

Oomphel In The Sky

Miles Gilbert watched the landscape slide away below him, its quilt of rounded treetops mottled red and orange in the double sunlight and, in shaded places, with the natural yellow of the vegetation of Kwannon. The aircar began a slow swing to the left, and Gettler Alpha came into view, a monstrous smear of red incandescence with an optical diameter of two feet at arm's length, slightly flattened on the bottom by the western horizon. In another couple of hours it would be completely set, but by that time Beta, the planet's G-class primary, would be at its midafternoon hottest. He glanced at his watch. It was 1005, but that was Galactic Standard Time, and had no relevance to anything that was happening in the local sky. It did mean, though, that it was five minutes short of two hours to 'cast-time.

He snapped on the communication screen in front of him, and Harry Walsh, the news editor, looked out of it at him from the office in Bluelake, halfway across the continent. He wanted to know how things were going.

"Just about finished. I'm going to look in at a couple more native villages, and then I'm going to Sanders' plantation to see Gonzales. I hope I'D have a personal statement from him, and the final situation-progress map, in time for the 'cast. I take it Maith's still agreeable to releasing the story at twelve-hundred?"

"Sure; he was always agreeable. The Army wants publicity; it was Government House that wanted to sit on it, and they've given that up now. The story's all over the place here, native city and all."

"What's the situation in town, now?"

"Oh, it's still going on. Some disorders, mostly just unrest. Lot of street meetings that could have turned into frenzies if the police hadn't broken them up in time. A couple of shootings, some sleep-gassing, and a lot of arrests. Nothing to worry about—at least, not immediately."

That was about what he thought. "Maybe it's not bad to have a little trouble in Bluelake," he considered. "What happens out here in the plantation country the Government House crowd can't see, and it doesn't worry them. Well, I'll call you from Sanders'."

He blanked the screen. In the seat in front, the native pilot said: "Some contragravity up ahead, boss." It sounded like two voices speaking in unison, which was just what it was. "I'll have a look."

The pilot's hand, long and thin, like a squirrel's, reached up and pulled down the fifty-power binoculars on their swinging arm. Miles looked at the screen-map and saw a native village just ahead of the dot of light that marked the position of the aircar. He spoke the native name of the village aloud, and added:

"Let down there, Heshto. I'll see what's going on."

The native, still looking through the glasses, said, "Right, boss." Then he turned.

His skin was blue-gray and looked like sponge rubber. He was humanoid, to the extent of being an upright biped, with two arms, a head on top of shoulders and a torso that housed, among other oddities, four lungs. His face wasn't even vaguely human. He had two eyes in front, close enough for stereoscopic vision, but that was a common characteristic of sapient life forms everywhere. His mouth was strictly for eating; he breathed through separate in-takes and outlets, one of each on either side of his neck; he talked through the outlets and had his scent and hearing organs in the intakes. The car was air-conditioned, which was a mercy; an overheated Kwann exhaled through his skin, and surrounded himself with stench like an organic chemistry lab. But then, Kwanns didn't come any closer to him than they could help when he was hot and sweated, which, lately, had been most of the time.

"A V and a half of air cavalry, circling around," Heshto said. "Making sure nobody got away. And a combat car at a couple of hundred feet and another one just at treetop level."

He rose and went to the seat next to the pilot, pulling down the binoculars that were focused for his own eyes. With them, he could see the air cavalry—egg-shaped things just big enough for a seated man, with jets and contragravity field generators below and a bristle of machine gun muzzles in front. A couple of them jetted up for a look at him and then went slanting down again, having recognized the Kwannon Planetwide News Service car.

The village was typical enough to have been an illustration in a sociography textbook—fields in a belt for a couple of hundred yards around it, dome-thatched mud-and-wattle huts inside a pole stockade with log storehouses built against it, their flat roofs high enough to provide platforms for defending archers, the open oval gathering-place in the middle. There was a big hut at one end of this, the khamdoo, the sanctum of the adult males, off limits for women and children. A small crowd was gathered in front of it; fifteen or twenty Terran air cavalymen, a couple of enlisted men from the Second Kwannon Native Infantry, a Terran second lieutenant, and half a dozen natives. The rest of the village population, about two hundred, of both sexes and all ages, were lined up on the shadier side of the gathering-place, most of them looking up apprehensively at the two combat cars which were covering them with their guns.

Miles got to his feet as the car lurched off contragravity and the springs of the landing-feet took up the weight. A blast of furnacelike air struck him when he opened the door; he got out quickly and closed it behind him. The second lieutenant had come over to meet him; he extended his hand.

"Good day, Mr. Gilbert. We all owe you our thanks for the warning. This would have been a real baddie if we hadn't caught it when we did."

He didn't even try to make any modest disclaimer; that was nothing more than the exact truth.

"Well, lieutenant, I see you have things in hand here." He glanced at the line-up along the side of the oval plaza, and then at the selected group in front of the khamdoo. The patriarchal village chieftain in a loose slashed shirt; the shoonoo, wearing a multiplicity of amulets and nothing else; four or five of the village elders. "I take it the word of the swarming didn't get this far?"

"No, this crowd still don't know what the flap's about, and I couldn't think of anything to tell them that wouldn't be worse than no explanation at all."

He had noticed hoes and spades flying in the fields, and the cylindrical plastic containers the natives bought from traders, dropped when the troops had surprised the women at work. And the shoonoo didn't have a fire-dance cloak or any other special regalia on. If he'd heard about the swarming, he'd have been dressed to make magic for it.

"What time did you get here, lieutenant?"

"Oh-nine-forty. I just called in and reported the village occupied, and they told me I was the last one in, so the operation's finished."

That had been smart work. He got the lieutenant's name and unit and mentioned it into his memophone. That had been a little under five hours since he had convinced General Maith, in Bluelake, that the mass labor-desertion from the Sanders plantation had been the beginning of a swarming. Some division commanders wouldn't have been able to get a brigade off the ground in that time, let alone landed on objective. He said as much to the young officer.

"The way the Army responded, today, can make the people of the Colony feel a lot more comfortable

for the future."

"Why, thank you, Mr. Gilbert." The Army, on Kwannon, was rather more used to obloquy than praise. "How did you spot what was going on so quickly?"

This was the hundredth time, at least, that he had been asked that today.

"Well, Paul Sanders' labor all comes from neighboring villages. If they'd just wanted to go home and spend the end of the world with their families, they'd have been dribbling away in small batches for the last couple of hundred hours. Instead, they all bugged out in a bunch, they took all the food they could carry and nothing else, and they didn't make any trouble before they left. Then, Sanders said they'd been building fires out in the fallow ground and moaning and chanting around them for a couple of days, and idling on the job. Saving their strength for the trek. And he said they had a shoonoo among them. He's probably the lad who started it. Had a dream from the Gone Ones, I suppose."

"You mean, like this fellow here?" the lieutenant asked. "What are they, Mr. Gilbert; priests?"

He looked quickly at the lieutenant's collar-badges. Yellow trefoil for Third Fleet-Army Force, Roman IV for Fourth Army, 907 for his regiment, with C under it for cavalry. That outfit had only been on Kwanon for the last two thousand hours, but somebody should have briefed him better than that.

He shook his head. "No, they're magicians. Everything these Kwanns do involves magic, and the shoonoon are the professionals. When a native runs into something serious, that his own do-it-yourself magic can't cope with, he goes to the shoonoo. And, of course, the shoonoo works all the magic for the community as a whole—rain-magic, protective magic for the village and the fields, that sort of thing."

The lieutenant mopped his face on a bedraggled handkerchief. "They'll have to struggle along somehow for a while; we have orders to round up all the shoonoon and send them in to Bluelake."

"Yes." That hadn't been General Maith's idea; the governor had insisted on that. "I hope it doesn't make more trouble than it prevents."

The lieutenant was still mopping his face and looking across the gathering-place toward Alpha, glaring above the huts.

"How much worse do you think this is going to get?" he asked.

"The heat, or the native troubles?"

"I was thinking about the heat, but both."

"Well, it'll get hotter. Not much hotter, but some. We can expect storms, too, within twelve to fifteen hundred hours. Nobody has any idea how bad they'll be. The last periastron was ninety years ago, and we've only been here for sixty-odd; all we have is verbal accounts from memory from the natives, probably garbled and exaggerated. We had pretty bad storms right after transit a year ago; they'll be much worse this time. Thermal convections; air starts to cool when it gets dark, and then heats up again in double-sun daylight."

It was beginning, even now; starting to blow a little after Alpha-rise.

"How about the natives?" the lieutenant asked. "If they can get any crazier than they are now—"

"They can, and they probably will. They think this is the end of the world. The Last Hot Time." He used the native expression, and then translated it into Lingua Terra. "The Sky Fire—that's Alpha—will bum up

the whole world."

"But this happens every ninety years. Mean they always acted this way at periastron?"

He shook his head. "Race would have exterminated itself long ago if they had. No, this is something special. The coming of the Terrans was a sign. The Terrans came and brought oomphel to the world; this a sign that the Last Hot Time is at hand."

"What the devil is oomphel?" The lieutenant was mopping the back of his neck with one hand, now, and trying to pull his sticky tunic loose from his body with the other. "I hear that word all the time."

"Well, most Terrans, including the old Kwannon hands, use it to mean trade-goods. To the natives, it means any product of Terran technology, from paper-clips to spaceships. They think it's... well, not exactly supernatural; extranatural would be closer to expressing their idea. Terrans are natural; they're just a different kind of people. But oomphel isn't; it isn't subject to any of the laws of nature at all. They're all positive that we don't make it. Some of them even think it makes us."

When he got back in the car, the native pilot, Heshto, was lolling in his seat and staring at the crowd of natives along the side of the gathering-place with undisguised disdain. Heshto had been educated at one of the Native Welfare Commission schools, and post-graded with Kwannon Planetwide News. He could speak, read and write *Lingua Terra*. He was a mathematician as far as long division and decimal fractions. He knew that Kwannon was the second planet of the *Gettler* Beta system, 23,000 miles in circumference, rotating on its axis once in 22.8 Galactic Standard hours and making an orbital circuit around *Gettler* Beta once in 372.06 axial days, and that Alpha was an M-class pulsating variable with an average period of four hundred days, and that Beta orbited around it in a long ellipse every ninety years. He didn't believe there was going to be a Last Hot Time. He was an intellectual, he was.

He started the contragravity-field generator as soon as Miles was in his seat. "Where now, boss?" he asked.

"Qualpha's Village. We won't let down; just circle low over it I want some views of the ruins. Then to Sanders' plantation."

"O.K., boss; hold tight."

He had the car up to ten thousand feet. Aiming it in the map direction of Qualpha's Village, he let go with everything he had—hot jets, rocketbooster and all. The forest landscape came hurtling out of the horizon toward them.

Qualpha's was where the trouble had first broken out, after the bug-out from Sanders; the troops hadn't been able to get there in time, and it had been burned. Another village, about the same distance south of the plantation, had also gone up in flames, and at a dozen more they had found the natives working themselves into frenzies and had had to sleep-gas them or strum them with concussion-bombs. Those had been the villages to which the deserters from Sanders' had themselves gone; from every one, runners had gone out to neighboring villages—"The Gone Ones are returning; all the People go to greet them at the Deesha-Phoo. Bum your villages; send on the word. Hasten; the Gone Ones return!"

Saving some of those villages had been touch-and-go, too; the runners, with hours lead-time, had gotten there ahead of the troops, and there had been shooting at a couple of them. Then the Army contragravity began landing at villages that couldn't have been reached in hours by foot messengers. It had been stopped—at least for the time, and in this area. When and where another would break out was anybody's guess.

The car was slowing and losing altitude, and ahead he could see thin smoke rising above the trees. He moved forward beside the pilot and pulled down his glasses; with them he could distinguish the ruins of the village. He called Bluelake, and then put his face to the view-finder and began transmitting in the view.

It had been a village like the one he had just visited, mud-and-wattle huts around an oval gathering-place, stockade, and fields beyond. Heshto brought the car down to a few hundred feet and came coasting in on momentum helped by an occasional spurt of the cold-jets. A few sections of the stockade still stood, and one side of the khamdoo hadn't fallen, but the rest of the structures were flat. There wasn't a soul, human or parahuman, in sight; the only living thing was a small black-and-gray quadruped investigating some bundles that had been dropped in the fields, in hope of finding something tasty. He got a view of that—everybody liked animal pictures on a newscast—and then he was swinging the pickup over the still-burning ruins. In the ashes of every hut he could see the remains of something like a viewscreen or a nuclear-electric stove or a refrigerator or a sewing machine. He knew how dearly the Kwanns cherished such possessions. That they had destroyed them grieved him. But the Last Hot Time was at hand; the whole world would be destroyed by fire, and then the Gone Ones would return.

So there were uprisings on the plantations. Paul Sanders had been lucky; his Kwanns had just picked up and left. But he had always gotten along well with the natives, and his plantation house was literally a castle and he had plenty of armament. There had been other planters who had made the double mistake of incurring the enmity of their native labor and of living in unfortified houses. A lot of them weren't around, any more, and their plantations were gutted ruins.

And there were plantations on which the natives had destroyed the klooba plants and smashed the crystal which lived symbiotically upon them. They thought the Terrans were using the living crystals to make magic. Not too far off, at that; the properties of Kwannon biocrystals had opened a major breakthrough in subnucleonic physics and initiated half a dozen technologies. New kinds of oomphel. And down in the south, where the spongy and resinous trees were drying in the heat, they were starting forest fires and perishing in them in hecatombs. And to the north, they were swarming into the mountains; building great fires there, too, and attacking the Terran radar and radio beacons.

Fire was a factor common to all these frenzies. Nothing could happen without magical assistance; the way to bring on the Last Hot Time was People.

Maybe the ones who died in the frenzies and the swarmings were the lucky ones at that. They wouldn't live to be crushed by disappointment when the Sky Fire receded as Beta went into the long swing toward apastron. The surviving shoonoon wouldn't be the lucky ones, that was for sure. The magician-in-public-practice needs only to make one really bad mistake before he is done to some unpleasantly ingenious death by his clientry, and this was going to turn out to be the biggest magico-prophetic blooper in all the long unrecorded history of Kwannon.

A few minutes after the car turned south from the ruined village, he could see contragravity-vehicles in the air ahead, and then the fields and buildings of the Sanders plantation. A lot more contragravity was grounded in the fallow fields, and there were rows of pneumatic balloon-tents, and field-kitchens, and a whole park of engineering equipment. Work was going on in the klooba-fields, too; about three hundred natives were cutting open the six-foot leafy balls and getting out the biocrystals. Three of the plantation airjeeps, each with a pair of machine guns, were guarding them, but they didn't seem to be having any trouble. He saw Sanders in another jeep, and had Heshto put the car alongside.

"How's it going, Paul?" he asked over his radio. "I see you have some help, now."

Everybody's from Qualpha's, and from Darshat's," Sanders replied. "The Army had no place to put them, after they burned themselves out." He laughed happily. "Miles, I'm going to save my whole crop! I

thought I was wiped out, this morning."

He would have been, if Gonzales hadn't brought those Kwanns in. The klooba was beginning to wither; if left un-harvested, the biocrystals would die along with their hosts and crack into worthlessness. Like all the other planters, Sanders had started no new crystals since the hot weather, and would start none until the worst of the heat was over. He'd need every crystal he could sell to tide him over.

"The Welfarers'll make a big forced-labor scandal out of this," he predicted.

"Why, such an idea." Sanders was scandalized. "I'm not forcing them to eat."

"The Welfarers don't think anybody ought to have to work to eat. They think everybody ought to be fed whether they do anything to earn it or not, and if you try to make people earn their food, you're guilty of economic coercion. And if you're in business for yourself and want them to work for you, you're an exploiter and you ought to be eliminated as a class. Haven't you been trying to run a plantation on this planet, under this Colonial Government, long enough to have found that out, Paul?"

Brigadier General Ramon Gonzales had taken over the first—counting down from the landing-stage—floor of the plantation house for his headquarters. His headquarters company had pulled out removable partitions and turned four rooms into one, and moved in enough screens and teleprinters and photoprint machines and computers to have outfitted the main newsroom of *Planetwide News*. The place had the feel of a newsroom—a newsroom after a big story has broken and the cast has gone on the air and everybody—in this case about twenty Terran officers and non-coms, half women—standing about watching screens and smoking and thinking about getting a follow-up ready.

Gonzales himself was relaxing in Sanders' business-room, with his belt off and his tunic open. He had black eyes and black hair and mustache, and a slightly equine face that went well with his Old Terran Spanish name. There was another officer with him, considerably younger—Captain Foxx Travis, Major General Maith's aide.

"Well, is there anything we can do for you, Miles?" Gonzales asked, after they had exchanged greetings and sat down.

"Why, could I have your final situation-progress map?"

And would you be willing to make a statement on audiovisual." He looked at his watch. "We have about twenty minutes before the 'cast."

"You have a map," Gonzales said, as though he were walking tiptoe from one word to another. "It accurately represents the situation as of the moment, but I'm afraid some minor unavoidable inaccuracies may have crept in while marking the positions and times for the earlier phases of the operation. I teleprinted a copy to *Planetwide* along with the one I sent to Division Headquarters."

He understood about that and nodded. Gonzales was zipping up his tunic and putting on his belt and sidearm. That told him, before the brigadier general spoke again, that he was agreeable to the audio-visual appearance and statement. He called the recording studio at *Planetwide* while Gonzales was inspecting himself in the mirror and told them to get set for a recording. It only ran a few minutes; Gonzales, speaking without notes, gave a brief description of the operation.

"At present," he concluded, "we have every native village and every plantation and trading-post within two hundred miles of the Sanders plantation occupied. We feel that this swarming has been definitely stopped but we will continue the occupation for at least the next hundred to two hundred hours. In the meantime, the natives in the occupied villages are being put to work building shelters for themselves

against the anticipated storms."

I hadn't heard about that," Miles said, as the general returned to his chair and picked up his drink again.

"Yes. They'll need something better than these thatched huts when the storms start, and working on them will keep them out of mischief. Standard megaton-kilometer field shelters, earth and log construction. I think they'll be adequate for anything that happens at periastron."

Anything designed to resist the heat, blast and radiation effects of a megaton thermonuclear bomb at a kilometer ought to stand up under what was coming. At least, the periastron effects; there was another-angle to it.

"The Native Welfare Commission isn't going to take kindly to that. That's supposed to be their job."

"Then why the devil haven't they done it?" Gonzales demanded angrily. "I've viewed every native village in this area by screen, and I haven't seen one that's equipped with anything better than those log storagebins against the stockades."

"There was a project to provide shelters for the periastron storms set up ten years ago. They spent one year arguing about how the natives survived storms prior to the Terrans' arrival here. According to the older natives, they got into those log storagehouses you were mentioning; only about one out of three in any village survived. I could have told them that. Did tell them, repeatedly, on the air. Then after they decided that shelters were needed, they spent another year hassling over who would be responsible for designing them. Your predecessor here, General Nokami, offered the services of his engineer officers. He was frostily informed that this was a humanitarian and not a military project."

Ramon Gonzales began swearing, then apologized for the interruption. "Then what?" he asked.

"Apology unnecessary. Then they did get a shelter designed, and started teaching some of the students at the native schools how to build them, and then the meteorologists told them it was no good. It was a dugout shelter; the weathermen said there'd be rainfall measured in meters instead of inches and anybody who got caught in one of those dugouts would be drowned like a rat."

"Ha, I thought of that one." Gonzales said. "My shelters are going to be mounded up eight feet above the ground."

"What did they do then?" Foxx Travis wanted to know.

"There the matter rested. As far as I know, nothing has been done on it since."

"And you think, with a disgraceful record of non-accomplishment like that, that they'll protest General Gonzales' action on purely jurisdictional grounds?" Travis demanded.

"Not jurisdictional grounds, Foxx. The general's going at this the wrong way. He actually knows what has to be done and how to do it, and he's going right ahead and doing it, without holding a dozen conferences and round-table discussions and giving everybody a fair and equal chance to foul things up for him. You know as well as I do that that's undemocratic. And what's worse, he's making the natives build them themselves, whether they want to or not, and that's forced labor. That reminds me; has anybody started raising the devil about those Kwanns from Qualpha's and Darshat's you brought here and Paul put to work?"

Gonzales looked at Travis and then said: "Not with me. Not yet, anyhow."

"They've been at General Maith," Travis said shortly. After a moment, he added: "General Maith

supports General Gonzales completely; that's for publication. I'm authorized to say so. What else was there to do? They'd burned their villages and all their food stores. They had to be placed somewhere. And why in the name of reason should they sit around in the shade eating Government native-type rations while Paul Sanders has fifty to a hundred thousand sols' worth of crystals dying on him?" "Yes; that's another thing they'll scream about. Paul's making a profit out of it."

"Of course he's making a profit," Gonzales said. "Why else is he running a plantation? If planters didn't make profits, who'd grow biocrystals?"

"The Colonial Government. The same way they built those storm-shelters. But that would be in the public interest, and if the Kwanns weren't public-spirited enough to do the work, they'd be made to—at about half what planters like Sanders are paying them now. But don't you realize that profit is sordid and dishonest and selfish? Not at all like drawing a salary-cum-expense-account from the Government."

"You're right, it isn't," Gonzales agreed. "People like Paul Sanders have ability. If they don't, they don't stay in business. You have ability and people who don't never forgive you for it. Your very existence is a constant reproach to them."

"That's right. And they can't admit your ability without admitting their own inferiority, so it isn't ability at all. It's just dirty underhanded trickery and selfish ruthlessness." He thought for a moment. "How did Government House find out about these Kwanns here?"

"The Welfare Commission had people out while I was still setting up headquarters," Gonzales said. "That was about oh-seven-hundred."

"This isn't for publication?" Travis asked. "Well, they know, but they can't prove, that our given reason for moving in here in force is false. Of course, we can't change our story now, that's why the situation-progress map that was prepared for publication is incorrect as to the earlier phases. They do not know that it was you who gave us our first warning; they ascribe that to Sanders. And they are claiming that there never was any swarming; according to them, Sanders' natives are striking for better pay and con-editions, and Sanders got General Maith to use troops to break the strike. I wish we could give you credit for putting us onto this, but it's too late now."

He nodded. The story was that a battalion of infantry had been sent in to rescue a small detail under attack by natives, and that more troops had been sent into re-enforce them, until the whole of Gonzales' brigade had been committed.

That wasted an hour, at the start," Gonzales said. "We lost two native villages burned, and about two dozen casualties, because we couldn't get our full strength in soon enough."

"You'd have lost more than that if Maith had told the governor general the truth and requested orders to act. There'd be a hundred villages and a dozen plantations and trading posts burning now, and Lord knows how many dead, and the governor general would still be arguing about whether he was justified in ordering troop-action." He mentioned several other occasions when something like that had happened. "You can't tell that kind of people the truth. They won't believe it. It doesn't agree with their preconceptions."

Foxx Travis nodded. "I take it we are still talking for nonpublication?" When Miles nodded, he continued: "This whole situation is baffling, Miles. It seems that the government here knew all about the weather conditions they could expect at periastron, and had made plans for them. Some of them excellent plans, too, but all based on the presumption that the natives would co-operate or at least not obstruct. You see what the situation actually is. It should be obvious to everybody that the behavior of these natives is nullifying everything the civil government is trying to do to ensure the survival of the Terran colonists, the

production of Terrantype food without which we would all starve, the biocrystal plantations without which the Colony would perish, and even the natives themselves. Yet the Civil Government will not act to stop these native frenzies and swarmings which endanger everything and everybody here, and when the Army attempts to act, we must use every sort of shabby subterfuge and deceit or the Civil Government will prevent us. What ails these people?"

"You have the whole history of the Colony against you, Foxx," he said. "You know, there never was any Chartered Kwannon Company set up to exploit the resources of the planet. At first, nobody realized that there were any resources worth exploiting. This plan was just a scientific curiosity; it was and is still the only planet of a binary system with a native population of sapient beings. The first people who came here were scientists, mostly sociographers and para-anthropologists. And most of them came from the University of Adelaide."

Travis nodded. Adelaide had a Federation-wide reputation for left-wing neo-Marxist "liberalism."

"Well, that established the political and social orientation of the Colonial Government, right at the start, when study of the natives was the only business of the Colony. You know how these ideological cliques form in a government—or any other organization. Subordinates are always chosen for their agreement with the views of their superiors, and the extremists always get to the top and shove the moderates under or out. Well, the Native Affairs Administration became the tail that wagged the Government dog, and the Native Welfare Commission is the big muscle in the tail."

His parents hadn't been of the left-wing Adelaide clique. His mother had been a biochemist; his father a roving news correspondent who had drifted into trading with the natives and made a fortune in keffa-gum before the chemists on Terra had found out how to synthesize hopkinsine. When the biocrystals were discovered and the plantations started, the Government attitude was set. Biocrystal culture is just sordid money grubbing. The real business of the Colony is to promote the betterment of the natives, as defined in University of Adelaide terms. That's to say, convert them into ersatz Terrans. You know why General Maith ordered these shoonoon rounded up?"

Travis made a face. "Governor general Kovac insisted on it; General Maith thought that a few minor concessions would help him on his main objective, which was keeping a swarming from starting out here."

"Yes. The Commissioner of Native Welfare wanted that done, mainly at the urging of the Director of Economic, Educational and Technical Assistance. The EETA crowd don't like shoonoon. They have been trying, ever since their agency was set up, to undermine and destroy their influence with the natives. This looked like a good chance to get rid of some of them."

Travis nodded. "Yes. And as soon as the disturbances in Bluelake started, the Constabulary started rounding them up there, too, and at the evacuee contonments. They got about fifty of them, mostly from the cantonments east of the city—the natives brought in from the flooded tidewater area. They just dumped the lot of them onto us. We have them penned up in a lorry-hangar on the military reservation now." He turned to Gonzales. "How many do you think you'll gather up out here, general?" he asked.

"I'd say about a hundred and fifty, when we have them all."

Travis groaned. "We can't keep all of them in that hangar, and we don't have anywhere else—"

Sometimes a new idea sneaked up on Miles, rubbing against him and purring like a cat. Sometimes one hit him like a sledgehammer. This one just seemed to grow inside him.

"Foxx, you know I have the top three floors of the Suzikami Building; about five hundred hours ago, I

leased the fourth and fifth floors, directly below. I haven't done anything with them, yet; they're just as they were when Trans-Space Imports moved out. There are ample water, light, power, air-conditioning and toilet facilities, and they can be sealed off completely from the rest of the building. If General Maith's agreeable, I'll take his shoonoon off his hands."

"What in blazes will you do with them?"

"Try a little experiment in psychological warfare. At minimum, we may get a little better insight into why these natives think the Last Hot Time is coming. At best, we may be able to stop the whole thing and get them quieted down again."

"Even the minimum's worth trying for," Travis said. "What do you have in mind, Miles? I mean, what procedure?"

"Well, I'm not quite sure, yet." That was a lie; he was very sure. He didn't think it was quite time to be specific, though. "I'll have to size up my material a little, before I decide on what to do with it. Whatever happens, it won't hurt the shoonoon, and it won't make any more trouble than arresting them has made already. I'm sure we can learn something from them, at least."

Travis nodded. "General Maith is very much impressed with your grasp of native psychology," he said. "What happened out here this morning was exactly as you predicted. Whatever my recommendation's-worth, you have it. Can you trust your native driver to take your car back to Bluelake alone?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then suppose you ride in with me in my car. We'll talk about it on the way in, and go see General Maith at once."

Bluelake was peaceful as they flew in over it, but it was an uneasy peace. They began running into military contra-gravity twenty miles beyond the open farmlands—they were the chlorophyll green of Terran vegetation—and the natives at work in the fields were being watched by more military and police vehicles. The carniculture plants, where Terran-type animal tissue was grown in nutrient-vats, were even more heavily guarded, and the native city was being patrolled from above and the streets were empty, even of the hordes of native children who usually played in them.

The Terran city had no streets. Its dwellers moved about on contragravity, and tall buildings rose singly or in clumps, among the landing-staged residences and the green transplanted trees. There was a triple wire fence around it, the inner one masked by vines and the middle one electrified, with warning lights on. Even a government dedicated to the betterment of the natives and unwilling to order military action against them was, it appeared, unwilling to take too many chances.

Major General Denis Maith, the Federation Army commander on Kwannon, was considerably more than willing to find a temporary home for his witch doctors, now numbering close to two hundred. He did insist that they be kept under military guard, and on assigning his aide, Captain Travis, to co-operate on the project. Beyond that, he gave Miles a free hand.

Miles and Travis got very little rest in the next ten hours. A half-company of engineer troops was also kept busy, as were a number of Kwannon Planetwide News technicians and some Terran and native mechanics borrowed from different private business concerns in the city. Even the most guarded hints of what he had in mind were enough to get this last co-operation; he had been running a newsservice in Bluelake long enough to have the confidence of the business people.

He tried, as far as possible, to keep any intimation of what was going on from Government House. That, unfortunately, hadn't been far enough. He found that out when General Maith was on his screen, in the middle of the work on the fourth and fifth floors of the Suzikami Building.

"The governor general just screened me," Maith said. "He's in a tizzy about our shoonoon. Claims that keeping them in the Suzikami Building will endanger the whole Terran city."

"Is that the best he can do? Well, that's rubbish, and he knows it. There are less than two hundred of them, I have them on the fifth floor, twenty stories above the ground, and the floor's completely sealed off from the floor below. They can't get out, and I have tanks of sleep-gas all over the place which can be opened either individually or all together from a switch on the fourth floor, where your sepoys are quartered."

"I know, Mr. Gilbert; I screenviewed the whole installation. I've seen regular maximum-security prisons that would be easier to get out of."

"Governor general Kovac is not objecting personally. He has been pressured into it by this Native Welfare government-within-the-Government. They don't know what I'm doing with those shoonoon, but whatever it is, they're afraid of it."

"Well, for the present," Maith said, "I think I'm holding them off. The Civil Government doesn't want the responsibility of keeping them in custody, I refused to assume responsibility for them if they were kept anywhere else, and Kovac simply won't consider releasing them, so that leaves things as they are. I did have to make one compromise, though." That didn't sound good. It sounded less so when Maith continued: "They insisted on having one of their people at the Suzikami Building as an observer. I had to grant that."

"That's going to mean trouble."

"Oh, I shouldn't think so. This observer will observe, and nothing else. She will take no part in anything You're doing, will voice no objections, and will not interrupt anything you are saying to the shoonoon. I was quite firm on that, and the governor general agreed completely."

"She?"

"Yes. A Miss Edith Shaw; do you know anything about her?"

"I've met her a few times; cocktail parties and so on." She was young enough, and new enough to Kwannon, not to have a completely indurated mind. On the other hand, she was EETA which was bad, and had a master's in sociography from Adelaide, which was worse. "When can I look for her?"

"Well, the governor general's going to screen me and find out when you'll have the shoonoon on hand."

Doesn't want to talk to me at all, Miles thought. Afraid he might say something and get quoted.

"For your information, they'll be here inside an hour. They will have to eat, and they're all tired and sleepy. I should say bout oh-eight-hundred. Oh, and will you tell the governor general to tell Miss Shaw to bring an overnight kit with her. She's going to need it."

He was up at 0400, just a little after Beta-rise. He might be a civilian big wheel in an Army psychological warfare project, but he still had four newscasts a day to produce.

He spent a couple of hours checking the 0600 cast and briefing Harry Walsh for the indeterminate period in which he would be acting chief editor and producer. At 0700, Foxx Travis put in an appearance. They

went down to the fourth floor, to the little room they had fitted out as command-post, control room and office for Operation Shoonoo.

There was a rectangular black traveling-case, initialed E. S., beside the open office door. Travis nodded at it, and they grinned at one another; she'd come early, possibly hoping to catch them hiding something they didn't want her to see. Entering the office quietly, they found her seated facing the big viewscreen, smoking and watching a couple of enlisted men of the First Kwannon Native Infantry at work in another room where the pickup was. There were close to a dozen lipstick-tinted cigarette butts in the ashtray beside her. Her private face wasn't particularly happy. Maybe she was being earnest and concerned about the betterment of the underprivileged, or the satanic maneuvers of the selfish planters.

Then she realized that somebody had entered; with a slight start, she turned, then rose. She was about the height of Foxx Travis, a few inches shorter than Miles, and slender. Light blond; green suit costume. She ditched her private face and got on her public one, a pleasant and deferential smile, with a trace of uncertainty behind it. Miles introduced Travis, and they sat down again facing the screen.

It gave a view, from one of the long sides and near the ceiling, of a big room. In the center, a number of seats—the drum-shaped cushions the natives had adopted in place of the seats carved from sections of tree trunk that they had been using when the Terrans had come to Kwannon—were arranged in a semicircle, one in the middle slightly in advance of the others. Facing them were three armchairs, a remote-control box beside one and another Kwann cushion behind and between the other two. There was a large globe of Kwannon, and on the wall behind the chairs an array of viewscreens.

"There'll be an interpreter, a native Army sergeant, between you and Captain Travis," he said. "I don't know how good you are with native languages, Miss Shaw; the captain is not very fluent."

"Cushions for them, I see, and chairs for the lordly Terrans," she commented. "Never miss a chance to rub our superiority in, do you?"

I never deliberately force them to adopt our ways," he replied. "Our chairs are as uncomfortable for them as their low seats are for us. Difference, you know, doesn't mean inferiority or superiority. It just means difference."

"Well, what are you trying to do, here?"

"F in trying to find out a little more about the psychology back of these frenzies and swarmings."

"It hasn't occurred to you to look for them in the economic wrongs these people are suffering at the hands of the planters and traders, I suppose."

So they're committing suicide, and that's all you can call these swarmings, and the fire-frenzies in the south, from economic motives," Travis said. "How does one better oneself economically by dying?"

She ignored the question, which was easier than trying to answer it.

"And why are you bothering to talk to these witch doctors? They aren't representative of the native people. They're a lot of cynical charlatans, with a vested interest in ignorance and superstition—"

"Miss Shaw, for the past eight centuries, earnest souls have been bewailing the fact that progress in the social sciences has always lagged behind progress in the physical sciences. I would suggest that the explanation might be in difference of approach. The physical scientist works *with* physical forces, even when he is trying, as in the case of contragravity, to nullify them. The social scientist works against social forces."

"And the result's usually a miserable failure, even on the physical-accomplishment level," Foxx Travis added. "This storm shelter project that was set up ten years ago and got nowhere, for instance. Ramon Gonzales set up a shelter project of his own seventy-five hours ago, and he's half through with it now."

"Yes, by forced labor!"

"Field surgery's brutal, too, especially when the anesthetics run out. It's better than letting your wounded die, though."

"Well, we were talking about these shoonoon. They are a force among the natives; that can't be denied. So, since we want to influence the natives, why not use them?"

"Mr. Gilbert, these shoonoon are blocking everything we are trying to do for the natives. If you use them for propaganda work in the villages, you will only increase their prestige and make it that much harder for us to better the natives' condition, both economically and culturally—

"That's it, Miles," Travis said. "She isn't interested in facts about specific humanoid people on Kwannon. She has a lot of high-order abstractions she got in a classroom at Adelaide on Terra."

"No. Her idea of bettering the natives' condition is to rope in a lot of young Kwanns, put them in Government schools, overload them with information they aren't prepared to digest, teach them to despise their own people, and then send them out to the villages, where they behave with such insufferable arrogance that the wonder is that so few of them stop an arrow or a charge of buckshot, instead of so many. And when that happens, as it does occasionally, Welfare says they're murdered at the instigation of the shoonoon."

"You know, Miss Shaw, this isn't just the roughneck's scorn for the egghead," Travis said. "Miles went to school on Terra, and majored in extraterrestrial sociography, and got a master's, just like you did. At Montevideo," he added. "And he spent two more years traveling on a Paula von Schlichten Fellowship."

Edith Shaw didn't say anything. She even tried desperately not to look impressed. It occurred to him that he'd never mentioned that fellowship to Travis. Army Intelligence must have a pretty good *dossier* on him. Before anybody could say anything further, a Terran captain and a native sergeant of the First K.N.I. came in. In the screen, the four sepoys who had been fussing around straightening things picked up auto-carbines and posted themselves two on either side of a door across from the pickup, taking positions that-would permit them to fire into whatever came through without hitting each other.

What came through was one hundred and eighty-four shoonoon. Some wore robes of loose gauze strips, and some wore fire-dance cloaks of red and yellow and orange ribbons. Many were almost completely naked, but they were all amulet-ed to the teeth. There must have been a couple of miles of brass and bright-alloy wire among them, and half a ton of bright scrap-metal, and the skulls, bones, claws, teeth, tails and other components of most of the native fauna. They debouched into the big room, stopped, and stood looking around them. A native sergeant and a couple more sepoys followed. They got the shoonoon over to the semicircle of cushions, having to chase a couple of them away from the single seat at front and center, and induced them to sit down.

The native sergeant in the little room said something under his breath; the captain laughed. Edith Shaw gaped for an instant and said, "*Muggawsh!*" Travis simply remarked that he'd be damned.

"They do look kind of unusual, don't they?" Miles said. "I wouldn't doubt that this is the biggest assemblage of shoonoon in history. They aren't exactly a gregarious lot."

"Maybe this is the beginning of a new era. First meeting of the Kwannon Thaumaturgical Society."

A couple more K.N.I. Privates came in with serving-tables on contragravity floats and began passing bowls of a frozen native-food delicacy of which all Kwanns had become passionately fond since its introduction by the Terrans. He let them finish, and then, after they had been relieved of the empty bowls, he nodded to the K.N.I. sergeant, who opened a door on the left. They all went through into the room they had been seeing in the screen. There was a stir when the shoonoo saw him, and he heard his name, in its usual native mispronunciation, repeated back and forth.

"You all know me," he said, after they were seated. "Have I ever been an enemy to you or to the People?"

"No," one of them said. "He speaks for us to the other Terrans. When we are wronged, he tries to get the wrongs righted. In times of famine he has spoken of our troubles, and gifts of food have come while the Government argued about what to do."

He wished he could see Edith Shaw's face.

"There was a sickness in our village, and my magic could not cure it," another said. "Mailsh Heelbare gave me oomphel to cure it, and told me how to use it. He did this privately, so that I would not be made to look small to the people of the village."

And that had infuriated EETA; it was a question whether unofficial help to the natives or support of the prestige of a shoonoo had angered them more.

"His father was a trader; he gave good oomphel, and did not cheat. Mailsh Heelbare grew up among us; he took the Manhood Test with the boys of the village," another oldster said. "He listened with respect to the grandfather-stories. No, Mailsh Heelbare is not our enemy. He is our friend."

And so I will prove myself now," he told them. "The Government is angry with the People, but I will try to take their anger away, and in the meantime I am permitted to come here and talk with you. Here is a chief of soldiers, and one of the Government people, and your words will be heard by the oomphel machine that remembers and repeats, for the Governor and the Great Soldier Chief."

They all brightened. To make a voice recording was a wonderful honor. Then one of them said:

"But what good will that do now? The Last Hot Time is here. Let us be permitted to return to our villages, where our people need us."

"It is of that that I wish to speak. But first of all, I must hear your words, and know what is in your minds. Who is the eldest among you? Let him come forth and sit in the front, where I may speak with him."

Then he relaxed while they argued in respectfully subdued voices. Finally one decrepit oldster, wearing a cloak of yellow ribbons and carrying a highly obscene and ineffably sacred wooden image, was brought forward and installed on the front-and-center cushion. He'd come from some village to the west that hadn't gotten the word of the swarming; Gonzales' men had snagged him while he was making crop-fertility magic.

Miles showed him the respect due his advanced age and obviously great magical powers, displaying, as he did, an understanding of the regalia.

"I have indeed lived long," the old shoonoo replied. "I saw the Hot Time before; I was a child of so high." He measured about two and a half feet off the floor; that would make him ninety-five or thereabouts. "I remember it."

"Speak to us, then. Tell us of the Gone Ones, and of the Sky Fire, and of the Last Hot Time. Speak as

though you alone knew these things, and as though you were teaching me."

Delighted, the oldster whooshed a couple of times to clear his outlets and began:

"In the long-ago time, there was only the Great Spirit. The Great Spirit made the World, and he made the People. In that time, there were no more People in the World then would be in one village, now. The Gone Ones dwelt among them, and spoke to them as I speak to you. Then, as more People were born, and died and went to join the Gone Ones, the Gone Ones became many, and they went away and built a place for themselves, and built the Sky Fire around it, and in the Place of the Gone Ones, at the middle of the Sky Fire, it is cool. From their place in the Sky Fire, the Gone Ones send wisdom to the people in dreams.

"The Sky Fire passes across the sky, from east to west, as the Always-Same does, but it is farther away than the Always-Same, because sometimes the Always Same passes in front of it, but the Sky Fire never passes in front of the Always-Same. None of the grandfather-stories, not even the oldest, tell of a time when this happened.

"Sometimes the Sky Fire is big and bright; that is when the Gone Ones feast and dance. Sometimes it is smaller and dimmer; then the Gone Ones rest and sleep. Some times it is close, and there is a Hot Time; sometimes it goes far away, and then there is a Cool Time.

"Now, the Last Hot Time has come. The Sky Fire will come closer and closer, and it will pass the Always Same, and then it will bum up the World. Then will be a new World, and the Gone Ones will return, and the People will be given new bodies. When this happens, the sky Fire will go out, and the Gone Ones will live in the World again with the People; the Gone Ones will make great magic and teach wisdom as I teach to you, and will no longer have to send dreams. In that time the crops will grow without planting or tending or the work of women; in that time, the game will come into the villages to be killed in the gathering-places. There will be no more of hunger and no more hard work, and no more the People will die or be slain. And that time is now here," he finished. "All the People know this."

"Tell me, Grandfather; how is this known? There have been many Hot Times before. Why should this one be the Last Hot Time?"

"The Terrans have come, and brought oomphel into the World," the old shoonoo said. "It is a sign."

"It was not prophesied beforetime. None of the People had prophesies of the coming of the Terrans. I ask you, who were the father of children and the grandfather of children's children when the Terrans came; was there any such prophesy?"

The old shoonoo was silent, turning his pornographic ikon in his hands and looked at it.

"No," he admitted, at length. "Before the Terrans came, there were no prophesies among the People of their coming. Afterward, of course, there were many such prophesies, but there were none before."

"That is strange. When a happening is a sign of something to come, it is prophesied beforetime." He left that seed of doubt alone to grow, and continued: "Now, Grandfather, speak to us about what the People believe concerning the Terrans."

"The Terrans came to the World when my eldest daughter bore her first child," the old shoonoo said. "They came in great round ships, such as come often now, but which had never before been seen. They said that they came from another world like the World of People, but so far away that even the Sky Fire could not be seen from it. They still say this, and many of the People believe it, but it is not real.

"At first, it was thought that the Terrans were great shoonoon who made powerful magic, but this is not real either. The Terrans have no magic and no wisdom of their own. All they have is the oomphel, and the oomphel works magic for them and teaches them their wisdom. Even in the schools which the Terrans have made for the People, it is the oomphel which teaches." He went on to describe, not too incorrectly, the reading-screens and viewscreens and audio-visual equipment "Nor do the Terrans make the oomphel, as they say. The oomphel makes more oomphel for them."

"Then where did the Terrans get the first oomphel?"

"They stole it from the Gone Ones,' the old shoonoo replied. "The Gone Ones make it in their place in the middle of the Sky Fire, for themselves and to give to the People when they return. The Terrans stole it from them. For this reason, there is much hatred of the Terrans among the People. The Terrans live in the Dark Place, under the World, where the Sky Fire and the Always-Same go when they are not in the sky. It is there that the Terrans get the oomphel from the Gone Ones, and now they have come to the World, and they are using oomphel to hold back the Sky-Fire and keep it beyond the Always-Same so that the Last Hot Time will not come and the Gone Ones will not return. For this reason, too, there is much hatred of the Terrans among the People."

"Grandfather, if this were real there would be good reason for such hatred, and I would be ashamed for what my people had done and were doing. But it is not real." He had to rise and hold up his hands to quell the indignant outcry. "Have any of you known me to tell not-real things and try to make the People act as though they were real? Then trust me in this. I will show you real things, which you will all see, and I will give you great secrets, which it is now time for you to have and use for the good of the People. Even the greatest secret," he added.

There was a pause of a few seconds. Then they burst out, in a hundred and eighty-four—no, three hundred and sixty eight—voices:

"The Oomphel Secret, Mailsh Heelbare?"

He nodded slowly. "Yes. The Oomphel Secret will be given."

He leaned back and relaxed again while they were getting over the excitement Foxx Travis looked at him apprehensively.

"Rushing things, aren't you? What are you going to tell them?"

"Oh, a big pack of lies, I suppose," Edith Shaw said scornfully.

Behind her and Travis, the native noncom interpreter was muttering something in his own language that translated roughly as: "This better be good!"

The shoonoon had quieted, now, and were waiting breathlessly.

"But if the Oomphel Secret is given, what will become of the shoonoon?" he asked. "You, yourselves, say that we Terrans have no need for magic, because the oomphel works magic for us. This is real. If the People get the Oomphel Secret, how much need will they have for you shoonoon?"

Evidently that hadn't occurred to them before. There was a brief flurry of whispered—whooshed, rather—conversation, and then they were silent again. The eldest shoonoo said:

"We trust you, Mailsh Heelbare. You will do what is best for the People, and you will not let us be thrown out like broken pots, either."

"No, I will not," he promised. "The Oomphel Secret will be given to you shoonoon." He thought for a moment of Foxx Travis' joking remark about the Kwannon Thaumaturgical Society. "You have been jealous of one another, each keeping his own secrets," he said. "This must be put away. You will all receive the Oomphel Secret equally, for the good of all the People. You must all swear brotherhood, one with another, and later if any other shoonoo comes to you for the secret, you must swear brotherhood with him and teach it to him. Do you agree to this?"

The eldest shoonoo rose to his feet, begged leave, and then led the others to the rear of the room, where they went into a huddle. They didn't stay huddled long; inside of ten minutes they came back and took their seats.

"We are agreed, Mailsh Heelbare," the spokesman said.

Edith Shaw was impressed, more than by anything else she had seen. "Well, that was a quick decision!" she whispered.

"You have done well, Grandfathers. You will not be thrown out by the People like broken pots; you will be greater among them than ever. I will show you how this will be.

"But first, I must speak around the Oomphel Secret." He groped briefly for a comprehensible analogy, and thought of a native vegetable, layered like an onion, with a hard kernel in the middle. "The Oomphel Secret is like a fooshkoot. There are many lesser secrets around it, each of which must be peeled off like the skins of a fooshkoot and eaten. Then you will find the nut in the middle."

"But the nut of the fooshkoot is bitter," somebody said.

He nodded, slowly and solemnly. "The nut of the fooshkoot is bitter," he agreed.

They looked at one another, disquieted by his words. Before anybody could comment, he was continuing:

"Before this secret is given, there are things to be learned. You would not understand it if I gave it to you now. You believe many not-real things which must be chased out of your minds, otherwise they would spoil your understanding."

That was verbatim what they told adolescents before giving them the Manhood Secret. Some of them huffed a little; most of them laughed. Then one called out: "Speak on, Grandfather of Grandfathers," and they all laughed. That was fine, it had been about time for teacher to crack his little joke. Now he became serious again.

"The first of these not-real things you must chase from your mind is this which you believe about the home of the Terrans. It is not real that they come from the Dark Place under the World. There is no Dark Place under the World."

Bedlam for a few seconds; that was a pretty stiff jolt. No Dark Place; who ever heard of such a thing? The eldest shoonoo rose, cradling his graven image in his arms, and the noise quieted.

"Mailsh Heelbare, if there is no Dark Place where do the Sky Fire and the Always-Same go when they are not in the sky?"

"They never leave the sky; the World is round, and there is sky everywhere around it."

They knew that, or had at least heard it, since the Terrans had come. They just couldn't believe it. It was against common sense. The oldest shoonoo said as much, and more:

"These young ones who have gone to the Terran schools have come to the villages with such tales, but who listens to them? They show disrespect for the chiefs and the elders, and even for the shoonoon. They mock at the Grandfather-stories. They say men should do women's work and women do no work at all. They break taboos, and cause trouble. They are fools."

"Am I a fool, Grandfather? Do I mock at the old stories, or show disrespect to elders and shoonoon? Yet I, Mailsh Heelbare, tell you this. The World is indeed round, and I will show you."

The shoonoo looked contemptuously at the globe. "I have seen those things," he said. "That is not the World; that is only a make-like. He held up his phallic wood-carving. "I could say that this is a make-like of the World, but that would not make it so."

"I will show you for real. We will all go in a ship." He looked at his watch. "The Sky Fire is about to set. We will follow it all around the world to the west, and come back here from the east, and the Sky Fire will still be setting when we return. If I show you that, will you believe me?"

"If you show us for real, and it is no a trick, we will have to believe you."

When they emerged from the escalators, Alpha was just touching the western horizon, and Beta was a little past zenith. The ship was moored on contragravity beside the landing stage, her gangplank run out. The shoonoon, who had gone up ahead, had all stopped short and were staring at her; then they began gabbling among themselves, overcome by the wonder of being about to board such a monster and ride on her. She was the biggest ship any of them had ever seen. Maybe a few of them had been on small freighters; many of them had never been off the ground. They didn't look or act like cynical charlatans or implacable enemies of progress and enlightenment. They were more like a lot of schoolboys whose teacher is taking them on a surprise outing.

"Bet this'll be the biggest day in their lives," Travis said. 'Oh, sure. This'll be a grandfatherstory ten generations from now."

"I can't get over the way they made up their minds, down there," Edith Shaw was saying. "Why, they just went and talked for a few minutes and came back with a decision."

They hadn't any organization, or any place to maintain on an organizational pecking-order. Nobody was obliged to attack anybody else's proposition in order to keep up his own status. He thought of the Colonial Government taking ten years not to build those storm-shelters.

Foxx Travis was commenting on the ship, now: 'I never saw that ship before; didn't know there was anything like that on the planet. Why, you could lift a whole regiment, with supplies and equipment—"

She's been laid up for the last five years, since the heat and the native troubles stopped the tourist business here. She's the old Hesperus. Excursion craft. This sun-chasing trip we're going to make used to be a must for tourists here."

I thought she was something like that, with all the glassed observation deck forward. Who's the owner?"

"Kwannon Air Transport, Ltd. I told them what I needed her for, and they made her available and furnished officers and crew and provisions for the trip. They were working to put her in commission while we were fitting up the fourth and fifth floors, downstairs."

"You just asked for that ship, and they just let you have it?" Edith Shaw was incredulous and shocked. They wouldn't have done that for the Government.

"They want to see these native troubles stopped, too. Bad for business. You know; selfish profit-move.

That's another social force it's a good idea to work with instead of against."

The shoonoon were getting aboard, now, shepherded by the K.N.I. officer and a couple of his men and some of the ship's crew. A couple of sepoys were lugging the big globe that had been brought up from below after them. Everybody assembled on the forward top observation deck, and Miles called for attention and, finally, got it. He pointed out the three viewscreens mounted below the bridge, amidships. One on the left, was tuned to a pickup on the top of the Air Terminal tower, where the Terran city, the military reservation and the spaceport met. It showed the view to the west, with Alpha on the horizon. The one on the right, from the same point, gave a view in the opposite direction, to the east. The middle screen presented a magnified view of the navigational globe on the bridge.

Viewscreens were no novelty to the shoonoon. They were a very familiar type of oomphel. He didn't even need to do more than tell them that the little spot of light on the globe would show the position of the ship. When he was sure that they understood that they could see what was happening in Bluelake while they were away, he called the bridge and ordered Up Ship, telling the officer on duty to hold her at five thousand feet.

The ship rose slowly, turning toward the setting M-giant. Somebody called attention that the views in the screens weren't changing. Somebody else said:

"Of course not. What we see for real changes because the ship is moving. What we see in the screens is what the oomphel on the big building sees, and it does not move. That is for real as the oomphel sees it."

"Nice going," Edith said. "Your class has just discovered relativity." Travis was looking at the eastward view-screen. He stepped over beside Miles and lowered his voice.

"Trouble over there to the east of town. Big swarm of combat contragravity working on something on the ground. And something's on fire, too."

"I see it."

"That's where those evacuees are camped. Why in blazes they had to bring them here to Bluelake—"

That had been EETA, too. When the solar tides had gotten high enough to flood the coastal area, the natives who had been evacuated from the district had been brought here because the Native Education people wanted them exposed to urban influences. About half of the shoonoon who had been rounded up locally had come in from the tide-inundated area.

"Parked right in the middle of the Terran-type food production area," Travis was continuing.

That was worrying him. Maybe he wasn't used to planets where the biochemistry wasn't Terra-type and a Terran would be poisoned or, at best, starve to death, on the local food; maybe, as a soldier he knew how fragile even the best logistics system can be. It was something to worry about. Travis excused himself and went off in the direction of the bridge. Going to call HQ and find out what was happening.

Excitement among the shoonoon; they had spotted the ship on which they were riding in the westward screen. They watched it until it had vanished from "sight of the seeing-oomphel," and by then were over the upland forests from whence they had been brought to Bluelake. Now and then one of them would identify his own village, and that would start more excitement.

Three infantry troop-carriers and a squadron of air cavalry were rushing past the eastward pickup in the right hand screen; another fire had started in the trouble area.

The crowd that had gathered around the globe that had been brought aboard began calling for Mailsh

Heelbare to show them how they would go around the world and what countries they would pass over. Edith accompanied him and listened while he talked to them. She was bubbling with happy excitement, now. It had just dawned on her that shoonoon were fun.

None of them had ever seen the mountains along the western side of the continent except from a great distance. Now they were passing over them; the ship had to gain altitude and even then make a detour around one snowcapped peak. The whole hundred and eighty-four rushed to the starboard side to watch it as they passed. The ocean, half an hour later, started a rush forward. The score or so of them from the Tidewater knew what an ocean was, but none of them had known that there was another one to the west. Miles' view of the education program of the EETA, never bright at best, became even dimmer. *The young men who have gone to the Terran schools... who listens to them? They are fools.*

There were a few islands off the coast; the shoonoon identified them on the screen globe, and on the one on deck. Some of them wanted to know why there wasn't a spot of light on this globe, too. It didn't have the oomphel inside to do that; that was a satisfactory explanation. Edith started to explain about the orbital beacon-stations ox-planet and the radio beams, and then stopped.

"I'm sorry; I'm not supposed to say anything to them," she apologized.

"Oh, that's all right. I wouldn't go into all that, though. We don't want to overload them."

She asked permission, a little later, to explain why the triangle tip of the arctic continent, which had begun to edge into sight on the screen globe, couldn't be seen from the ship. When he told her to go ahead, she got a platinum half-sol piece from her purse, held it on the globe from the classroom and explained about the curvature and told them they could see nothing farther away than the circle the coin covered. It was beginning to look as though the psychological-warfare experiment might show another, unexpected, success.

There was nothing, after the islands passed, but a lot of empty water. The shoonoon were getting hungry, but they refused to go below to eat. They were afraid they might miss something. So their dinner was brought up on deck for them. Miles and Travis and Edith went to the officers' dining room back of the bridge. Edith, by now, was even more excited than the shoonoon.

"They're so anxious to learn!" She was having trouble adjusting to that; that was dead against EETA doctrine. "But why wouldn't they listen to the teachers we sent to the villages?"

"You heard old Shatresh—the fellow with the pornographic sculpture and the yellow robe. These young twerps act like fools, and sensible people don't pay any attention to fools. What's more, they've been sent out indoctrinated with the idea that shoonoon are a lot of lying old fakes, and the shoonoon resent that. You know, they're not lying old fakes. Within their limitations, they are honest and ethical professional people."

"Oh, come, now! I know, I think they're sort of wonderful, but let's don't give them too much credit."

"I'm not. You're doing that."

"*Huh?*" She looked at him in amazement. "Me?"

"Yes, you. You know better than to believe in magic, so you expect them to know better, too. Well, they don't. You know that under the macroscopic world-of-the senses there exists a complex of biological, chemical and physical phenomena down to the subnucleonic level. They realize that there must be something beyond what they can see and handle, but they think it's magic. Well, as a race, so did we until only a few centuries pre-atomic. These people are still lower Neolithic, a hunting people who have just

learned agriculture. Where we were twenty thousand years ago.

"You think any glib-talking Kwann can hang a lot of rags, bones and old iron onto himself, go through some impromptu mummary, and set up as shoonoo? Well, he can't. The shoonoon are a hereditary caste. A shoonoo father will begin teaching his son as soon as he can walk and talk, and he keeps on teaching him till he's the age-equivalent of a graduate M.D. or a science Ph. D."

"Well, what all is there to learn—?"

"The theoretical basis and practical applications of sympathetic magic. Action-at-a-distance by one object upon another. Homeopathic magic: the principle that things which resemble one another will interact. For instance, there's an animal the natives call a shynph. It has an excrescence of horn on its brow like an arrowhead, and it arches its back like a bow when it jumps. Therefore, a shynph is equal to a bow and arrow, and for that reason the Kwanns made their bowstrings out of shynph-gut. Now they use tensilon because it won't break as easily or get wet and stretch. So they have to turn the tensilon into shynph-gut. They used to do that by drawing a picture of a shynph on the spool, and then the traders began labeling the spools with pictures of shynph. I think my father was one of the first to do that.

"Then, there's contagious magic. Anything that's been part of anything else or come in contact with it will interact permanently with it. I wish I had a sol for every time I've seen a Kwann pull the wad out of a shot-shell, pick up a pinch of dirt from the footprint of some animal he's tracking, put it in among the buckshot, and then crimp the wad in again.

"Everything a Kwann does has some sort of magical implications. It's the shoonoo's business to know all this; to be able to tell just what magical influences have to be produced, and what influences must be avoided. And there are circumstances in which magic simply will not work, even in theory. The reason is that there is some powerful counter-influence at work. He has to know when he can't use magic, and he has to be able to explain why. And when he's theoretically able to do something by magic, he has to have a plausible explanation why it won't produce results—just as any highly civilized and ethical Terran M.D. has to be able to explain his failures to the satisfaction of his late patient's relatives. Only a shoonoo doesn't get sued for malpractice; he gets a spear stuck in him. Under those circumstances, a caste of hereditary magicians is literally bred for quick thinking. These old gaffers we have aboard are the intellectual top crust among the natives. Any of them can think rings around your Government school products. As for preying on the ignorance and credulity of the other natives, they're only infinitesimally less ignorant and credulous themselves. But they want to learn—from anybody who can gain their respect by respecting them."

Edith Shaw didn't say anything in reply. She was thoughtful during the rest of the meal, and when they were back on the observation deck he noticed that she seemed to be looking at the shoonoon with new eyes.

In the screen-views of Bluelake, Beta had already set, and the sky was fading; stars had begun to twinkle. There were more fires—one, close to the city in the east, a regular conflagration—and fighting had broken out in the native city itself. He was wishing now, that he hadn't thought it necessary to use those screens. The shoonoon were noticing what was going on in them, and talking among themselves. Travis, after one look at the situation, hurried back to the bridge to make a screen-call. After a while, he returned, almost crackling with suppressed excitement.

"Well, it's finally happened! Maith's forced Kovac to declare martial rule!" he said in an exultant undertone.

"Forced him?" Edith was puzzled. "The Army can't force the Civil Government—"

"He threatened to do it himself. Intervene and suspend civil rule."

"But I thought only the Navy could do that."

"Any planetary commander of Armed Forces can, in a state of extreme emergency. I think you'll both agree that this emergency is about as extreme as they come. Kovac knew that Maith was unwilling to do it—he'd have to stand court-martial to justify his action—but he also knew that a governor general who has his Colony taken away from him by the Armed Forces never gets it back; he's finished. So it was just a case of the weaker man in the weaker position yielding."

"Where does this put us?"

"We are a civilian scientific project. You are under orders of General Maith. I am under your orders. I don't know about Edith."

"Can I draft her, or do I have to get you to get General Maith to do it?"

"Listen, don't do that," Edith protested. "I still have to work for Government House, and this martial rule won't last forever. They'll all be prejudiced against me—"

"You can shove your Government job on the air lock," Miles told her. "You'll have a better one with Planetwide News, at half again as much pay. And after the shakeup at Government House, about a year from now, you may be going back as director of EETA. When they find out on Terra just how badly this Government has been mismanaging things there'll be a lot of vacancies."

The shoonoon had been watching the fighting in the viewscreens. Then somebody noticed that the spot of light on the navigational globe was approaching a coastline, and they all rushed forward for a look.

Travis and Edith slept for a while; when they returned to relieve him, Alpha was rising to the east of Bluelake, and the fighting in the city was still going on. The shoonoon were still wakeful and interested; Kwanns could go without sleep for much longer periods than Terrans. The lack of any fixed cycle of daylight and darkness on their planet had left them unconditioned to any regular sleeping-and-walking rhythm.

"I just called in," Travis said. "Things aren't good, at all. Most of the natives in the evacuee cantonments have gotten into the native city, now, and they've gotten hold of a lot of firearms somehow. And they're getting nasty in the west, beyond where Gonzales is occupying, and in the northeast, and we only have about half enough troops to cope with everything. The general wants to know how you're making out with the shoonoon."

"I'll call him before I get in the sack."

He went up on the bridge and made the call. General Maith looked as sleepy as he felt; they both yawned as they greeted each other. There wasn't much he could tell the general, and it sounded like the glib reassurances one gets from a hospital about a friend's condition.

"We'll check in with you as soon as we get back and get our shoonoon put away. We understand what's motivating these frenzies, now, and in about twenty-five to thirty hours we'll be able to start doing something about it."

The general, in the screen, grimaced.

"That's a long time, Mr. Gilbert. Longer than we can afford to take, I'm afraid. You're not cruising at full speed now, are you?"

"Oh, no, general. We're just trying to keep Alpha level on the horizon." He thought for a moment. "We don't need to keep down to that. It may make an even bigger impression if we speed up."

He went back to the observation deck, picked up the PA-phone, and called for attention.

"You have seen, now, that we can travel around the world, so fast that we keep up with the Sky Fire and it is not seen to set. Now we will travel even faster, and I will show you a new wonder. I will show you a new wonder. I will show you the Sky Fire rising in the west; it and the Always-Same will seem to go backward in the sky. This will not be for real; it will only be seen so because we will be traveling faster. Watch, now, and see." He called the bridge for full speed, and then told them to look at the Sky-Fire and then see in the screens where it stood over Blue-lake.

That was even better; now they were racing with the Sky-Fire and catching up to it. After half an hour he left them still excited and whooping gleefully over the steady gain. Five hours later, when he came back after a nap and a hasty breakfast, they were still whooping. Edith Shaw was excited, too; the shoonoon were trying to estimate how soon they would be back to Bluelake by comparing the position of the Sky Fire with its position in the screen.

General Maith received them in his private office at Army HQ; Foxx Travis mixed drinks for the four of them while the general checked the microphones to make sure they had privacy.

"I blame myself for not having forced martial rule on them hundreds of hours ago," he said. "I have three brigades: the one General Gonzales had here originally, and the two I brought with me when I took over here. We have to keep at least half a brigade in the south, to keep the tribes there from starting any more forest fires. I can't hold Bluelake with anything less than half a brigade. Gonzales has his hands full in his area. He had a nasty business while you were off on that world cruise—natives in one village caught the men stationed there off guard and wiped them out, and then started another frenzy. It spread to two other villages before he got it stopped. And we need the Third Brigade in the northeast; there are three quarters of a million natives up there, inhabiting close to a million square miles. And if anything really breaks loose here, and what's been going on in the last few days is nothing even approaching what a real outbreak could be like, we'll have to pull in troops from everywhere. We must save the Terran-type crops and the carniculture plants. If we don't, we all starve."

Miles nodded. There wasn't anything he could think of saying to that.

"How soon can you begin to show results with those shoonoon, Mr. Gilbert?" the general asked. "You said from twenty-five to thirty hours. Can you cut that any? In twenty-five hours, all hell could be loose all over the continent."

Miles shook his head. "So far, I haven't accomplished anything positive," he said. "All I did with this trip around the world was convince them that I was telling the truth when I told them there was no Dark Race under the World, where Alpha and Beta go at night." He hastened, as the general began swearing, to add: "I know, that doesn't sound like much. But it was necessary. I have to convince them that there will be no Last Hot Time, and then—"

The shoonoon, on their drumshaped cushions, stared at him in silence, aghast. All the happiness over the wonderful trip in the ship, when they had chased the Sky Fire around the World and caught it over Bluelake, and even their pleasure in the frozen delicacies they had just eaten, was gone.

"No—Last-Hot—Time?"

"Mailsh Heelbare, this is not real! It cannot be."

"The Gone Ones—"

"The Always-Cool Time, when there will be no more hunger or hard work or death; it cannot be real that this will never come!"

He rose, holding up his hands; his action stopped the clamor.

"Why should the Gone Ones want to return to this poor world that they have gladly left?" he asked.

"Have they not a better place in the middle of the Sky Fire, where it is always cool? And why should you want them -to come back to this world? Will not each one of you pass, sooner or later, to the middle of the Sky Fire; will you not there be given new bodies and join the Gone Ones? There is the Always-Cool; there the crops grow without planting and without the work of women; there the game come into the villages to be killed in the gathering-places, without hunting. There you will talk with the other Gone Ones, your fathers and your fathers' fathers, as I talk with you. Why do you think this must come to the World of People? Can you not wait to join the Gone Ones in the Sky Fire?"

Then he sat down and folded his arms. They were looking at him in amazement; evidently they all saw the logic, but none of them had ever thought of it before. Now they would have to rum it over in their minds and accustom themselves to the new viewpoint. They began whooshing among themselves. At length, old Shatresh, who had seen the Hot Time before, spoke:

"Mailsh Heelbare, we trust you," he said. "You have told us of wonders, and you have shown us that they were real. But do you know this for real?"

"Do you tell me that you do not?" he demanded in surprise. "You have had fathers, and fathers' fathers. They have gone to join the Gone Ones. Why should you not, also? And why should the Gone Ones come back and destroy the World of People? Then your children will have no more children, and your children's children will never be. It is in the World of People that the People are born; it is in the World that they grow and gain wisdom to fit themselves to live in the Place of the Gone Ones when they are through with the bodies they use in the World. You should be happy that there will be no Last Hot Time, and that the line of your begettings will go on and not be cut short."

There were murmurs of agreement with this. Most of them were beginning to be relieved that there wouldn't be a Last Hot Time, after all. Then one of the class asked:

"Do the Terrans also go to the Place of the Gone Ones, or have they a place of their own?"

He was silent for a long time, looking down at the floor. Then he raised his head.

"I had hoped that I would not have to speak of this," he said. "But, since you have asked, it is right that I should tell you." He hesitated again, until the Kwannos in front of him had begun to fidget. Then he asked old Shatresh: "Speak of the beliefs of the People about how the World was made."

"The great Spirit made the world." He held up his carven obscenity. "He made the World out of himself. This is a makelike to show it."

"The Great Spirit made many worlds. The stars which you see in dark-time are all worlds, each with many smaller worlds around it. The Great Spirit made them all at one time, and made people on many of them. The Great Spirit made the World of People, and made the Always-Same and the Sky Fire, and inside the Sky Fire he made the Place of the Gone Ones. And when he made the Place of the Gone Ones, he put an Oomphel-Mother inside it, to bring forth oomphel."

This created a brief sensation. An Oomphel-Mother was something they had never thought of before, but

now they were wondering why they hadn't. Of course there'd be an Oomphel-Mother; how else would there be oomphel?

"The World of the Terrans is far away from the World of People, as we have always told you. When the Great Spirit made it He gave it only an Always-Same, and no Sky Fire. Since there was no Sky Fire, there was no place to put a Place of the Gone Ones, so the Great Spirit made the Terrans so that they would not die, but live forever in their own bodies. The Oomphel-Mother for the World of the Terrans the Great Spirit hid in a cave under a great mountain.

"The Terrans whom the Great Spirit made lived for a long time, and then, one day, a man and a woman found a crack in a rock, and went inside, and they found the cave of the Oomphel-Mother, and the Oomphel-Mother in it. So they called all the other Terrans, and they brought the Oomphel-Mother out, and the Oomphel-Mother began to bring forth Oomphel. The Oomphel-Mother brought forth metal, and cloth, and glass, and plastic; knives, and axes and guns and clothing—" He went on, cataloguing the products of human technology, the shoonoon staring more and more wide-eyed at him. "And oomphel to make oomphel, and oomphel to teach wisdom," he finished. "They became very wise and very rich.

"Then the Great Spirit saw what the Terrans had done, and became angry, for it was not meant for the Terrans to do this, and the Great Spirit cursed the Terrans with a curse of death. It was not death as you know it. Because the Terrans had sinned by laying hands on the Oomphel-Mother, not only their bodies must die, but their spirits also. A Terran has a short life in the body, after that no life.

"This, then, is the Oomphel Secret. The last skin of the fooshkoot has been *peeled* away; behold the bitter nut, upon which we Terrans have chewed for more time than anybody can count. Happy people! When you die or are slain, you go to the Place of the Gone Ones, to join your fathers and your fathers' fathers and to await your children and children's children. When we die or are slain, that is the end of us."

"But you have brought your oomphel into this world; have you not brought the curse with it?" somebody asked, frightened.

"No. The People did not sin against the Great Spirit; they have not laid hands on an Oomphel-Mother as we did. The oomphel we bring you will do no harm; do you think we would be so wicked as to bring the curse upon you? It will be good for you to learn about oomphel here; in your Place of the Gones One there is much oomphel."

"Why did your people come to this world, Mailsh Heel-bare?" old Shatresh asked. "Was it to try to hide from the curse?"

"There is no hiding from the curse of the Great Spirit, but we Terrans are not a people who submit without strife to any fate. From the time of the Curse of Death on, we have been trying to make spirits for ourselves."

"But how can you do that?"

"We do not know. The oomphel will not teach us that, though it teaches everything else. We have only learned many ways in which it cannot be done. It cannot be done with oomphel, or with anything that is in our own world. But the Oomphel-Mother made us ships to go to other-worlds, and we have gone to many of them, this one among them, seeking things from which we try to make spirits. We are trying to make spirits for ourselves from the crystals that grow in the Klooba plants; we may fail with them, too. But I say this; I may die, and all the other Terrans now living may die, and be as though they had never been, but someday we will not fail. Someday our children, or our children's children, will make spirits for themselves and live forever, as you do."

"Why were we not told this before, Mailsh Heelbare?"

"We were ashamed to have you know it. We are ashamed to be people without spirits."

"Can we help you and your people? Maybe our magic might help."

"It well might. It would be worth trying. But first, you must help yourselves. You and your people are sinning against the Great Spirit as grievously as did the Terrans of old. Bewarned in time, lest you answer it as grievously." What do you mean, Mailsh Heelbare?" Old Shatresh was frightened.

You are making magic to bring the Sky Fire to the World. Do you know what will happen? The World of People will pass whole into the place of the Gone Ones, and both will be destroyed. The World of People is a world of death; everything that lives on it must die. The Place of the Gone Ones is a world of life; everything in it lives forever. The two will strive against each other, and will destroy one another, and there will be nothing in the Sky Fire or the World but fire. This is wisdom which our oomphel teaches us. We know this secret, and with it we make weapons of great destruction." He looked over the seated shoonoon, picking out those who wore the flamecolored cloaks of the fire-dance. "You—and you—and you," he said. "You have been making this dreadful magic, and leading your people in it. And which among the rest of you have not been guilty?"

"We did not know," one of them said. "Mailsh Heel-bare, have we yet time to keep this from happening?"

"Yes. There is only a little time, but there is time. You have until the Always-Same passes across the face of the Sky-Fire." That would be seven hundred and fifty hours. "If this happens, all is safe. If the Sky Fire blots out the Always Same, we are all lost together. You must go among your people and tell them what madness they are doing, and command them to stop. You must command them to lay down their arms and cease fighting. And you must tell them of the awful curse that was put upon the Terrans in the long-ago time, for a lesser sin than they are now committing."

"If we say that Mailsh Heelbare told us this, the people may not believe us. He is not known to all, and some would take no Terran's word, not even his."

"Would anybody tell a secret of this sort, about his own people, if it were not real?"

"We had better say nothing about Mailsh Heelbare. We will say that the Gone Ones told us in dreams."

"Let us say that the Great Spirit sent a dream of warning to each of us," another shoonoo said. "There has been too much talk about dreams from the Gone Ones already."

"But the Great Spirit has never sent a dream—"

""Nothing like this has ever happened before, either."

He rose, and they were silent. "Go to your living-place, now," he told them. "Talk of how best you may warn your people." He pointed to the clock. "You have an oomphel like that in your living-place; when the shorter spear has moved three places, I will speak with you again, and then you will be sent in air cars to your people to speak to them."

They went up the escalator and down the hall to Miles' office on the third floor without talking. Foxx Travis was singing softly, almost inaudibly:

"You will eeeat... in the sweet... bye-and-bye,

You'll get oooooom... phel in the sky... when you die!"

Inside, Edith Shaw slumped dispiritedly in a chair. Foxx Travis went to the coffee-maker and started it. Miles snapped on the communication screen and punched the combination of General Maith's headquarters. As soon as the uniformed girl who appeared in it saw him, her hands moved quickly; the screen flickered, and the general appeared in it.

"We have it made, general. They're sold; we're ready to start them out in three hours."

Maith's thin, weary face suddenly lighted. "You mean they are going to co-operate?"

He shook his head. "They think they're saving the world; they think we're co-operating with them."

The general laughed. "That's even better! How do you want them sent out?"

"The ones in the Bluelake area first. Better have some picked K.N.I. in native costume, with pistols, to go with them. They'll need protection, till they're able to get a hearing for themselves. After they're all out, the ones from Gonzales' area can be started." He thought for a moment. "I'll want four or five of them left here to help me when you start bringing more shoonoon in from other areas. How soon do you think you'll have another class for me?"

"Two or three days, if everything goes all right. We have the villages and plantations in the south under pretty tight control now; we can start gathering them up right away. As soon as we get things stabilized here, we can send reinforcements to the north. We'll have transport for you in three hours."

The general blanked out. He turned from the screen. Travis was laughing happily.

"Miles, did anybody ever tell you you were a genius?" he asked. "That last jolt you gave them was perfect. Why didn't you tell us about it in advance?"

"I didn't know about it in advance; I didn't think of it till I'd started talking to them. No cream or sugar for me."

"Cream," Edith said, lifelessly. "Why did you do it? Why didn't you just tell them the truth?"

Travis asked her to define the term. She started to say something bitter about Jestng Pilate. Miles interrupted.

"In spite of Lord Beacon, Pilate wasn't jesting," he said.

"And he didn't stay for an answer because he knew he'd die of old age waiting for one. What kind of truth should I have told them?"

"Why, what you started to tell them. That Beta moves in a fixed orbit and can't get any closer to Alpha—"

"There's been some work done on the question since Pilate's time," Travis said. "My semantics prof at Command College had the start of an answer. He defined truth as a statement having a practical correspondence with reality on the physical levels of structure and observation and the verbal order of abstraction under consideration."

"He defined truth as a statement. A statement exists only in the mind of the person making it, and the mind of the person to whom it is made. If the person to whom it is made can't understand or accept it, it isn't the truth."

"They understood when you showed them that the planet is round, and they understood that tri-dimensional model of the system. Why didn't you let it go at that?"

"They accepted it intellectually. But when I told them that there wasn't any chance of Kwannon getting any closer to Alpha, they rebelled emotionally. It doesn't matter how conclusively you prove anything, if the person to whom you prove it can't accept your proof emotionally, it's still false. Not-real."

"They had all their emotional capital invested in this Always-Cool Time," Travis told her. "They couldn't let Miles wipe that out for them. So he shifted it from this world to the next, and convinced them that they were getting a better deal that way. You saw how quickly they picked it up. And he didn't have the sin of telling children there is no Easter Bunny on his conscience, either."

"But why did you tell them that story about the Oomphel Mother?" she insisted. "Now they'll go out and tell all the other natives, and they'll believe it."

"Would they have believed it if I'd told them about Terran scientific technology? Your people have been doing that for close to half a century. You see what impression it's made."

"But you told them—You told them that Terrans have no souls!"

"Can you prove that was a lie?" Travis asked. "Let's see yours. Draw—*soul*! Inspection—*soul*!"

Naturally, Foxx Travis would expect a soul to be carried in a holster.

"But they'll look down on us, now. They'll say we're just like animals," Edith almost wailed.

"Now it comes out," Travis said. "We won't be the lordly Terrans, any more, helping the poor benighted Kwanns out of the goodness of our hearts, scattering largess, bearing the Terran's Burden—new model, a give away instead of a gun. Now *they'll* pity us; they'll think *we're* inferior beings."

"I don't think the natives are inferior beings!" She was almost in tears.

"If you don't, why did you come all the way to Kwannon to try to make them more like Terrans?"

"Knock it off, Foxx; stop heckling her." Travis looked faintly surprised. Maybe he hadn't realized, before, that a boss newsman learns to talk like a commanding officer. "You remember what Ramon Gonzales was saying, out at Sanders', about the inferior's hatred for the superior as superior? It's no wonder these Kwanns resent us. They have a right to; we've done them all an unforgivable injury. We've let them see us doing things they can't do. Of course they resent us. But now I've given them something to feel superior about. When they die, they'll go to the Place of the Gone Ones, and have oomphel in the sky, and they will live forever in new bodies, but when we die, we just die, period. So they'll pity us and politely try to hide their condescension toward us.

"And because they feel superior to us, they'll want to help us. They'll work hard on the plantations, so that we can have plenty of biocrystals, and their shoonoon will work magic for *us*, to help us poor benighted Terrans to grow souls for ourselves, so that we can almost be like them. Of course, they'll have a chance to exploit us, and get oomphel from us, too, but the important thing will be to help the poor Terrans. Maybe they'll even organize a Spiritual and Magical Assistance Agency."