," Dave said, lifting the cup in his hand. "I had a helluva hangover, this morning, and one cup yanked me right out of it. Coffee isn't in it with this stuff."

"Sure," Julio agreed. "In a couple of years, we'll be shipping it all over the Federation—if we're in business then. But you can't start an interstellar company on a new luxury-item. Too chancy; the big money won't risk it. We'll need something with an existing demand. Remember, the first thing we have to sell is stock."

They were still talking about that when one of the girls came over.

"You . . . want . . . more?" she asked bashfully, in precise Lingua Terra.

Nobody did. She and her companion began gathering up empty bowls and things. A little later Kiarrune's son, Jaessune, came in. He saw Nancy first of all, and they smiled at each other. Jaessune had been especially attentive to Nancy at the feast.

"You . . . all . . . sleep . . . good?" he asked.

"Yes, thank you," Roger told him, in his own language. "Sleep good. Good things for eat, this daylight: much good."

"Much happy." He spoke to one of the girls, and she went out. "Sammeh, Zwiuss, come: We make talk."

They made talk, all that day and for days to come. Mostly it was with Sammeh and Zwiuss and Jaessune; sometimes Kiarrune and, seeming to snatch the time from an endless press of other affairs, Vethir. Luther and Lourenço went back to the *Stellex* to relieve Adriaan, Lisette, and Sylvia¹⁷, and thereafter joined the language classes by screen. Words for things or acts that could be shown; thing-and-act combination words; words for ideas, and for ideas about ideas. Sentence structure, and grammar. It was surprising how little grammar was needed to convey meaning, and how much trouble a little knowledge of grammar could make.

The language, they found, was called Sosti¹⁸; it was spoken all over the river-valley system to which the Freyan civilization was confined. They learned the names of the river and its tributaries, and of the cities and their rulers. There were a surprising number of princely realms and sovereignties, and this bothered Nancy. It wasn't what the culture pattern indicated.

The civilization was an ancient one; the language was uniform, and the culture and the economy unified. These were a warlike people; the nobleman was first of all a warrior. Then why hadn't there been conquests and, long ago, a single empire? Apparently there never had been. Three kingdoms¹⁹ existed in an area no larger than the Mississippi Valley on Terra, each a loose collection of minor principedoms, Prince Vethir, for instance, was a nominal subject of King—the title was actually "Great Prince" in literal translation²⁰—

¹⁷ The original text reads "de Ruyter and the girls." That is the only time female members of the *Stellex* crew are referred to as "girls."

¹⁸ This name does not appear in "Gunpowder God" and so is retained here.

¹⁹ The original concept of "great kingdoms" has been eliminated. The three kingdoms are composed of subject principedoms so the term "kingdom" would seem to be sufficient to distinguish them from their subordinate realms.

²⁰ Given the limited authority enjoyed by the kings over their subject princes under the political situation maintained by the gunpowder theocracy this framing makes more sense—

Leogene, at Langeks, the big city at the forks of the river—his kingdom was also called Langeks—and so were the neighboring princes of Pintam and the north and Tetz to the south. There was always trouble between Vethir and Yussuch of Pintam, and there was talk of impending open war, which disturbed Luther and Sylvia. What bothered Nancy was not being able to understand the situation. These kings should long ago have established their authority in their respective kingdoms, and then wars among them should have unified the whole civilization into one empire.

The language-learning gradually spread out from the big room at the top of the keep. Karl and Adriaan spent a lot of time with Zwiuss in his study. Arthur and Dave and Margaret were usually in the shop of the castle armorer, or the blacksmith, or the carpenter. Julio, a horseman on Terra, haunted the stables. Charley found a professional brother in the castle healer, who had his dispensary and surgery across from the guardroom inside the main gate. And of course Fitzurse and Kiarrune became almost inseparable.

"You know, they never invented the socket bayonet here," Fitzurse said, "They have to mix pikemen and halberdiers with their infantry musketeers. So I just invented it for them; now every infantryman can have a musket. Trouble is, every one has to be individually fitted; it's only an accident when you find two musket-barrels with the same outside diameter at the muzzle. Take a year and a half to get them all fitted."

He was surprised, too, at the muskets. They were, he said, almost exactly like guns he'd seen in museums in Cape Town and Johannesburg, which had been used in the Great Trek.

"Well, that's like the physical resemblance of the people to Terran humans," Charley said. "You wouldn't claim, would you, that some Boers had their ox carts fitted with Dillinghams, and trekked out here to Freya with their guns? No; if you have black powder and no percussion caps, there are only a few ways in which you can get fire to the charge in the barrel, and a flintlock's the simplest and best way to do it. Well, environmental conditions being the same here and on Terra, the same physical structure is the most efficient for a race of sapient beings."

while also maintaining a conceptual connection to the redundant title of "Great King" in the original text.

Charley's insistence on the non-humanity of Freyans was getting a trifle tiresome, especially when one is thinking, at the moment, of a tilty little nose with a dusting of golden freckles across it.

"Charley, have you found one characteristic among these people that differentiates them from us?" he asked. "Do they differ from any of us more than a Eurasian barbarian²¹ differs from a South African or Antarctic²²?"

"Well, no," Charley gruded. "But they can't be human! They evolved here on Freya; there's no genetic connection at all between them and us."

He was trying hard very to be convincing. Maybe it was Charles Clifford, M.D., whom he was really trying to convince.

They sat together in a double chair, just wide enough to be comfortably and agreeably close. Her golden head was bent over the notepad, and somehow his arm had managed to get up on her shoulder. When it had, she'd only snuggled a little closer.

"This is my name," she said. "See; ss-am, m-eh, Sammeh."

Two characters—they wrote from the bottom of the page up—each with a little dingbat like accent-mark. Phonetic-syllabic; he'd been afraid of having to learn a thousand or so ideographs, or hire some scribe of questionable reliability.

"And here is yours." She switched from blue to red for that. "See. Rrr-oh. Djji. Eh-rrr."

The accent-mark things were the vowels; you put them under the consonants when they preceded and over when they followed. This looked like an easy alphabet to learn.

"And here is yours, in our writing." He did it in block capitals; time enough to go into upper and lower case when she had learned the letters. "This is S-a-m-m-e-h."

She looked at it in mock-horror, and then laughed.

"That—*me*?" she demanded in Lingua Terra. "But so many letters. And it goes on its side, and the wrong way." She made the funny clawing

gesture in front of her face, which seemed to convey complete bafflement, "I will never learn this!"

"Oh, you've just had it, for now. Let's take a break."

"Take?" She made a grasping gesture. "Break?" She snapped something imaginary with her fingers. "Break what?"

"Throw it in. Time out," he told her. "Stop this now and do something else."

"Yes!" She jumped up and caught one of his hands in both of hers. "*Let us take a break* in the flower-and-grass place. The garden."

"Good. Or would you rather take a ride in an aircar?"

He knew what the answer to that would be. As they went out, Nancy, trying to teach Jaessune the Arabic numeration and the importance of a figure for absolutely nothing at all, waved to them. Another Terro-Freyan romance sprouting: somebody else wouldn't listen to Charley.

The big policy debate started as soon as Karl and Margaret went up to relieve Luther and Lourenço on ship-watch. It wasn't that Luther wanted to make trouble; he'd just come to some conclusions the correctness of which he was positive. That was usual with idealists.

In the first place, he wanted them all to leave Stursintir Castle and go to Langeks. He'd heard, like everybody else, of the trouble between Vethir and Yusunuch of Pintam, and he wanted to be out of Stursintir before a war started. Again, it would have been easy to do Luther an injustice. He wasn't a coward; he just thought all wars were wrong and he didn't want any part in one. Then, he wanted to start immediate trading operations. He and Lourenço and, by screen, Karl, had designed a hundred and fifty foot freighter with a wooden hull, which could be built by local labor and lifted with one of the heavy-duty contragravity generators. It looked more like a cantilever bridge than an airframe, but he estimated a five hundred ton payload and an airspeed of a hundred and fifty mph.

"We all admit we have to find something we can sell on Terra," he argued. "We won't find it sitting around here, and the best way we can learn about the products of this planet will be by trading-voyages."

Nobody denied that. What Roger couldn't see was the necessity of leaving Stursintir,

especially when things were just getting good with him and Sammeh. And he could see a great many objections to a move to Langeks.

"We still don't know what things are like there. We don't know what powerful established trading interests we'd come into conflict with, and neither do we know how soon this King Leogene would get envious of us and to try grab our ship, not realizing that it wouldn't do him any good after he got it. We don't have that to worry about here."

"Well, can we trust Vethir?" Luther countered. "He's been very hospitable so far, but—"

"We can trust him," Fitzurse said. "We could wipe this whole castle garrison out at the first act of treachery, and he knows it. We couldn't defend ourselves effectively in the middle of a couple of hundred thousand people in Langeks. Trade there, yes. But keep our base here."

"We still need a treaty. I think we can get one from Vethir; a better treaty than we could get from Leogene, at least now."

"Well, Leogene is Vethir's sovereign; a treaty with a subject prince wouldn't be as good as a treaty from the king. I doubt if Vethir has enough sovereignty to give us a treaty the Federation Colonial Office would accept," Luther argued.

"You know why we can get a treaty from Vethir? He needs our help in case Yusunuch of Pintam invades him. If King Leogene hasn't enough sovereignty to keep his subject princes from making war on one another, he doesn't have enough sovereignty outside Langeks City to make a treaty with."

"That's another thing!" Luther began clamoring. "I've heard about that, too. That's why I want us to get out of here, before we get caught in the middle of a war."

There was, he had long ago learned, one infallible weapon against the idealist, and that was moral indignation.

"You mean, you want us to tell Vethir it was nice knowing him and thanks for everything, and then run out on him when he needs help?" he demanded. "Abandon him and his people to massacre and enslavement? Maybe you could do that and still respect yourself; be damned if I could."

"Yes: I thought I was the business-business guy, and Luther was the idealist," Julio put in. "If that's idealism, I'll take a plate of hash."

"And have you any idea," Fitzurse asked. "What effect a shameful desertion like that would have on our prestige? Why, no Freyan would ever trust any Terran's friendship again."

"Luther, it's our moral duty to help Vethir defend his country." Surprisingly, the feminine voice came from the screen-speaker. Generally Margaret stayed completely out of these bickers, unless they involved the Keene-Gonzales-Dillingham Theory of Non-Einsteinian Relativity and the Dillingham hyperdrive. "You say you're opposed to war; why, if we didn't help Vethir, we'd be no better than passive accomplices of this Prince Yusunuch in an unprovoked war of conquest."

Luther looked hurt and bewildered. Why, they were actually taking a lofty moral attitude toward him, instead of defending their own position. He said something, rather weakly, about what the Federation government would say.

"I'd hate to listen to what they'd say if we deserted Vethir, under the circumstances," Fitzurse told him.

There was a lot more of it, mostly repetitious, with Luther's position getting steadily weaker. In the end, Stellar Explorations, Ltd., voted to authorize Roger Barron and Reginald Fitzurse to offer Prince Vethir of Stursintir a bilateral offensive and defensive alliance.

"He was very happy to accept," Roger reported, the next afternoon. "There will be a meeting with the Council of Stursintir this evening to ratify the treaty. That is a pure formality; Vethir is really absolute ruler here. Now here's the situation. . . ."

He showed them, on the map, the Stursintir-Pintam boundary, along the two small rivers that joined to form the Fessu, and explained how the castle that guarded Yunsay Pass had passed, almost a century before, to Pintam by betrayal.

"There's been raiding and barn-burning and cattle-rustling on both sides ever since; that's accepted. But lately, some outsider has made a deal with Yusunuch to furnish him with money and supplies and mercenaries and guarantee the permissive support or at least the non-interference of King Leogene, in return for concessions after the

²¹ The original text reads "a full-blooded Mongoloid."

²² The original text reads "a full-blooded Negroid or Caucasian."

conquest. This outsider, Eiraad, is to get this section up here, called the Yellowstone Valley—"

"Did you say Eiraad?" Nancy demanded. "Why, Eiraad is one of the gods these people worship. Not here in Stursintir, but other places. He's a fire-god, or sun-god, or something like that."

"Come to think of it, Roger", Fitzurse interrupted, "Zwius and Vethir never spoke of Eiraad, at all. They talked about Eiraad's Forge; they always used that expression."

"That's right; Eiraad's Forge," Nancy said. "It's some kind of a theocracy; all the top priests are in Langeks, but they have temples all over. Tell me; what's fire-seed?"

"Fire-seed?" Fitzurse echoed. "Why, that's gunpowder."

"But they get it from the priests of Eiraad. I thought it was some sacramental substance, maybe used in connection with their cremation rites. Are you sure?"

"It's all I've been hearing about. Sore subject, here; they're almost out of it, and can't get any more. I'm surprised Jaessune didn't mention it to you."

She and Jaessune would have had other things to talk about. Then he swore at his own obtuseness.

"Now it figures!" He swore again. "The whole thing figures. Say these priests accidentally discovered gunpowder, a few centuries ago. . . ."

"Bet I know how," Charley interrupted. "Bet Eiraad was originally a healer-god, like Aesculapius, and the priests were the doctors. Sulphur²³, saltpeter and charcoal sounds just like the sort of mess early iron-age, try-anything empirics would mix up, and then I suppose they put it on the stove and got a big surprise. After that, Eiraad went out of medical practice and into the munitions business."

"Yes, Eiraad's Forge is the only source of gunpowder; the priests make it, keep it a temple secret, and furnish it to the kings and princes. Firearms and artillery are just good enough that nobody without powder has a chance against anybody with it. That's why this place is cluttered

up with this hodgepodge of petty sovereignties and tributary princes who don't pay tribute and kings who can't keep their subjects from fighting among themselves. Eiraad's Forge wants a lot of rival rulers they can play off against each other. Anybody doesn't cough up with offerings to the temple, they shut the powder off on him and supply his rivals, and see what happens. I'll bet the offerings just roll in!"

"Yellowstone Valley," Arthur said. "Can anybody show me where it is? I'll take a jeep and go look at it right away."

"Sulphur?"

"Sure; what else?"

"This is old-fashioned, country-style black powder?" Lisette asked. "Well, if Arthur finds sulphur, you can tell Vethir that his ammunition worries are over. Little Lisette will make him all the fire-seed he wants, and she'll eat the first batch if it won't outshoot Eiraad's Best."

"Where'll you get the niter?"

"The first thing I noticed, coming down, was that every farm has a manure-pile bigger than the farmhouse. The ground under every one of them is saturated with potassium nitrate. Anybody want to bet on how soon the priests of Eiraad will be out on the sidewalk beating a drum for pennies?"

There was an electric light at the ceiling of Vethir's council-chamber, with its own nuclear-conversion unit, and three more stood on the table in place of the candlesticks. Some of the Council had never seen them before, and blinked in awe.

"Well, tell us all," Zwius was saying. "To what will we pledge ourselves?"

"We will pledge friendship and brotherhood with one another," Roger said, "We will pledge to aid one another in war. Prince Vethir will guarantee to the Company of Searchers Among the Stars the right to live in peace in his realm, and to buy and sell, and to buy land and erect buildings on it, and places to land our sky-things. The Company of Searchers Among the Stars will pledge themselves to respect the rights of the people of Stursintir, and to maintain the right of the house of Prince Vethir to rule in Stursintir, against enemies from without and treasons and rebellions within, and specifically against Prince Yusunuch of Pintam and Prince Tesselz of Tetz. And we will pledge ourselves to give weapons, as we can, to Prince Vethir and his

people, and to make weapons and teach them how to make weapons. And we will make fire-seed, and teach the people of Stursintir to make it."

There was an instant's silence, and then the room blew up almost like a barrel of fire-seed. Everybody was shouting at once. Kiarrune was brandishing his sword and yelling, "Death to Yusunuch! Destruction to Pintam!" Sammeh ran around the table and flung her arms about his neck. Nancy and Jaessune were embracing. And Vethir had flung back his head and was laughing like a madman. It was the first time, now that he thought of it, that he had ever heard the Prince of Stursintir laugh. Things must have been pretty grim, up to now. Then there was a general cry of, "Wine! Wine!" Evidently there was only one way to make a treaty really official here.

"The making of fire-seed will take time," Vethir said, after things had quieted down a little. "The people must be taught, and the stuff to make it of must be gathered, and things to make it with prepared, and we know nothing of any of this. The priests of Eiraad have kept it a secret since no man can remember."

Mark one up for Vethir; at least he had some faint glow of an idea of production problems.

"Well, I know what has to be done," Lisette said, "and I know what we don't have to do it with. I'll have to organize the niter production, first of all. How about you, Lourenço? How soon do you think you can get the mill ready?"

Lourenço estimated a week, doubled that, and then said, "That's for about fifty pounds a day. That can be increased gradually, after we get workers trained."

Arthur was even less optimistic about sulphur production; he gave it a month, to be on the safe side.

"But we can't wait that long," Vethir objected. "Yusunuch will learn of what we're doing, and he'll be across the mountains before we're ready for him."

"Don't let him find out," Fitzurse said. "Seal your frontiers. Haven't you done that already?"

Vethir wasn't exactly sure what he meant. Fitzurse told him.

"Cavalry patrols guarding every road and trail out of Stursintir; let anybody in, but let nobody out. How about this Tesselz of Tetz, by the way?"

Vethir used some words that hadn't come up yet in the language-learning. Zwius said:

"He will attack as soon as he hears that Yusunuch's army is across the rivers, but not before. At least, I don't think he will."

"Then we'll take care of him. But this Yunsay Castle, the castle at the pass; that will have to come first. That's the key to the whole situation."

"Man, do you know about Yunsay Castle?" Kiarrune cried. "Yunsay Castle has never been taken. We would have it today, if it hadn't been sold to Yusunuch's grandfather by Him Whom Fadrigio Slew."

"Father," Jaessune said reprovingly. "Yunsay Castle has never been attacked with sky-things."

"That's right," Fitzurse said. "Give me a hundred men and a week to train them and the first cloudy night we'll take it, from the top down."

"Jaessune, pick your best hundred men," Kiarrune told his son. "Men able to learn from those wiser than they are, if you have that many. The Terran war-captain Reginald will teach them a new way to take castles."

"We ought to have a good fifth column, both in Pintam and Tetz," he said, and then had to explain what that was.

Vethir seemed to question the propriety of such a way of making war. Zwius had no such scruples.

"Eiraad's Forge is established in both," he said, "and in both, the priests of Fremn are ill-pleased, because the people have no more offerings for them, after Yusunuch and Tesselz make them give offerings to Eiraad's Forge. They look to me for advice. I will send word to them."

"We'll airdrop agents outside both Pintam and Tetz towns, with radios. You can give them contacts, people you trust. Then they can gather those who have been wronged or bear any grudge against the prince, and they can gather news for us, and spread tales, and get people to speak and act against Eiraad's Forge."

For ten days, Karl, on the ship, reported unvaryingly fair weather over the northwestern part of the continent. Fitzurse and Dave took charge of the commando training, and at all hours men in black with long pistols and sawed-off muskets and short pikemen's swords were swarming out of air-

²³ This British form of the American English "sulfur," generally in use in Commonwealth countries—such as Australia and South Africa in the Southern Hemisphere where "second" Terran Federation civilization flourished, appears throughout the original text.

lorries onto the battlements of Stursintir Castle. Arthur had a gang of workmen up Yellowstone Valley; Luther and Lourenço and Charley took over a grist-mill and began converting it for mixing and grinding powder. Lisette, with anybody she could press into service, began organizing niter production. There already existed a small charcoal-burning industry.

There was a shortage of everything, particularly skilled help. In Stursintir Town, only three or four pot-tinkers knew anything at all about working sheet-metal, and one of these had to be dragged to a chopping-block and threatened with instant beheadment before he consented even to try to make evaporating pans for the sulphur refinery. There was also trouble with the peasants about the manure-piles.

Roger, Fitzurse and Julio formed a general staff, along with Vethir, Kiarrune and Zwiis. The latter was also busy fomenting treasons and plots among his co-religionists in Pintam and Tetz by radio, and the three Terran members usually found themselves called away to show some Freyan mechanic how to use a monkey-wrench, or to land a spy outside one of the enemy capitals, or jockey a landing-craft to and from the ship. Roger had taught Sammeh to fly an aircar, and Nancy had given Jaessune a few flying lessons; outside of them, all the air-transport had to be flown by Terrans, and when they were doing that, they couldn't be doing anything else. Nobody got much sleep. Everybody wished that he or she had been born quintuplets.

Along with everything else, he managed to find time to learn everything that Zwiis or anybody else at Stursintir Castle knew about the operations of Eiraad's Forge. One item of information intrigued him. Wherever there was a temple, there was always, nearby, a large farm, enclosed with high and impenetrable thorn hedges, to which a great deal of manure was hauled, and also bags of sulphur said to be used in religious ceremonies. He flew by night to take infrared photographs of the ones both at Pintam and at Tetz.

Then, on the evening of the ninth day, everybody decided that the age of miracles had not yet ended. Charley, who had surprised nobody more than himself by developing a talent for the work, reported that the powder-mill was in production, to the extent of fifteen pounds. A

charge of it drove one of the big two-ounce musket-balls an inch and a half deeper into a block of wood than an equal charge of Eiraad's Best, and fouled the bore less.

It was decided to take time out for a feast the next evening. It had been a week since the last time, and feasts were important to Freyan morale. Kiarrune and Zwiis wanted to open it by firing one of the bombards with the new powder, until they learned that the production being celebrated would be equal to about one-quarter charge for one of them. They finally settled on Sammeh firing a musket down the banquet-table at a dummy robed in black and yellow like a priest of Eiraad. That last was gratifying; Stursintir had come to recognize its real enemy.

The feast was still in progress when Margaret called down from the ship.

"Get ready for it tomorrow night," she said. "Cold front moving in; heavy clouding with it."

The feasters broke into cheers when this was translated. He noticed that Nancy was clutching Jaessune's arm, and that her cheering was rather mechanical.

The firelight glowed brighter through the fog: ahead the guardians of Yunsay Castle had built fires at the corners of the outside walls, and there were cressets over the gate. They were watchful, but they were watching the ground; with the wet fog swirling along the mountain-top, nothing could be seen from the watchtower, and only the lower ramparts were manned.

The aircar ahead, piloted by Nancy, hovered briefly over the tower, then moved away. After a moment, there was a faint glow, a cloth-covered flashlight. Katherine, piloting the lorry in which he and twenty men were riding, brought it up over the tower. Checking the safety of his submachine gun and the sack of spare drums slung from his shoulder, he stepped down. It was a pity they had to double up on vehicles, but only a few Freyans had had any instruction on Terran firearms and none, not even Jaessune, who had only a 10-mm automatic, could be trusted with machine weapons.

In the faint glow of the covered flashlight, Jaessune showed him the head of the spiral stairway; they started down together, the man with the flashlight behind them and the rest soft shoeing after. The light was uncovered after they were

around the first turn. Outside, he knew, Lisette and Dave were bringing another lorry down to the top of the keep. Then they heard voices ahead.

There were a dozen Pintamska soldiers in the vaulted room at the bottom of the steps, kneeling or stooping in a circle under a cresset, around a pair of dice and a handful of coins on the stone floor. They were completely unsuspecting; as one of them stooped for the dice and shook them between his hands, he slipped off the safety of the submachine gun and saw Jaessune lift the Colt-Argentine from his holster. Then, with shocking suddenness, a black-powder smoothbore bellowed somewhere outside, followed by the gibber of a submachine gun, and a dozen voices began yelling at once.

The man with the dice dropped them and snatched a long pistol from his sash, cocking it. Jaessune shot him dead at once. The rest flung their hands above their heads, clapping their palms together. One or two of them cried "Treason!" Considering the direction from whence they had been assailed, that wasn't an unreasonable assumption. Outside, the shooting stopped; the yelling continued, and the cry of treason was being raised there, too. Dave came through the doorway from the battlements, fitting a fresh drum onto his submachine gun. From the lower and outer walls, more shooting began, mostly local black powder, with a few sharp pangs of Terran smokeless.

Half a dozen of the black-clad commando men came in from outside, and the twenty who had landed with him on the tower came crowding out of the stairway. They found the stairs to the floor below. When they got there, they found more of their force, with Fitzurse and Arthur; they had gotten in by the balcony from the central court. They had a crowd of prisoners—fifteen or twenty men and several women. Only one man wore armor; most were in night-dress, including a portly and dignified if badly shaken gentleman who was evidently the castellan himself.

That was the end of the Battle of Yunsay Castle. By this time, landing craft were coming in with infantry, a few of them with Fitzurse's new bayonets on their muskets. Vethir was with the first one, and he was the first man off, with a big orange-and-violet Stursintiriska flag, which he insisted on raising with his own hands before he did anything else.

"My fiends," Vethir was saying, when the castle was secure and they were gathered in its council-room, "you have taken Yunsay Castle from Yunsuch, a thing nobody thought possible. Now, I will give it to you, the Company of Searchers Among the Stars. And when the Pintamska are driven out of the Strip, you may have such lands there as you need, to make your buildings and places to land sky-things. This will be written into the agreement which we will sign."

"And we will make you one of the Company of Searchers Among the Stars," Roger replied, "with a thousand shares of common stock." Vethir wasn't quite sure what that was, but he felt that it must be a great honor.

"What'll we do with these prisoners, now?"

"Well, the captain of the castle, Fiksum, is a gentleman. He is cousin to Prince Yunsuch. If you follow our customs, you will furnish oukry for himself and his family and servants and release him under pledge to pay you such ransom as you name. Any other gentlemen you will release in the same way. As to the soldiers, if they are mercenaries you may take them into your service, but you may not require them to fight against Yunsuch as long as their captains are in his pay. If they are Yunsuch's own soldiers, you may put them to work, as long as they are given soldiers' pay and soldierly treatment, but you may not require them to fight against anybody, and you must release them as soon as the war with Yunsuch is over."

Count Fiksum—at least, he had a title a few below prince—had expected an exorbitant ransom. Instead, he was told that he would be freely released if he swore never again to bear arms against the Prince of Stursintir or the Company of Searchers Among the Stars, and to be their friend in everything saving his duty to the Prince of Pintam. He'd never heard of anything like that, and said so.

"We would rather have your friendship than any ransom of money, Count Fiksum," Roger told him. "And it won't cost you anything."

The implication that neutralizing him was worth more than cash was flattering.

"But is it honorable for me to do this?" he asked.

"It is a common and an honorable practice among our people," Fitzurse assured him, without

adding that it was chiefly used in pacifying the Northern Hemisphere barbarians on Terra.

"He should also swear," Vethir hastened to add, "that he will tell Yusunuch nothing about the Terran weapons."

"Oh, nothing of the sort; we want Yusunuch to hear all about them, and about the sky-things. And he can tell Yusunuch that we are making our own fire-seed and don't have to depend on Eiraad's Forge for it. We'll put the soldiers of Yusunuch to work making it, and teach them how, and after the war they can return to Pintam and make fire-seed there."

Vethir was shocked. As soon as Fiksum was out of earshot, he exclaimed angrily:

"What god has addled your wits, Roger? I never heard of such folly, to offer to teach an enemy!"

"Nobody who can make fire-seed is our enemy, Vethir, because Eiraad's Forge will be his. If you don't realize that yet, it will take Yusunuch time to learn it, but sooner or later he will."

Daylight filtered down through a fog that hung heavy on both sides of the mountain. Nothing happened on the Pintam side, except that a few carts and a pack-train, bound for the Strip, were turned back by Stursintiriska soldiers. There was a little shooting down in the Strip, the scattered reports floating up faintly. By mid-afternoon, the refugees began coming up, a few at first and then crowds of them. They had carts, and pack and riding animals, but no meat-cattle. Most were armed. Some of them stopped and shook their fists and shouted curses as they passed the castle, but that was all they did. There were too many guns staring blackly at them from the walls, and they could see the gunners' smoking matches.

Luther watched them pass and go down the slope on the Pintam side. He was indignant; not because they had been driven from their homes, but because they had been allowed to keep their weapons. He said so to Roger. It wasn't the first time, Roger reflected, that he had observed the ruthlessness of an idealist committed to a war to end war.

"You'll notice, though, that they haven't anything to eat."

Luther hadn't; now that it was mentioned, he shrugged.

"I don't pity them. That land down there didn't belong to them; they stole it from the Stursintiriska in the first place."

Well, their grandfathers had. The distinction didn't seem important to Luther. Pintamska had done it, these people were Pintamska, therefore they'd done it. He changed the subject by asking Luther how soon he could get work started on the contragravity ship.

A lot of angry people, with weapons and no food. They had all been advised, when evicted from the Strip, to go to Pintam Town, and told that it was Prince Yusunuch's duty to provide for them. He doubted if Yusunuch would see it that way, and even so it was a two days' journey to the town, and they'd be hungry before they got there. Hungry, and armed, in a countryside full of food.

Have to alert the fifth column by radio. Mixed among those refugees were close to a hundred Stursintiriska infiltrators.

That night he and Sammeh took a landing-craft into Tetz to land three men and their oukry a few hours' ride from Tetz Town. One was an oukry-trader, suspected dealer in stolen livestock; one was a hunter, suspected smuggler; the third was a known and convicted thief whose head, by rights, ought to be over the gate at Stursintir Town. They had all been promised free pardons and rewards if they followed instructions and survived.

"The only thing I'm afraid of is that Tesselz won't believe it," he said as they lifted and turned back toward Stursintir Castle.

"He'll believe it. It's such a big pack of lies that nobody would stop to doubt it, and it's just what Tesselz has been waiting for," she said. "But why do you want him to attack us now? Why not just go on and finish Pintam at once?"

"And have Tesselz attack while all our soldiers are north of the mountain? We have between two and three thousand, counting those hooligans from Tetshech. Yusunuch has over ten thousand, which would keep our army quite busy. And Tesselz has five thousand of his own. There is a temple of Eiraad, and a powder mill, in Tetz. We need more powder than we have to conquer Pintam. Sammeh, Reginald has a saying: 'The long way round is the shortest road to victory.' He knows what he's talking about."

The next day started early and ended late. From before daylight all the Terrans who could be spared were piloting landing-craft and lorries, ferrying soldiers to the southern border, and by noon only the five hundred Tetshech irregulars, patrolling and pilfering in the Strip, and a hundred men under Julio at Yunsay Castle, remained in the north. Fitzurse, Kiarrune and Prince Vethir went south to take command in the field.

By noon, too, the skies had cleared, and Arthur and Adriaan took airjeeps, each with a hastily instructed Freyan machine-gunner, and flew reconnaissance over Pintam. They found long columns of troops, with artillery, marching south toward Yunsay Pass, where an immediate invasion was evidently expected. When caught in inviting density, they were machine-gunned from the air.

The spy radio reported consternation in Pintam Town. Count Fiksum, arriving in the morning after an all day and all night ride, had told his story. He had been accused at once of having sold Yunsay Castle to Vethir and thrown into prison. There were also reports of clashes between the refugees and troops.

The invasion from Tetz came at noon of the second day after the taking of Yunsay Castle. He was in the banquet-hall of Stursintir Castle, now converted into staff headquarters, with Sammeh, Zwiis, Adriaan and a few others, when Fitzurse appeared in the screen.

"This is it," he said. "Their cavalry crossed just above the mouth of the Fessu; our pickets gave them a few shots, bolted, and radioed in, according to plan. They're headed north along the main road to Stursintir, into the ambush we have set up for them. The main army's close behind; we can't observe them because we don't want to let them see our contragravity."

He gave a wave-length combination; Sylvia punched it on another screen. The pickup was in a tree, and occasionally a spray of long triangular leaves would swing in front of it. It looked down into an empty village street, with thatched and whitewashed cottages an either side. Among and between them, hidden from down the road, infantrymen crouched. A few had pikes or halberds; most of them had muskets, a number with bayonets. More would be inside, waiting to fire out of doors and windows. An anvil rang intermittently in the smithy, and a cowbell—worn by something

that looked not at all like a cow—went *clank! clank-clank*. Close to the pickup somebody, in a tone of subdued fervence, was imploring somebody else to watch the point of that Fremn-damned²⁴ pike.

Then they could hear the slap-thudding of many oukry feet. The infantrymen tensed, and gunlocks clicked. There were a few shots. Then three cavalrymen in violet and orange sashes and shoulder-cape came tearing, one firing a pistol behind him, and passed out of view. Their pursuers, about two hundred, in white and green Tetzka sashes and the black shoulder-cape that meant mercenaries, followed.

They got to the middle of the straggling village, and then it blew up in their faces. The front of the column became a tangle of dead and wounded oukry and unseated riders. The rear kept on for a moment, pushing the middle off the road and among the houses, where they ran into pikes and the deadly novelty of bayonets. Then a howling tide of Stursintiriska cavalry, swinging long swords, swept in and chased the survivors down the road. There was a distant squall of musket-fire when they ran into another ambush.

"Main body's crossed the river, now," Fitzurse said, from his own screen. "They're in two divisions, about a thousand infantry in each, one two miles behind the other. We'll give you that from an airjeep." He gave another combination, and Sylvia, at the other screen, punched it out. "Ground troops are just going to demonstrate in front of them and stop them; we're going to let them form a battle-line and then bust it from the air."

The jeep from which this was being picked up was grounded, out of sight of the enemy. In the foreground, the Stursintiriska army was deploying; none of these infantrymen had bayonets, and there was a pike or halberd between every two muskets. Field-guns—the carriages were abominably clumsy—were being run into position, and troop-sized blocks of cavalry came up and skittered off to the flanks. Then one of the guns was fired, and another. The jeep rose slightly, to get a view over the heads of the infantry; the advance force of the Tetzka army, approaching along the road, was forming a line across the fields on either side of it. The Stursintiriska infantry began firing, the men in

²⁴ The original text reads "unprintably qualified."

the front rank passing back empty muskets and taking loaded ones.

"All right; here we go," Dave's voice said. "Ready, Hechup? Don't fire until I tell you to, now, and don't fire unless there's something in front of your guns."

The vehicle rose rapidly, and the landscape below swung in the screen as it made a half-circle to get on the Tetzka left flank. Then it came rushing down on the enemy, and Dave yelled, "Let them have it, Hechup!"

The blocks of cavalry on the flank simply exploded in all directions, leaving a residue of a few dead men and oukry. The infantry saw what was happening and bolted, all but a few with sluggish reflexes or the optimism to try to hit an airjeep with a smoothbore flintlock. A caisson beside one of the field-pieces blew up with a bang. The cavalry at the other end of the line simply weren't there.

By the time the jeep had turned and was approaching what had started out as a battle, two more jeeps and an aircar were at work, firing ahead of bunches of fugitives to stop them, and amplified voices were shouting offers of quarter. Whole companies were surrendering to aircraft, and Stursintirskaya cavalry were arriving to disarm them.

"Well, that was the Battle of Whatzit," Fitzurse said. "Nancy and Jaessune and Lisette each have a jeep; they caught the other gang, a couple of miles south, and are herding them north under arms until somebody can take their surrender. Can you leave what you're doing and come down and give a hand?"

They began to hear firing, ahead, and Sammeh, who was piloting the car, put on speed. It wasn't fighting, though. About a thousand Tetzka troops had been marched into fields beside the road and were discharging their muskets to empty them before stacking them in surrender. There were two landing-craft on the ground and a third lifting out, and a couple of hundred Stursintirskaya, some of them infantry on captured oukry, were guarding the prisoners. Some trestle-tables had been set up, and as Sammeh brought the car down he could see Vethir and Fitzurse and Kiarrune and a number of others, among them a dozen Tetzka in long white and green cloaks and gilded armor, but without swords or daggers.

There were introductions. One of the Tetzka was a brother of Prince Tesselz, and the rest were dukes or counts or the equivalent. They were arguing about the pledge of peace and friendship, to which the Tetzka objected.

"But it is a well-known and honorable usage of war, on our world," Fitzurse was saying.

"You're not on your world, now!" the brother of Tesselz retorted, with a belligerence the circumstances didn't quite justify.

"I wonder about that," one of his companions said. "A few more battles like this one and it'll be their world. Peace and friendship with these people might be worth having."

Vethir stepped aside a little. He looked as though the merry-go-round was going too fast for him.

"Roger, what are we going to do with these people?" he whispered.

"Can you trust this brother of Tesselz's?"

"Great Fremn, no! Not even chained in a dungeon! He's a bigger villain than Tesselz, and has twice as much wit. This war, and everything else, was his idea. All Tesselz cares for is wine and feasting and beautiful women."

"Then he's our boy. Long live Tesselz, Prince of Tetz, vassal of King Vethir of Great Stursintir."

The conquest of Tetz turned out to be a large-scale Castle Yunsay operation in triplicate. Charley was in charge of the taking of the temple farm, three miles southeast of the town; most of the men he had with him had been workers at the Stursintir powder mill, and it was hoped that they would know what not to do to avoid blowing the place up. Fitzurse took command of the detachment to take the temple itself, making a remark to the cryptic effect that dealing with turbulent priests was a Fitzurse tradition. The main force, led by Roger, Kiarrune and Vethir, took the citadel-palace in the center of the town. At all three the surprise was complete, and only at the third was there any serious fighting.

An hour after it was over, they were gathered in Tesselz's throne-room. Vethir, who had by this time gotten used to the idea of being King of Great Stursintir, was sitting on Tesselz's throne, one booted foot resting lightly on the golden crown of Tetz. Sammeh stood at his right, clutching Roger's

hand but keeping a properly haughty Princess-Sammeh-of-Great-Stursintir expression on her face. The others were ranged on either side, and there were screens for Luther and Adriaan at Stursintir Castle, Julio at Yunsay Castle, and Karl and Margaret on the *Stellex*. Prince Tesselz had been given time to dress—magnificently in cloth-of-gold—and was standing before his conqueror, his nobles about him. There was no fear in his face; only anger which had become utter fury when he saw what Vethir was using for a footstool.

"Is this an honorable thing, Vethir?" he was demanding. "To hire a gang of accursed sorcerers and witches, from Eiraad only knows what place of abominations, and murder brave soldiers with many-shooting guns from sky-things? Is that a decent way to make war?"

"It's a way to win a war, when you've been attacked by treachery and without warning."

Tesselz actually became angrier, which hadn't seemed possible.

"And what a pack of dirty lies that was!" he fairly howled. "You sent those three rogues yourself! If I had them here now, I'd kill them with my bare hands if you shot me the next moment."

He was interrupted by a bustle at the door. Fitzurse, wearing his old Terran Federation Army tunic, with a blaze of decoration-ribbons on his breast, strode in. Behind him, soldiers frog-marched eight or ten prisoners, all in the black and yellow robes of Eiraad's Forge, hustling them to the throne and throwing them to the floor at Vethir's feet. There was a gasp of horror from Tesselz and his nobles.

One of the priests picked himself up and glared at Vethir.

"There is still time," he cried, "for you to humble yourself and repent!" Then he pointed at Fitzurse. "But none for him! He threatened to kill me, an archpriest, at my very altar."

Now he knew why Reginald Fitzurse's name had always stirred something in his memory; now he understood the remark about turbulent priests. There had been a Reginald Fitzurse, centuries ago, who, with three comrades, had slain at his very altar a turbulent priest—Thomas á Becket.

"He would have saved me the trouble. Maybe it would have been better for you if he had," Vethir told the priest. Then he asked Fitzurse: "What did you find at the temple?"

"Oh, quite a treasure. Gold and silver bullion, specie, merchandise of all sorts, jewels. Five hundred fine new muskets, all alike. And ten tons of fire-seed, in twenty-pound kegs. Charley called me; he found fifty tons at the farm."

Tesselz gave a strangled cry of rage. "You old lying scoundrel!" he shouted at the archpriest. "You told me you only had a hundred small kegs. I wish he had killed you, and taken all day about it. And where did you steal those muskets? From my own armory I'll wager." He turned to Fitzurse. "You mean they have fire-seed at the farm, too? A hundred great casks of it?"

"Of course; that's where they make it. In a day or so, we'll be turning out about two hundred pounds a day there."

"You mean you can make fire-seed? Just like they can?"

Nobody bothered to answer him. Vethir held the crown out on his toe.

"Tesselz, do you want this back?" he asked.

"What good will it do me? It's the crown of Tetz, and there is no Tetz now; only Stursintir."

They hadn't meant to proclaim the Kingdom of Great Stursintir until they had Pintam as well as Tetz to support the pretension. It suddenly struck Roger that now, however, was the time to do it.

"Oh, no, Tesselz," he said. "There will still be a Tetz, and if you wish, you may be Prince of Tetz. As a subject Prince, of course, of his Majesty Vethir, King of Great Stursintir."

Tesselz's jaw went slack for a moment, then tightened. That was another matter entirely.²⁵

"And I will be sovereign here in Tetz?"

"You will be obliged to furnish me troops, at need, and there will be a matter of tributes for the support of the Kingdom, of course," Vethir told him. "And you will never suffer Eiraad's Forge to take root here again."

Tesselz laughed. "You think I'm crazy, to let these robbers come back, now that you've rid me of them?" he demanded. Then he looked at the crown, still dangling on Vethir's toe. "At least, you might have the decency to hand it to me on the point of your sword," he said.

"Oh, of course." Vethir wasn't wearing a sword; only a 10-mm automatic. "Kiarrune, lend me yours."

²⁵ The original text reads "evidently a Hos of another color."

As soon as the conquerors came home to Stursintir Castle, Nancy and Zwiuss went to work on the proclamation. Nancy furnished the basis for it, from the microbook library, an old document from the Second Century Pre-Atomic.²⁶ There were a few words in it to which Charley took exception, but, in Sosti translation, he agreed that they'd be appropriate. And there was the matter of a new flag for Great Stursintir. Vethir wanted to use the old orange flag of Stursintir, with the violet halberd-head; it had to be carefully explained that that wouldn't do. What was finally adopted was a quarter-arc rainbow on a white field. No matter who got annexed later, he'd still be able to find his colors in the flag.

Tessetz and a score of his nobles, brought from Tetz in a hastily luxurized landing-craft, gathered with the Stursintirska nobility and gentry in the great hall and listened while Zwiuss read solemnly from the scroll:

"We, the representatives of the Great Kingdom of Stursintir, in congress assembled . . . do solemnly declare in the face of the earth, that it is the unanimous and indubitable will of these principedoms to break the repugnant ties which bound them to the kings of Langeks²⁷ . . . in consideration of the respect due to other nations, let the weighty reasons which have impelled us to this solemn declaration be detailed²⁸ . . ."

A great many of the charges against King Leogene of Langeks were grossly exaggerated; well, maybe the case against Ferdinand VII of Spain²⁹ had been slightly overstated in Nancy's original. Nobody paid too much attention to that; they were in too complete agreement with the denunciations of the "rapacious priesthood of a false god," which made up the bulk of the proclamation. Finally, "we, the princes, nobles and people of Great Stursintir," after investing themselves with

the high character of a nation, free and independent³⁰, pledged allegiance to King Vethir I and undying friendship to the Company of Searchers Among the Stars.

One thing, Stellar Explorations, Ltd., now had a real treaty, with a real sovereign power. That was drawn up, in triplicate and bi-lingually, and signed by all parties.

The Tetzka were feasted; they tasted chilled wine, and ice cream. The next day they were taken by air to Yunsay Castle. They looked at the *Stellex* through a telescope, and saw a screen-view of the planet from a thousand miles; they didn't quite believe that. But they did believe, because they saw and fired it, that the powder mill was actually making fire-seed, and when they returned home, loaded with presents, they found that Charley had production at the Tetz mill up to a hundred and fifty pounds a day and increasing it daily.

Kiarrune was still at Tetz, with five hundred Stursintirska troops. One of the first things he did was empty the jails and recruit the inmates into a secret police, headed by the three disreputables from Stursintir. All Tessetz's mercenaries and half of his own Tetzka soldiers were shifted north to the Pintam border: the rest were put to work demolishing the temple of Eiraad. It was incredibly rich; the gold that plated the minaret alone was worth enough to pay the mercenaries for a year. Tessetz got half the loot, which completely reconciled him to losing the war and his independence and insured that Eiraad's Forge would hate him equally with Vethir and the Terrans.

The hangovers from the feasting had barely evaporated before all Stursintir was demanding the immediate invasion and conquest of Pintam. After Yunsay Castle and Tetz, nothing seemed impossible, and weren't they a mighty kingdom, now? Even Vethir was impatient to add Pintam to his realm, and Zwiuss flew up from Tetz, where he had been re-organizing the government, to add his voice. He was worried about the possibility that King Leogene would mobilize to recover his lost principedoms, and that Eiraad's Forge, infuriated but not seriously damaged by the Tetz expulsion and expropriation, would preach a general holy war.

That worried Nancy, too. "We're going to have this whole civilization against us," she

²⁶ In the original version this document was the 1776 A.D. Declaration of Independence of the United States of (North) America. Given that civilization in Terra's northern hemisphere was destroyed in the Atomic Wars, the 1816 A.D. Declaration of the Independence of the United Provinces of South America is used here instead.

²⁷ The original text reads "When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another."

²⁸ The original text reads "a decent respect for the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation."

²⁹ The original text reads "George III of England."

³⁰ The original text reads "declaring themselves, as they of a right ought to be, free and independent."

prophesied. "Not just King Leogene and Langeks; the other two kingdoms, down the river and along the coast, too. There are temples and priests of Eiraad in all of them, and they'll all be preaching a crusade against us. Roger, this isn't just politics. This is religion. Religion isn't so important to us, but these people aren't rationalists; they're believers. The same mentality that existed in Europe at the time of the Crusades and the Reformation and counter-Reformation. We're the enemies of Eiraad; the infidel."

Fitzurse wasn't underestimating the power of religious fanaticism, either. There was always some half-crazy messiah stirring up the Eurasian barbarians, and he knew how hard a holy war was to stop, once it started. But he also knew how dangerously low the ammunition, especially for the 15-mm machine guns, was. Thousands and thousands of rounds had been wasted during the Tetz Assault³¹, by ill-trained Freyans who had had to handle the guns because Terrans were needed to pilot the vehicles. He was trying to explain that to Vethir and Zwiuss.

"We didn't have much to start with, and we can't get any more. We haven't the means of making it, and it would take our ship a year to go to our world and back for it." He didn't bother to add that in any case they had no money to buy any. "If we fight Pintam, it will have to be with your muskets."

Just the day before, Julio had been talking about seeing if he could get one of the huge 8-bore muskets rifled and fitted with sights, so that he could hit something with it.

Vethir looked hurt and puzzled; normal reaction to the discovery that the supposedly inexhaustible is close to being exhausted. Then he brightened.

"But there are the sky-things," he said. "Look at this fool of a Yusunuch, massing his army in front of Yunsay Pass, waiting for us to march over the mountain. Because the pass used be to the only road, he still thinks it is. He hasn't realized, yet, that the whole sky is a road now.

Mark another one up for Vethir. It had been quite a while after the fact, on Terra, before military, political and economic thinking had adjusted to that simple little fact.

"That's true, Vethir," he said. "But we haven't enough sky-things, or enough people to fly the ones we have. We'll have to train your people and teach them to fly. And we'll have to build big sky-things, that can lift a thousand soldiers at a time, and we'll first have to teach people to help us do the work. And we'll need more fire-seed than we have. All that will take time."

"It will take work, also." Sammeh had been sitting quietly beside him, saying nothing now. "It will not be done by shouting 'On to Pintam!' or boasting about how we will feast in Yusunuch's palace."

"No, it won't," her father agreed. "And too many of the people think the Terrans are magicians who can do everything for them." He turned to Zwiuss. "We will have a meeting of the Council tomorrow afternoon. Roger and Reginald and the others will explain what must be done. Then, in the evening, we will have a great feast. Not only the namely men, but the leaders among the townsfolk and the common soldiers and workers and even the peasants; the ones to whom the others listen. Instead of tale-telling and drinking-songs, there will be speaking. Then they can go and inspire the others."

"We must strike quickly, that is certain," Zwiuss said. "There is much unrest in Pintam. We must act before it dies down."

He was right about that. The fifth column radio was calling for speedy invasion, too. With a fine disregard for chronology, they were spreading the story that Eiraad's Forge had coerced Prince Yusunuch into war with Stursintir because Prince Vethir had discovered how to make his own fire-seed and was no longer dependent on them. This was uncritically accepted by the people; there was a rising tide of anticlericalism, and everybody was blaming Eiraad's Forge for everything. Nancy was almost chagrined at the lack of crusading spirit among the Pintamska.

By this time, too, there were a large number of Strip refugees in Pintam Town, clamoring for relief; the soup-kitchens Yusunuch set up only insulted and infuriated them. Most of the land in the Strip had been tenant-farmed, and the absentee-landlord owners were, many of them, influential nobles. A few were gotten to and told that there was enough gold in the temple of Eiraad to indemnify all of them.

³¹ The original text reads "Blitz."

Then there was Count Fiksum. As soon as contragravity began appearing north of the mountains, it was realized that he had been telling the truth about how he had lost Yunsay Castle. He was promptly released, and Yusunuch sought his advise.

"Make peace," Fiksum told his cousin bluntly. "One of these machines can wipe out a thousand men in the time it takes to drain a wine-cup. Vethir has made himself a king. If you submit, he will deal as fairly with you as he did with Tsesetz. If you don't, he'll put your head up over your own gate."

"Suppose I put yours there?" Yusunuch was reported to have said.

"Then, in time, Vethir will take it down to make place for yours. He has sworn friendship with me, and vengeance is the duty of a friend."

A good idea of Yusunuch's state of mind could be gotten from the fact that Fiksum was not even banished from the court. Yusunuch may have thought that he might need somebody with whom the now King of Great Stursintir had sworn friendship.

And the mercenaries, even those directly in the pay of Eiraad's Forge, were dissatisfied. Most of them were in the Yunsay Line, awaiting the attack that didn't come. They had all hoped to enrich themselves by the plunder of Stursintir, and now that hope was vanished. Not a few of them had experienced, and all had heard about, machinegun fire from the air. They were business men, and they knew bad business when they found themselves on the short end of it.

Except for the difference in language and dress, and the absence of cigar-smoke, it could have been any political rally banquet he had ever seen since he had been a teenage illegal voter. It was a big success; the boys from the precincts came, were fed and liquored, received the Word, and went away full of party spirit. The next day, the work began.

Luther now had a finely drawn set of plans for a contragravity ship. Nobody, himself least of all, expected it, when finished, to bear more than a coincidental resemblance to them. First, he had to design a jet engine that wouldn't set the ship's timbers on fire as soon as it was started. He solved that with a nuclear-electric engine and a big blower-fan from the *Stellex*. After that, he was faced with

the problem of building a ship around it and the contragravity generator that would leave any room at all for payload. By this time, the estimated speed had inched down to eighty mph.

Lourenço tried to take on the contragravity pilot training program, in the time he could spare from helping Luther on the ship and Charley at the two powder mills. He became disheartened by the total inability of any Freyan to grasp the theory of the contragravity field. Hell, they didn't even grasp the theory of gravity; things fell because down was the place for them. Samme and Jaessune had become skilled pilots, and at a pinch they could handle a landing-craft alone. All they knew about it was that if you pushed this and pulled that, so-and-so would happen. With Nancy and, when he could find time, Dave, to help them out of difficulties, they were able to handle it themselves, and almost all their alumni made good light-vehicle pilots. Many went on to lorries or helping on landing-craft, and a number were graduated to power equipment.

There was a lot of this. When the *Stellex* had been fitted out, it had been hoped that they would find an inhabitable but uninhabited planet; while Adriaan took a couple of them on the yacht and streaked back to Terra to file claim, the rest would dig in and make the colony self-sustaining. So they had lumbering machines and excavating and mining equipment and construction equipment and a lot of contragravity lifters of all sizes, and half a dozen big contragravity manipulators sprouting hooks and claws and grapples and pusher-arms in all directions. There was even a sawmill and a forging-hammer and a small nuclear smelting furnace. The lot of it was lightered down and put into use as soon as people could be taught to use it.

By the end of the second week, there were still very few visible and tangible accomplishments, but there were a lot of young Freyans around who could be trusted with manipulators and bulldozers and things like that and wouldn't do anything utterly disastrous with or to them.

Troop morale was good. Most of the soldiers on the Strip were professionals; they thought this was a wonderful war—plenty to eat and drink, lots of pretty girls, and nobody taking shots at them. They knew it wouldn't last, but they were going to enjoy it while it did. The five hundred so-called cavalry from Tetshech were different. There was no looting on this side of the mountain,

and they all thought that every Pintamska peasant was a rich miser with a crock of gold under the hearthstone. They were getting restless, and Fitzurse was worried. He had a talk with their captain, and explained that there would be no invasion until the big sky-thing was built.

"You'll never get it finished the way you're going at it," the Tetshechka told him. "I watched those peasants you have cutting timber over here in the Strip. Why, I have at least a hundred men who could each do more lumbering work than any five of those clodhoppers."

"It seems," Fitzurse said, reporting the conversation to Roger, "that after brigandage and cattle-herding, lumbering is the third largest industry in Tetshech. It occurs to me that we could put some of those fellows to work."

"It occurs to me," Roger said, "that we could buy cut timbers in Tetshech. Luther has his jet finished; he could build some kind of a temporary lumber-scow with it and the generator, and for a few kegs of powder we might get all the timbers we need."

After a visit to Tetshech, which was just west of northern Stursintir and southern Pintam, Fitzurse decided that the idea was feasible. He didn't think much of the manners and customs of the Tetshechka—the former he described as non-existent, and the latter beastly—but they did have timbers, logs up to a hundred feet long and four feet at the butt, and they could cut more as desired. They rafted it, when they had high water, into Pintam. That and the herds of *zhoumy*³², big yak-like animals, were traded for anything they couldn't raise, make or pilfer for themselves. There was no temple of Eiraad in Tetshech, and they were delighted to have fire-seed brought right to their log-stocked town. They couldn't understand, though, how the Stursintirka were going to get the timbers out.

At first they couldn't, that is. The next day Dave, who was in charge of lumbering, arrived with a landing-craft, Luther, and three recently skilled Stursintirka workmen. They unloaded the big generator, built a log frame around it and a log-raft around that, lifted it, and towed it out, detouring over southern Pintam to the alarm of the populace,

There was a panic among the troops in the Yunsay Line when they passed over them, too. The next raft was bigger. Its frame was built at the shipyard, it mounted the blower-jet, and it didn't have to be towed. This thing shuttled back and forth, usually carrying a deck-load of boulders which could be dumped onto Prince Yusunuch's army, for some time. Enough timber to build three ships like the one under construction only cost a half ton of Eiraad's Best from Tetz.

Beside timbers, iron was needed. It was learned that there was a little principedom called Xanx³³, just south of Tetz, where there were some bog-iron mines and a few crude furnaces and forges. Julio took one of the landing craft down and traded four kegs of powder for enough iron to load the vehicle. When he went back for another load, he was invited to dine with the prince, an elderly and rather shabby gentleman named Lykars, who wanted to know how much he would have to give for a great-cask of fire-seed. That would be a half ton.

"Why, your Highness, I'm afraid I can't sell you that much," Julio regretted. "King Vethir is at war with the Prince of Pintam, now, and he will only allow limited quantities to be shipped out of the kingdom. Now, if you were subject to King Vethir, of course, he would be obliged to give you all you needed for the defense of your principedom."

"But I'm a subject of King Leogene."

"So was King Vethir, until very recently. I'll tell you what you do; come, with a few of your gentlemen, to Stursintir Castle and sign our Declaration of Independence and swear allegiance to King Vethir, and then Xanx will be part of the Kingdom³⁴ of Great Stursintir, and . . ."

"Does King Vethir really and truly make his own fire-seed? I'd heard that said, but it's so hard to believe—"

He went to Stursintir Castle with five or six of his courtiers, all as elderly and shabby as himself, and when he saw the powder mill he cursed Eiraad's Forge for almost ten minutes without repeating a single malediction. It seemed that, until now, he

³³ This place name does not appear in "Gunpowder God" and so is retained here.

³⁴ The term "Great Kingdom" from the original text seems to be redundant. The new kingdom is composed of subject principedoms so the term "kingdom" would seem to be sufficient to distinguish it from its subject principedoms.

³² This animal name does not appear in "Gunpowder God" and so is retained here.

had believed that fire-seed was made by Eiraad Himself, and that its manufacture was totally beyond any human power.

So Prince Lykars swore allegiance and was given a pretty new rainbow flag, and a flashlight and a magnifying glass and a few other gadgets. He wanted to do his part in the war with Pintam by furnishing five hundred infantry. After he saw the shipyard, however, he agreed that fifty blacksmiths would be worth much more to the war-effort.

The contragravity ship was finished. She looked like old pictures of Noah's Ark, except that Noah's Ark hadn't had a sheet-metal jet-and-air-scoop assembly and an air-rudder on top or a big bulge amidships for a contragravity generator. After some hesitation, she was christened *King Vethir*. Vethir was delighted, even after seeing her, which only went to show that he'd never seen a real contragravity ship. On her trial voyage, the³⁵ *King Vethir* reached sixty-five mph, which at least made her a formidable competitor for oxcarts and river barges. She could carry five hundred cavalry and their mounts, or, badly crowded, two thousand infantry.

Naturally, everybody began shouting "On to Pintam!" again.

Luther was one. This was a war to end war and make Freya safe for democracy and strike off the chains of theocratic despotism. Nancy was another, she wanted Pintam conquered before the crusaders began swarming in. And Fitzurse had drawn up an ambitious plan for beating the army of Pintam by detail through mobility. Only Roger was against it.

"This isn't going to be any Tetz Assault," he told them. "You can't win a war on nothing but mobility; you have to have fire-power too, and we don't have that. It will take a lot of hard ground-fighting, with conventional Freyan weapons. That will mean damage to the country, and the people who'll be worst hurt by it are the ones who are most favorable to us now. Fitz, you've been quoting Clausewitz about the necessity to destroy the armed strength of the enemy; I wish you'd remember the Clausewitzian quotation everybody knows—War is a continuation of policy by other means. Policy is to add Pintam to Great Stursintir without creating any more enmity than we did at Tetz."

³⁵ The original text reads "CGS" for "contragravity ship."

"Well, if we have to conquer Pintam with muzzle loaders we'd better do it while we still have powder for them," Charley said. "Powder is seventy five percent niter, and I'm not getting enough of it."

"Well, don't look at me," Lisette said. "I've been having to get it a shovelful from under this manure-pile and a shovelful from under that manure-pile, and we're just running out of manure-piles."

"Well, that's the way Eiraad's Forge got it," somebody argued.

"They didn't attempt the sort of quantity production we're in, and they didn't scatter it around the way we're doing. A whole ton and a half to this Prince Lykars of Xanx!" Charley fairly tore his hair. "We're using up the niter they accumulated over years, faster than it can be replaced, We can't keep that up."

"Can you keep it up three months?" Adriaan asked.

"I suppose so. What can we do by then?"

"Send the *Stellex* to Yggdrasil and back. It's only twenty light-years away³⁶. You know what Yggdrasil produces, don't you?"

"Guano." Terra was still importing huge quantities of it, for the soil-reclamation projects in the war-ruined Northern Hemisphere. "That's right; nitrates. What'll we use for money, though?"

"Foodstuffs," Julio said promptly. "They still have to supply themselves by carniculture and hydroponics, Terran vegetation won't even grow in the soil. They have to process the guano before they ship it—Hey, with the processing plants they have, it'd be no trick at all to extract pure potassium nitrate. A shipload of pure niter would make an awful lot of fire-seed."

Everybody was happy. Charley saw his powder mills on full production. Lisette would at last get out of the barn-yards and oukry-stables. And when they called Karl, on ship watch again, he grinned in his gray beard. In his book, planets were just places you took spaceships to and from.

Everybody was happy except the five hundred Tetshechkska irregulars. The great sky-thing was built, and the promised invasion wasn't

³⁶ A three month voyage across twenty light-years and back implies a hyperdrive speed of approximately fifty hours per light-year.

going to start at all. So they mutinied, fortunately when the *King Vethir* was available and could load a thousand mercenaries and Tetzka³⁷ regulars. The mutiny was put down, and the mutineers disarmed.

Their captain, forlorn without his weapons, was highly indignant.

"You promised us that we would be taken to Pintam, that there would be an invasion as soon as the big sky-thing was finished—"

"We promised nothing of the sort; we told you that there would not be an invasion until after it was built, and we said nothing about how long after. In any case, you have freed us from any promises to you by this mutiny. You are no longer soldiers of the King. You will be paid what is owing to you, and you will be taken back to your own country."

Roger talked to the captain privately:

"You know, I suppose, that the Tetshechkska no longer need to trade with Pintam; we bring them fire-seed and everything else. Well, where you don't have to trade, you can raid." He paused, and the Tetshechkska captain's eyes widened momentarily; that happy thought had not occurred to him before. "We will give your men their pay in fire-seed, we will give each one a good oukry, we will return their arms, and we will land them in Tetshech on the Pintam border. Will that satisfy them?"

Satisfy them; it delighted them. When they were loaded, with their mounts, aboard the *King Vethir*, they were happily singing their folk-songs, all of which seemed to deal with the exploits of distinguished robbers.

There were six of the seventy foot landing craft; he and Sammeh took one, Nancy and Jaessune took another, and the other four were handled by similar Terro-Freyan teams. The ship hauled iron from Xanx to Tetshech to trade for meat, Tetshechkska hardwoods to Tetz. Meat and grain and root-vegetables and fruit and casks of wine and bales of the dried blossoms from which the tea was made went up to the *Stellex*. Adriaan brought down his two hundred foot space-yacht *Voortrekker*, and she was berthed in an improvised and growing spaceport in the Strip. Three of the six landing-craft were also to be left behind; the

³⁷ These are *Pintamska (Nostori)* troops in the original text but Freyan military traditions prevent Stursintir from requiring the *Pintamska* troops captured during the battle of Castle Yunsay to fight against anyone.

berthing-space aboard the *Stellex* was thus added to cargo-capacity. Karl and Lourenço and Margaret and Sylvia would take her on her voyage, with four young Freyans whom they had been training to do ordinary crewmen's work. They had learned considerable merely in the process of getting the cargo aboard and stowed. Finally, when the *Stellex* was crammed with every scrap of food that would go into her, there was a farewell feast and then she broke orbit and vanished into hyperspace.

Ten days later, a second and larger contragravity ship was finished. She was christened *Princess Sammeh*.

While open to travel, the frontiers were closely guarded, and there were radios at most of the posts. One of these reported that a party of cavalry from Dazour, escorting two noblemen, had been halted by a patrol. The noblemen—Zwius recognized their names; they were members of the court of Prince Tabalk of Dazour—said that they wanted to discuss pledges of friendship and trade between their sovereign and King Vethir. Maybe they meant that. Maybe Tabalk wanted an embassy in Stursintir as a base for espionage and propaganda. Or maybe he was ready to launch an invasion. There had been some examples from Old Terran history of things like that.

The aircar ride to Stursintir Castle impressed the envoys. So did the spectacle, carefully arranged, of both the *King Vethir* and the *Princess Sammeh* in the air, and the guard of honor of five hundred infantry, each with a long triangular bayonet on his musket. And, of course, the electric lights, and the chilled wine, and the screens and radios.

They began by talking about trade. They wanted iron and lumber and hides; they had textiles and wine and grain to sell. And they inquired, with elaborate nonchalance, if it were really true that the Stursintirskas made their own fire-seed, without the help of the priests of Eiraad. They were shown that it was, but they were told that because of the war with Pintam, only very little could be released for export, and it was not too delicately hinted that if the Prince of Dazour brought his country into the Kingdom of Great Stursintir, he could have all he needed.

By this time, reports had gotten from the western border to Prince Yunsuch's capital that the

five hundred Tetshechkska, joined by a thousand more of their countrymen, were pillaging and burning, committing all the usual atrocities and a few they seemed to have invented specially for the occasion. The spy radio reported that Yusunuch had pulled a thousand troops out of the Yunsay Line and ordered them west.

Their column was kept under air observation, and the two envoys from Dazour were taken for a look at them and the Yunsay Line. The troops on the march were not molested, but the two Dazourska saw some bombing of the Yunsay Line—empty oxygen cylinders packed with blasting explosive—and were horrified at the effect.

There was only one road across southern Pintam; about halfway³⁸ from Yunsay Pass to the Tetshech border, it crossed a deep and narrow gorge on a wooden bridge. By the end of the second day, the Pintamska column was within a few hours' march of it, and made camp. The next morning, when they took the road again, they were under observation of several aircars, including one in which Roger had the two Dazourska diplomats.

"We are going to show you something, now," he told them, when the head of the column was within two hundred yards of the bridge. "Watch this."

Then he dived and swept over the heads of the Pintamska. Before any of them could do anything, he was zooming up at the bridge, and as he did, he let go his rocket-booster.

The aircar shot up to twenty thousand feet in a matter of seconds; when it was losing momentum, he turned in a wide circle and brought it down again. The bridge was blazing from one end to the other, and the road to the east of it was empty, except for a litter of discarded pikes and muskets and a few casualties who had been knocked down and trampled in the rush. Pintamska soldiers, mounted and on foot, were streaming away in both directions, scattering as they went.

"That was an army, a moment ago," he told his passengers. "It may be an army again, but not for a couple of days."

"But why did you spare them?" one of the Dazourska asked. "You could have wiped them all out with the flame-weapon."

"Oh, that would have been too horrible! We would never do a thing like that," he assured them.

"That is, not unless it were a case of national survival. If Great Stursintir were invaded by some overwhelming force—the only such enemy I can think of would be Langeks—we would find ourselves driven to use even worse weapons than that, of course. Beside, those are trained soldiers, though they don't look like it at the moment. When Prince Yusunuch submits and brings Pintam into Great Stursintir, as he will inside a month, we will want them. Now, down there; there's the Yunsay Line, again. Wait until I show you something. Here, use the binoculars. Those four big cannon, two on either side of the road. Bombards, throw three hundred pound stone balls. They're new ones, but they're probably the last of their kind that will be made. . . ."

"We must go home to Dazour tomorrow," one of them said. "Prince Tabalk must be told about this. Today, we have seen the whole world changed."

"I am glad," the other said, "that I am an old man. I will not have to live long in this changed world."

The next morning, the two Dazourska envoys got a closer view of Prince Yusunuch's three hundred pounders. All four of them, with their mounts, were sitting in the outer enclosure of Stursintir Castle. The night before, Dave and Jaessune, with two hundred of the commando force, had dropped onto the gun positions and held them until four Stursintirska machine operators brought down contragravity manipulators and each snatched away one of the giant bombards. The whole operation cost three casualties and two hundred-odd rounds of rifle and pistol ammunition.

The two Dazourska heard the story, inspected the bombards, and then got into the landing-craft that was to take them back to Dazour.

Three days later, Prince Tabalk of Dazour decided to repudiate his allegiance to Langeks and take his country into Great Stursintir. It took some argument to persuade him not to have the priests at the Dazour temple tied to kegs of fire-seed and blown up. Once he could get along without them, he had wanted to indulge what had long been his real feeling toward them.

On the way to Stursintir Castle from the discussions, Roger detoured for another look at the Yunsay Line. It was empty, marked only by the

raw-earth scars of trenches and gun-emplacements. Swinging north along the road, he saw the army on the march toward Pintam. They were going to inform Prince Yusunuch that the war was over.

A couple of days later, Count Fiksum and several companions rode up the pass road to Yunsay Castle and from there were airlifted to Stursintir Castle. Prince Yusunuch, they said, wanted admission to Great Stursintir on the same terms as Prince Tabalk. He also wanted assistance in suppressing the Tetshechkska brigands who were ravaging the western part of his principedom.

Everybody was happy except Nancy, and she would have been except that she was convinced that the crusades were about to start. Kings and princes everywhere would be taking up the sword; huge armies would be marching to crush the infidel, joined at every crossroads by fresh throngs shouting "Eiraad wills it!" Every day of postponement would make the final catastrophe that much more catastrophic. She said as much, one afternoon, when half a dozen of them were lounging in the room at Yunsay Castle that had been fitted up as a bar and clubroom.

"Nancy, it isn't going to happen," he told her, a trifle impatiently. "Eiraad's Forge is finished, even in Langeks."

"But you can't just wipe a religion out of existence overnight," she objected.

"Not a religion, no. But Eiraad's Forge wasn't really one. A religion needs more than priests and temples. It needs believers with deep emotional faith, believers who love their religion as the people who followed Peter the Hermit loved theirs, and that Eiraad's Forge never had. Look at the way the people of Tetz, and Dazour, and Pintam, turned on them. And the Prince of Balkrum³⁹, south of Dazour."

He had been one of the more recent seceders from Langeks; to prove his sincerity, he had shipped the heads of eighteen priests of Eiraad, each packed in a powder-keg full of salt, to Stursintir Castle. Nancy had been present when they had been opened; she grimaced at the memory.

"Where Eiraad's Forge made their mistake was right at the beginning, by over-specialization. When they discovered the niter-sulphur-charcoal combination, they thought they had everything they

needed, and they adopted this policy of supplying the rulers with powder in exchange for forced-levy offerings from their subjects. The people hated them, and they were stupid enough not to care. They thought they could control the people through the princes, and their only control over the princes was based on the secret of making powder and their ability to supply or withhold it. And now the secret isn't a secret any more, and their monopoly's busted."

"What I can't see," Julio said, "is why King Leogene hasn't gone to war with us on his own account. He's just sitting and watching his kingdom break under up him."

"That's all he can do. With the annexation of Balkrum, we now have forty-five thousand troops, not counting Tetshechkska. King Leogene has, in the original principedom and Langeks City, a total of fifteen thousand. The rest of the military strength of Langeks is controlled by the—put it in quotes—subject princes. That was Eiraad's Forge, too. They managed to keep the kingdom divided, every prince virtually independent of the King, and completely independent of one another. That's why we've been making these princes who join Great Stursintir turn the bulk of their troops over to us. What we want is a national army, because Great Stursintir is going to be a nation, not a snake pit. We can do that, because we're something new and we're making it a condition of membership. If Leogene tried to do it, he'd have a civil war on his hands. I'm about half expecting him to have one, no matter what he does."

"The mercenary captains aren't taking service with Leogene, any more," Fitzurse remarked. "And we have to fight them off with a club."

Quite a few free-companies, he had been hearing, were going down the river to take service in Sechune, in the delta county, and in Klistan, to the east along the coast. The mercenary business itself wasn't too good, any more. Great Stursintir wanted no more of them. He thought of the many things, none of them good, that Machiavelli, out of long experience, had had to say about mercenaries—*They plunder you in peace and let your enemies plunder you in war. You cannot rely upon them, for they will always aspire to their own greatness. . . .* Maybe it would be a good plan to collect a lot of free-companies and use them in

³⁹ This place name does not appear in "Gunpowder God" and so is retained here.

³⁸ The original text reads "half way."

colonizing the other continents. He was turning that idea over in his mind when he became aware of what Nancy was saying:

"Well, gosh, I won't cry if there isn't any crusade. Then Jaessune won't be going off to war as soon as we're married."

"Huh?" Charley almost shouted. "You mean you and Jaessune are getting married?"

"Yes, we are, in about a week." She rose, picked up a bottle and carefully corked it. "You say one damn word about him not being human and I'm going to smash this over your head!"

Then she set the bottle down and went out. Charley looked at it silently until she was gone.

"I can understand her attitude, of course, but—" He shrugged. "I hope having a child by Jaessune isn't anything she's counting on too heavily. She won't, you know."

"Do you know that, or is that just your professional opinion?"

Having a child by him might be something important to Sammeh. They hadn't discussed it, but he suspected that it would be. The curse of overpopulation hadn't put its mark on the Freyan mind as it had on the Terran.

"Well, look, Roger," Charley said. "Life here originated and evolved independently of life on Terra. We and the Freyans started from two different puddles of living slime, seven hundred light-years apart. You know the mechanism of reproduction. The sperm and the ovum are away up the structural ladder. Each contains twenty four chromosomes, with us; I don't know how many for the Freyans. Each of them contains thousands of genes. Here, for a simplified example, suppose a Terran locksmith made a lock, and a locksmith here on Freya made a key, neither knowing what the other was doing. What odds would you give against the key working in the lock? Well, that's almost an even-money bet beside the odds against a Terran spermatozoon fertilizing a Freyan ovum, or vice versa."

That sounded reasonable, until he began to think about.

"Wait a minute, Charley. Every physical characteristic stems, originally, from the gene for it; that's correct, isn't it? And you, yourself, have admitted that Freyans do not possess any non-human characteristics, or lack any human ones."

"I see what you're getting at, Roger." Charley frowned. "Superficially, it sounds convincing. But, dammit, these people. . . ." Then he changed the subject by shifting to the research work he intended doing once the powder mills could run themselves and he could get back to medical work.

The third ship was finished. She was almost twice as big as the *King Vethir*, and had a speed of a hundred mph. Luther thought that now was the time to embark the armies of Great Stursintir and go to Langeks to tell King Leogene that he was through. Julio was reminded of an old Spanish proverb about the converted Moor eating pork three times a day. And even if this belligerence hadn't been so inconspicuous for Luther, the idea was pure nonsense. Administrative problems were already piling up faster than they could be dealt with, without creating a host of new ones.

Beside, Leogene would find out where he stood soon enough.

It didn't take him long. It was barely three weeks after Nancy's marriage to Jaessune before a big forty-oared barge came up the river to Balkrum and an embassy from King Leogene journeyed overland by okry, to Stursintir Castle. They brought friendly greetings from their king, who wanted to enter into alliance with the King of Great Stursintir and make agreements of peace, friendship and trade. Eiraad's Forge, they announced, no longer existed in Langeks. The temples and farms had been seized by the Crown, and the priests expelled, but not before a number had been questioned under torture. As a result of this last, King Leogene now knew how to make fire-seed for himself.

Why, in the five or six centuries that Eiraad's Forge had been battering on the kings and princes and people of the Great River valley, this simple little idea hadn't occurred to anybody before would be one of the perpetual mysteries. Maybe everybody had been afraid Eiraad really would do something about it.

Her father was alone at his writing-table, with piles of parchments and stacks of the soft white paper of the Terrans in front of him. For a moment, he did not hear them enter, and kept on writing. Then he raised his head and smiled at

them, and picked up his poignard to strike the gong and call for wine. They sat down facing him.

"I'm not hearing any more complaints from western Pintam about Tetshehechska raids," he said.

"Oh, no; that's stopped," Roger said. "I told their chief that if it didn't, there'd be no more ships with iron and powder, and we'd buy no more cattle and lumber from them. He accused us of being as bad as the priests of Eiraad; I assured him that we were much worse. On that basis, we got along very pleasantly. Why, King Vethir, there is something we want to talk about."

"Why, of course, Roger." He closed his eyes and massaged them gently with his palms. "What is it; this visit of King Leogene? We will have to entertain him very lavishly, and I'm afraid he'll find Stursintir Castle small and mean, by his standards. You know—"

"Father," she interrupted. "Roger wants to talk to you about us getting married. Why don't you listen to him?"

Her father didn't seem greatly surprised. He poured wine for the three of them and picked up his own cup.

Then he said something which horrified her.

"You understand, Roger, that Sammeh is heiress to the throne of Great Stursintir?"

"Why, what a thing to mention!" she cried. "But for Roger and his friends, there would be no Great Stursintir. There wouldn't even be a Stursintir, by now, and our flesh would be rotting from our bones in the ruins of this castle."

Her father nodded slowly, straightforward, like a Terran. "I remember it hourly, Sammeh, with thankful wonder," he said. "But Roger is a subject—a *citizen*—of the Terran Federation. Would he repudiate that?"

Roger passed his hand across his face slowly. "I will make no claim on the throne," he said. "Great Stursintir did not exist a quarter of a year ago; who knows what it will be when your daughter succeeds you? It may be all of this world by then. It may not even be a kingdom, but a Public Thing, such as we have in the Federation. There have been great changes, and none of us can guess what greater changes will come. Why talk now of things that may happen in a world the very shape of which we cannot guess?"

Her father nodded again. "Yes," he said, and tasted his wine—it would have been warm and

tasteless, except for the cold maker, no, the refrigerator, of the Terrans. Who would drink warm wine, once they had tasted it chilled? "I suppose there is nothing impossible to those who go searching among the stars. But of course; you and my daughter must marry, if that is what you both wish."

Then he drank more wine, while they both told him how much they wanted it.

"And it will be a big, wonderful marriage," she said, "and everybody will be here, all the Princes of Great Stursintir, and all the people, and there'll be feasting and rejoicing and a happy time for everybody. . . ."

When the *Stellex* had left, everybody had been busy—the war with Pintam had still been on, and there had been the annexation of Dazour and of Pintam and the other princedoms afterward, and rebuilding the bridge they had burned in front of Yusunuch's soldiers, and airlifting a thousand Tetshehechska to guard the northern border against the plains nomads, and finishing the *Princess Sammeh* and building the *Searcher*, and Nancy's wedding, and King Leogene. . . .

Then, gradually, it began to be realized that the *Stellex* was almost a month longer gone than the estimated time to and from Yggdrasil.

At first, nobody was much concerned; there might be delays in getting the cargo sold, and refining the potassium nitrate would take time. Then they began thinking of everything that could go wrong aboard the poor wheezy old *Stellex* between planets, and they began to worry.

Their main telecast station was at Yunsay Castle, and there were a dozen young Freyans of both sexes who had learned to operate the screens; one or another of them was always on watch at the activated but empty screen tuned to the ship's wavelength. There was a button beside it to press as soon as anything came in.

It was past two in the morning, on the hundred and thirty-fifth day after the *Stellex* had broken orbit off Freya, when the girl on duty pressed it. Bells began jangling all over the castle, and some soldiers on the ramparts, who didn't know what was happening, let off a sixty pounder and began ringing the alarm-bell.

When he and Fitzurse and Adriaan got to it, they found themselves looking through it into the

astradome of the spaceship, past Karl. There was a card in front of him, lettered, "5,000,000 Miles off Planet; 30 Second Lag."

"How did you make out?" Adriaan wanted to know, at once; they waited for an endless half-minute and then Karl saw them and waved to them.

"Unbelievably well; we sold the cargo, and we have niter aboard for enough powder to blow Eiraad's Forge into orbit. And a lot of machinery and power-equipment, and some contragravity vehicles. That stuff's all second-hand; the Yggdrasil Company sold it to us from their own equipment. They didn't lose any money on it, of course," he added. "And arms and ammunition. And there are twenty three Terrans aboard, fourteen men and nine women, all skilled technicians. They're willing to work for us either for salaries or for stock."

That would be stock. It takes money to pay salaries, and after Karl's buying spree. . . .

"Well, that's wonderful, Karl." It was practically incredible. "How much do we owe the Yggdrasil Company?"

Thirty seconds later Karl heard him and started laughing.

"We still have a credit of a little under ten thousand sols on their books," he said. "I've commanded tramp freighters for a long time, and I never saw a cargo go quicker or bring better prices. I thought they were crazy until I tasted some of the stuff they've been eating, there. There's some kind of a micro-organism, something like a virus, that gets into the nutrients for both the hydroponics and the carniculture. Sylvia can tell you about it. Contact with Terran organic matter kills it, but it makes the food taste simply foul."

"Then we have prospects of regular trade with Yggdrasil?" Adriaan asked.

"We have regular trade with Yggdrasil now," Karl told him. "As soon as I can get another cargo aboard, I'm going back. They'll buy all the food we can ship them. In a week or so, there's another ship coming in here, Pan-Federation freighter *Callisto*. She's bringing more niter, and blasting explosives—they've started manufacturing them on Yggdrasil—and general merchandise. A lot of that's paid for, too. And a Terran Federation Army captain and ten enlisted men, to represent the Government until something permanent can be set

up. It was from the Federation Army that I got the arms and ammunition."

That was good. The Federation Army was authorized to furnish arms to colonies and exploitation companies; that meant that they had at least tentative recognition.

"You filed the discovery claim?"

"Yes, on the whole system, with the Army on Yggdrasil. And a photo-print of our treaty with Vethir, and I made first application for a charter. The Federation people there all take it as foregone that we'll be chartered, and are acting on that assumption. I have acknowledgements of the claim and the application, in case Adriaan starts for Terra at once and beats the ship from Yggdrasil there."

"That's possible," Adriaan said. "The *Voortrekker's* faster than any of these Pan-Federation freighters and we're closer to Terra than Yggdrasil.⁴⁰ I'll have to wait until the *Callisto* gets in, of course. Tell me, somebody, why the devil we thought we'd have to export something to Terra when we have Yggdrasil right next door." Then he began muttering to himself about stock issues and the Banking Cartel and franchises.

They were in the bar and clubroom at Yunsay Castle, the few of them who weren't busy showing the newcomers around or supervising work on the new spaceport. Adriaan was trying to make up a crew for the *Voortrekker*.

"I'll need two, beside myself," he was saying. "It oughtn't to be anybody who can't be spared here."

"I'm just getting this hospital system organized," Charley said. "And I have to run down to Langeks every now and then and help our noble ally chase some of the bugs out of his new powder mills. How about you, Fitz? Now that everybody has all the powder he needs, I doubt if there'll be any wars for a while."

"There are still Sechune and Klistan," Fitzurse said. "And Vethir has just made me commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and I have to keep an eye on our royal ally, too."

"I'll go," Margaret said. "Luther and Lourenço can handle everything on the *Stellex*."

⁴⁰ That Freya, the more habitable planet, is closer to Terra than is the already-established Yggdrasil attests to the vagaries of interstellar exploration at this point in the Federation era.

"That's good. I ought to have somebody who can help me talk to people on Terra. We have a company to organize, you know. How about you, Julio?"

"Hell, I'm Minister of Industry and Economics," Julio said. "And I have to organize cargo procurement."

"Jaessune wants to see our world," Nancy said. "He'd be handy on the ship."

"And he'd be a lot handier on Terra," Adriaan said. "Vethir could appoint him ambassador; he could have a lot of influence with the Government. And he'd be wonderful publicity."

"Wait a minute." Something seemed suddenly to have occurred to her. "How long is this voyage going to take? Six months⁴¹, isn't it?"

"No, that's what it would take the *Stellex*. *Voortrekker* has a lot lower mass-to-power ratio, and better Dillinghams. About four months."

"Oh, that's all right. We can go. You know, the *Voortrekker's* a lovely yacht, Adriaan, but it wouldn't make a very good maternity hospital."

"You mean to tell us—?" Charley began.

"I am a married woman, Charley," she said. "And when a couple of humans of different sexes, are in congress assembled—"⁴²

Charley reached for the bottle and poured himself another drink.

"A couple of humans," he repeated. "Of two different sexes, from two different planets. That's right," he agreed.

He really seemed relieved that it was settled.

⁴¹ If the forty light-year round trip to Yggdrasil took the *Stellex* three months of travel time, this estimate suggests that Freya is approximately eighty light-years from Terra.

⁴² The original text reads "And when, in the course of human events, a couple of humans of different sexes get married—"

Naming Conversions

<u>Original</u>	<u>New</u>
Athan	Echen
Chartiphon	Kiarrune
Darro	Fessu
Dazouri	Dazourska
Dombra	Yunsay
Dralm	Fremn
Gathlon	Hechup
Gormoth	Yusnuch
Harmakros	Jaessune
Harphax	Langeks
Hos-Bleth	Klistan
Hos-Harphax	Langeks
Hos-Hostigos	Great Stursintir
Hos-Rathon	Sechune
Hostigos	Stursintir
Hostigi	Stursintirska
Kaiphranos	Leogene
Lykarses	Lykars
Nostor	Pintam
Nostori	Pintamska
Phadrigos	Fadriigo
Phebron	Fiksum
Phosg	Guth
Ptsophes	Vethir
Rylla	Sammeh
Sarrask	Tessetz
Sask	Tetz
Saski	Tetzska
Sastragath	Tetshehech
Sastragathi	Tetshehechska
Styphon	Eiraad
Styphon's House	Eiraad's Forge
Tabalkon	Tabalk
Tarr-	Castle
Xentos	Zwius