

NUMBER 5

The fantastic, other-dimensional adventures of

# BLADE



## LIBERATOR OF JEDD

by Jeffrey Lord

# Liberator of Jedd

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**Jeffrey Lord**

Book 5 in the Richard Blade Series

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# Chapter One

Lord Leighton was, at best, an indifferent speaker. For some reason which J was unable to fathom the old man had agreed to make the tiresome journey to Reading and address a seminar of Britain's leading brain surgeons gathered at the University. Later, when the confusion and danger was over, J was to guess that the old man had hoped to learn something about the human brain that he did not already know. What this could possibly be J could not surmise; the old fellow had already far surpassed the mortal brain by building a seventh generation computer, now waiting for Richard Blade in its guarded vault beneath the Tower of London, and so J put the rare expedition down to vanity, boredom and a desire to exchange chitchat with other scientific minds.

Lord L, J thought now, must get very weary of talking to J. For J was most definitely not a scientific brain. He was a prosaic and pragmatic man, a spy master when he had time to work at it. Which was not often these days. The truth was that J, caught up as he was in the computer experiments and Blade's dangerous forays into Dimension X, at times nearly forgot that he was head of MI6A.

Just now, as he squirmed on the hard seat and watched Lord L hem and haw and clear his throat, J was a little bored himself. Also tired and hungry. And worried about Richard Blade.

Lord Leighton clung to the lectern for support, rather like a frail old lion propping himself against a tree, and peered at his audience with hooded yellow eyes. His mane of white hair, thin and silky, haloed his pink scalp as though defying gravity.

"In such an electromechanism as the modern computer," he was saying, "we have at least succeeded in eliminating the danger of schizophrenia. We build computers to a complex schema, most complex, but when they are built they function exactly as intended. This certainly cannot be said of the human brain."

Lord L moved a bit, shifting his hold on the lectern to ease the omnipresent pain in his hump, and J felt a surge of pity and admiration for the old scientist. How did he ever manage to keep going?

For that matter how did Richard Blade manage to keep going? The boy had made four harrowing and desperate trips into Dimension X. In the morning he would go through the great computer again. His fifth time out J sighed and shook his head, causing the man in the next seat to regard him curiously, and decided to reserve all his sympathy for Blade. The boy was tense. Nervous. Drinking a little too much and chasing far too many women. All symptoms of strain and fatigue, J thought, though Lord L did not agree.

"The chief difference," his Lordship was saying, "is that a computer, a cybernetic machine, is a unit, single component, so to speak, and so it has the advantages and the integrity of such a unit. Man, on the other hand, really has three brains. The pity, and the source of most of our troubles, is that those three brains must function as one brain. This they find hard to do at times. And sometimes impossible. The three brains fight each other. And I think, though I admit to a great oversimplification here, that this is one of the reasons why man continues to war against man. In a world run by computers there would be no wars. Because to computers war would just not make sense."

J fidgeted and sneaked a glance at his watch. Some twenty minutes to go. Then, with any luck, they could catch the 10:47 back to London. J wondered what Dick Blade was doing at the moment. Probably something much more sensible than listening to a crowd of elderly pundits discuss something that one didn't understand, in a jargon that was all but incomprehensible. J sighed again and shifted his leaner nates on the hard chair. Yes. Blade was probably, in the parlance of youth today, making out.

"The oldest of our brains," said Lord L, "is reptilian. We have had it for billions of years. The second brain, engrafted onto the first is, of course, lower mammalian. The third brain, the latest to be melded to the first two, is also mammalian. But late mammalian. It is what makes man, man. Usually we call it the neo-cortex."

Lord L paused a moment, leered at the audience and added: "And that, gentlemen, is why we are always in so damned much trouble! That bloody neo-cortex of ours."

Titters. Then laughter. His Lordship, when the mood was on him, could sound more like a Cockney than a man born near Bow Bells, and his language could put a coster-monger to shame.

J did not laugh. That bloody neo-cortex. Blade's neo-cortex that Lord L had been tinkering with for months now. Taking it apart and putting it together again. Scrambling the molecules and atoms and reassembling them in a manner that allowed Blade to wander into Dimension X. A dimension that no other man on this earth might see or know. Only Richard Blade.

J found himself shivering. He was sweating and it was almost cold in the hall. How long could Blade keep it up? How many times could he go into Dimension X and come back? Come back sane and whole?

Of a sudden J found that he was badly frightened. The terror of the thing, of what they were doing with Blade and the computer, descended on him like black dead weight for the first time.

He could only hope that Richard Blade did not feel the same. A frightened man would stand no chance whatever out in Dimension X.

Lord L hobbled around to the other side of the lectern and clung to it, sipping from a glass of water. "As you all know," he continued, "it was an Englishman, Charles Babbage, who designed the first 'analytical engine' in 1820. He thought it out rather fully, as a matter of fact, though of course the technology of the time was not up to building it. And I might add that since 1820 a great many of us have not known whether to damn or praise Mr. Babbage."

More titters and laughter.

Lord L went into his peroration. He wound it up quickly, for which J was grateful. Only a quarter of an hour had been granted for questions. They might catch their train yet.

A tall balding man, young for this assembly, was asking a question.

"Do you think it possible, Lord Leighton, that we will ever learn to control human behavior by changing the pattern of the brain cells? Will the time come when we can restructure the cellular molecules, rearrange the constituent atoms? Completely change the electrochemistry of the brain?"

It seemed to J that Lord L, tottering by the lectern, looked directly at him. There was a wisp of smile on his Lordship's thin lips as he answered.

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"I think that is very possible. I believe it is being done now, to a certain extent, on monkeys, by planting electrodes in the brain and controlling the subject by remote radio stimulation."

J felt an overwhelming desire to go to the men's room and vomit. He now understood why Lord L had made the trip to Reading. The sly old bastard was looking for a brain surgeon. He had plans, new plans, for Richard Blade. Just scrambling his brain cells and sending him into Dimension X was no longer enough. The scientist in Lord Leighton was taking over from the human being.

He was not normally a profane man, but now J let a string of obscenities race through his mind. It wasn't going to happen! Not while he was bloody well alive. Dick Blade was like a son to him and they were not going to butcher him. Rage overwhelmed J. He would see to it. He would blow the whole damned Project DX first.

Going back to London they had a first-class compartment to themselves. J wasted no time in voicing his suspicions. Lord L made no attempt at denial. The old man was arrogant and crusty and very much aware of his eminence as Britain's first scientist. As such he never stooped to lying.

"My dear J," the old man said, "there is no need to get all in a lather. It was a thought I had, a stray and tentative thought, nothing more. And of course we should have to have Blade's permission for any, er, any such brain surgery."

"I'll see that you don't get it," said J angrily. "I goddamned bloody well will see to it. The boy has done enough. Maybe too much. There are already personality changes in him that I don't like."

Lord L gave him a bland look, hooding his yellow eyes in the way he had. "I suppose so," he murmured. "Bound to be a few changes, my dear fellow, when your cortex has been restructured as many times as Blade's has. No help for it. But you overlook a point, such changes are not necessarily for the worse. I am quite as fond of Blade as you are, and I study him most carefully, though I admit I lack the emotional overload you carry, and so far I have seen nothing harmful, no cause for alarm."

J knew he was no match for this aging little hunchback. Lord L had a mind like a razor and he could slash you to bits with it. J set his jaw and retreated into stubbornness.

"I remind you, Leighton, that I am head of MI6A and that Blade is under my direct command. There will be no such operations as I am sure you have in mind. If necessary I will go directly to the Prime Minister. He was in the infantry. He will understand about combat fatigue."

His Lordship, when he found the going unpleasant, was given to non sequiturs. "In my war," he said mildly, "they called it shell shock."

J was shocked at his own reply. "I don't give a good tinker's fuck what you called it in your war. That boy has been into Dimension X four times and tomorrow he goes out again. All right So be it. But when he comes back this time, if he comes back, I am going to pull him out of Project DX. Blade has done his bit. You had better start looking around for a new boy."

Lord L smiled sweetly and leaned to tap J's knee. "I think we shall have to leave that up to Blade himself, J. And I also think that you know what his answer will be if it comes down to a question of country and duty. In any case it is all very much in the future. Now please do be quiet and let me think, I've a nasty little problem in quadruple feedback circuitry to solve."

His Lordship slumped in his seat, eased his hump, and began to scribble on the back of an old envelope.

J's first anger had faded. He now regarded the old man with his usual mixture of admiration and loathing. The cold-blooded old bastard was right, of course. Dick Blade would do anything that was asked of him. Meet any test, volunteer in the face of any danger, keep going out into Dimension X as long as he was needed. It was just the way Richard Blade was made.

J leaned back and tried to relax. The train was racing through a small village where a few lights still gleamed here and there. A crowd was spilling out of the local, laughing and shouting cheerful good nights.

J thought that he would call Blade as soon as he got back to his office. He would not be sleeping tonight anyway and there was work piled on his desk. He would just call and check to make sure that Blade was ready for the ordeal tomorrow. His fifth time through the computer into God only knew what.

Again he wondered what Blade was doing at the moment. He hoped it was something pleasant. Something very pleasant.

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## Chapter Two

Richard Blade was at the moment enjoying himself. Not many men, even fine swimmers and top-flight athletes, as Blade was, would have shared his enjoyment. He was half a mile from shore in the icy Channel. A raw mid-March wind was slicing off whitecaps and whipping up waves. The water was, as Viki complained, fit only for polar bears. But Blade found himself reveling in it.

Blade was naked but for a jockstrap. He floated and stared at the sullen dark sky, overcast and with no hint of stars or moon. A cold wave slapped at him viciously. Blade rolled through it and slid down in the trough. He was feeling better. The muzzy feeling from too many brandy and sodas had gone. He ran his teeth over his tongue and felt the thick coating. It had become a regular morning thing, the coated tongue. He was putting away too much booze. Far too much. He did not seem able to stop the drinking and he never got drunk. Weary at times, utterly weary, and with moments of desolation and despair that he had never known before, but never drunk. In a way it was a cheat.

And there was the little matter of satyriasis. Blade's smile was grim. His sexual appetite these days was excessive, to say the least. Not at all like the old Blade. Then he had been satisfied with one woman and very little booze. But that had been the old Blade. Before Dimension X. Before he had gone four times through the computer. He had had Zoe then and they had planned to be married. All this before Lord Leighton and the monstrous computer and Dimension X. And the Official Secrets Act which precluded Blade from so much as hinting at his real job or the reasons for his long absences.

Zoe had left him and married another man.

Blade let a wave carry him toward the cove where Viki waited, a slim forlorn figure shivering in a British warm. She thought he was a little crazy. Blade went deep and swam powerfully beneath the turbulence, thinking that perhaps his latest girl was not too far off the mark.

Not that he had any real doubts about his sanity. He didn't. And he had never been in better physical shape. It was just that he knew, and admitted, and so must J and Lord L, that the brain-scrambling trips through the computer were affecting him. Looking at it dispassionately, Blade mused as his lungs began to pain, it would have been extremely odd if his brain had not suffered a few changes. It was to be expected. The important thing was not to panic, don't push the panic button. It was nothing he could not handle. He felt sure of that.

Viki, pronounced as though spelled with a C, Randolph was at the moment dancing in a West End musical. She had a speaking part, two lines, and considered her career well launched. She was a tall girl with an elfin face and gypsy eyes, slim legs and arms and a tiny waist, and surprisingly large cone-shaped breasts. Her real name was Poldalski and her father was a dustman in Putney. This latter Blade had ascertained more out of idle curiosity and boredom than anything else; he was not a snob and could not have cared less about the antecedents of his bed partners. It had been something to do, finding out all about Viki, and between trips into Dimension X he badly needed something to do. For with the advent of Project DX he was no longer permitted to work at his profession of secret agent. J might have allowed it, but Lord L was adamant. His Lordship had no intention of losing Blade to a bullet, knife, rope or poison.

He surfaced, blowing hard, and struck out for the cove in a fast racing crawl. Viki waved, and desire surged in him and despite the shockingly cold water he began to achieve tumescence. The hard bind of the jockstrap caused him a slight discomfort. Nothing, he thought, to what Viki would presently feel. She had complained of soreness only that morning, after half an hour of his compulsive lovemaking.

Blade felt bottom and began walking in to shore. Yesterday morning, yesterday afternoon, twice last night and then that long bout this morning. Yes, my boy. Definitely you are afflicted with satyriasis. The Oxford Dictionary called it "insatiable venereal appetite in the male."

Ask Viki. For that matter, ask Hester or Stella or Babs or Pam or Evelyn or Doris.

Do you see, Lord Leighton, what your goddamned machine has done to a onetime English gentleman by name of Richard Blade?

Blade grinned and laughed aloud into the mad March wind that was tearing across the little beach. Why blame it on poor old Lord L and his computer? Maybe it was just his true nature emerging at last.

He left the water and stalked toward the waiting girl, droplets of salt water beading on his massive tanned body. To a sculptor's eye Blade would have seemed fashioned of brown concrete, with every muscle and tendon defined with the precision of a Praxiteles. So perfectly formed and proportioned was he that at first glance the eye was fooled. He appeared much taller than his six-foot-one and much heavier than his two hundred-ten pounds, and he had taken blues in all major sports at Oxford with an ease that suggested games for babies. Which, to Blade, they were. His physical prowess had been, quite often, a source of actual embarrassment to him. He did so easily what other well-endowed men could not do at all.

Viki Randolph had a whiney voice when she chose to use it, and she chose now.

"You were long enough," she accused. "I don't much like it, you know, being left to freeze on this bloody beach while you go pretending you're a seal or something."

Blade smiled and slapped her behind. He knew how to handle this type. He let his hand linger for a moment and squeezed a buttock. Viki gave him a look and pulled away.

"You're pouting," he said, "and it does not become you, ducks. Come on, then. Back to the cottage and I'll see to it that you are well warmed up."

Viki watched him warily. Blade gave her a leer and a wink. She groaned. "Oh, no! Not again. Don't you ever think of anything except sex? Or do anything else?"

Just then Blade wanted a brandy and soda more than he wanted her. He watched as she gathered her belongings from a blanket, using a small flashlight to find cigarettes and purse and various oddments. The wind took on a shriller note and though he began to goose pimple he was not cold.

They started toward the path that led up the cliff to the cottage, Viki carrying the things in a pouch made of the blanket.

"I am a reasonable man," Blade said. "If you will tell me anything else that is as important, as interesting and as much fun as sex, I will give it due consideration and let you know if I agree. Now

what could be fairer than that?"

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She surprised him then. The whine left her voice as she said, "The trouble is, darling, that you treat me like any stupid totsy. Just another dumb showgirl. You don't really talk to me. You talk at me. And you're never serious, not even for a moment. You act as if it would be a waste of time to be serious with me, as though I wouldn't understand you. You're arrogant, Dick. Very arrogant. And you don't even know it."

Blade stalked on ahead. The path was difficult here, steep and switchbacking back and forth, with a fallaway of some 200 yards. It was the highest cliff on the Dorset coast and among the locals was known as Suicide Leap.

Viki was right, of course. He was on the arrogant side. Nature, birth, background and training had all conspired to make it so. Blade was aware of this venial sin and fought against it, not always with success. At the moment, just now, he was piqued and irritated. First because he seemed to have misjudged Viki, or to have been badly fooled by her dumb showgirl mask, and second because he had no desire, need or intention of forsaking sex for philosophy and the finer aspects of life. He'd brought her down from London for one thing and one thing only, bed. And it was, by God, going to be bed, when and as often as he chose, and nothing else.

"Dick! Wait for me. I'm a girl, remember, not a great monster like you."

She was lagging far behind. He went back and picked her up and tossed her over his shoulder and began to climb again.

Viki panted in his ear. "You had a phone call while you were practicing to swim the Channel. I forgot cigarettes and had to go back and someone rang up while I was there."

Blade trotted easily up the steep incline. "Who?"

"Very mysterious. It was a man, but he wouldn't leave a name. He left a message for you."

"What?"

"To call J as soon as you got back to the cottage. That was all. Just to call J."

He nodded and stepped up his pace. What could J want? Everything was worked out, all plans made. Blade was due at Lord L's house in Prince's Gate for his final briefing at eight the next morning. Then on to the Tower of London and the trip through the computer into some new Dimension X. So? Some last-minute hitch? Blade shrugged. He would call J, of course, but in his own good time. Vila, warm and vibrant and bouncing on his big shoulders, had first claim.

Viki bit his ear. Then she thrust her tongue into it. Blade, who was lugging her along in the fireman's carry, moved a brawny hand up the inside of her pants-clad leg and gripped her firmly where she joined. She squirmed.

"Leave off that, Dick. For God's sake. Do you want to drive me crazy?"

"You started it, ducks. When a girl kisses a man's ear like that it's like a green light flashing. And

anyway, why play games, you know you love it. You want it as much as I do."

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Silence. Blade trotted, easily. Viki joggled up and down on his shoulder, her spectacular breasts crushed against the back of his neck. He could feel them even through the thick coat.

She bit his ear again. "You're right, of course, you big bastard. I guess I am a bad lot. But only where you are concerned! That I will have you understand, Dick Blade. I don't act like this with, with every man I go out with. But with you I just don't know, I don't seem to have any willpower. All you have to do is touch me and I do anything you want. And I don't like it. I hate it. And I think I hate you."

"Good," said Blade. "Keep it that way and we'll get along very well." He squeezed again, manipulating her expertly, and she moaned and caught at his hand and tried to pull it away. Blade laughed.

When they reached the cottage he piled logs on a smoldering fire and took a fast shower to get the salt off him. He had a brandy and soda and debated whether to call J now or later. He decided on later.

Viki, sitting primly in a big leather chair near the fire, was reading an old copy of Punch as Blade moved restlessly about in his robe. She kept glancing at him over the magazine. She sat with her long legs tightly crossed. When he offered her a drink she refused it. Blade shrugged and made another for himself. It must, he told himself, be the last. He was due in London at eight and that meant an early start. It would be nice if he could sleep tonight, sleep as he had once slept, without the hideous nightmares that brought him awake screaming and covered with cold sweat. Sleep to knit up the raveled sleeve of care.

Sleep? Macbeth hath murdered sleep.

Macbeth hell! Lord L hath murdered sleep with his damned computer. Dimension X hath murdered sleep.

Logs were roaring in the fireplace now. Blade stood in front of it, drink in hand, and stared into the blue-yellow flames. Viki had put down her magazine and was watching him intently. He ignored her. Outside the snug little cottage the wind hooted in derision.

In that moment Richard Blade knew what ailed him. Or rather he admitted it to himself, for the first time. He was afraid. There was nothing wrong with his brain and certainly not with his body. It was fear. Fear was the canker-worm eating away in his guts. And it was incredible. This sort of fear was beyond understanding. He had known fear before, as what man in his dangerous profession had not, but it was the healthy and necessary fear that kept a man alive. This present fear, the thing he now endured, was a slimy loathsome presence in his entrails.

Blade did not want to go up to London tomorrow. Blade did not want to go through the computer again. Blade did not again want to make the awesome and appalling journey into Dimension X.

Blade would do all those things. He would force himself to do them. It was unthinkable that he should not. Otherwise he would not have been Richard Blade.

Viki, back to her small, whiney voice again, said, "I'm hungry, Dick."

He was across the room in three strides and picked her up. He held her high over his head, as easily as

a child holds a doll, and brushed her dark head against the timbered ceiling. His laugh filled the cottage and boomed over the March wind off the Channel.

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"As my American friends say, ducks, I have got news for you. You are not hungry. Not for food. You are hungry for love. For sex. For a long and unstinted bout of sex that will never end. Never."

Viki struggled. She kicked him in the chest. "I am not," she moaned. "I'm not, Dick. Really. Please. I am terribly sore there. I don't want, "

He dropped her. She fell into his arms and he crushed her with one big arm and kissed her fiercely. "You do want," he told her.

Abruptly she stopped struggling and slid her sharp little tongue into his mouth. She nodded and pulled away for a moment to say, "Yes, you awful beast. You make me want. God, I must be as crazy as you are."

Blade lifted her by the elbows and carried her to the fire. He kissed her again. Viki responded avidly, but said, "There is no tenderness in you, Dick. None at all. You are just rogue male, all of you. And I am mad for you. I don't understand any of it. Nor you. Nor me."

She was wearing a heavy cable-stitched sweater. As he searched under it, pulled it high and unfastened her brassiere, Blade admitted the accusation. It had not always been true. There had been a time,

To hell with that. One did not live in the past. Nor, in his profession, did one count on the future. There was only now.

The brassiere came loose. He lifted each perfect breast from its nylon sling. Soft milk-white marble brushed with flickering fire shadow. He caressed and kneaded and felt her go lax. Her knees sagged and he held her tight.

He pulled the sweater up over her dark cap of hair and tossed it away. The brassiere followed. Viki stood naked from the waist, her piquant face uplifted to his, the gypsy eyes narrowed and watching him. Her hands, small red-nailed talons, reached inside his robe and pounced. She sank against him and moaned.

"I can't, darling. I just can't. You are just too enormous. I told you, You have made me so sore now I can hardly walk. Please, Dick, can't we, I mean I, I know other ways. I'll make you happy. I promise."

Blade was not a selfish man. Much of his enormous success with women was due to his regard for their pleasure. He gave her a half smile and said, "But will I make you happy? That is the question, ducks."

Viki pulled his robe open and stared down. She would not look at him. It was either a trick of the firelight, or she was blushing.

"Oh, yes, darling. I will be quite happy. I really rather like to do it, you know."

She giggled suddenly. "You are the first one, man or woman, that I have ever admitted that to."

"Your secret is safe with me," Blade said as he carried her to the bed. "And I want you to be happy, Viki. I really do. So if you like to do it you certainly shall do it."

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He did not awaken until after two. The fire had expired. Viki was sleeping soundly beside him, her mouth open a bit. Blade pushed it shut with a gentle finger and rolled out of bed. The cottage was cold and the gale from the Channel was gathering strength. He got into his robe and went to the phone, resolutely passing the brandy bottle and the siphon. No more of that. He might be afraid of going into Dimension X again but he was no drunk. And no coward. No one would ever know of his fear but himself, and he would keep it to himself. He would handle it somehow. Because he must.

He got a trunk call through to the office in London. J answered on the third ring. He sounded tired, but his remonstrance was mild enough.

"You took your time about calling back, dear fellow. Delay in message?"

"No, sir. I was swimming in the Channel and then, well, sir, I had some other business to attend to. Then I fell asleep. Sorry."

"No real matter," J said. "It is just that I want you to stop past the office in the morning before you go on to Prince's Gate for the briefing. I want a chat with you. Understood?"

Mystified, Blade said that he understood. "That's all, sir?"

He heard J yawn in London. "That is all, my boy. And, er, no need to mention this little visit to Lord. Also understood?"

Blade agreed. J said goodnight and hung up after suggesting that Blade get all the sleep he could.

Blade cradled the phone and stood for a moment staring at the pile of gray ashes in the fireplace. Viki snored softly. Blade glanced at the brandy bottle and shook his head. For the first time in weeks he didn't, really didn't, want a drink. Maybe that phase was over. Now if he could just get the slimy ice out of his guts whenever he thought of Dimension X.

He saw no point in going back to bed. He would not sleep again and it was better to stay awake and try to think this thing through. In the final analysis a man had to help himself, no one else could.

Blade rebuilt the fire, pulled up a chair and, smoking an infrequent pipe, stared into the flames and wondered where he would be this time tomorrow night? Would there be fire in this new Dimension X? Would they know the secret of flame?

What weapons? What dangers? What kind of men must he face, if they were men, and what sort of brains would they have? Cunning, cruel, complex or childish?

Viki snorted in her sleep and rolled over. Blade smiled. Who would have thought little Viki to be such an accomplished fellatrice? Blushing and shamed, or at least shamming it, and performing with an expertise that bespoke long experience. He smiled again and shook his head. How could you know, really know, about people? Anyone, even himself. People were robots wearing masks. They kept their real selves locked up in the vaults of their skulls. All the world ever saw was a reasonable facsimile. Even himself. Even Richard Blade. Who could ever guess about him? Guess at the unguessable.

~~He stood up and brushed his hand swiftly through the air. There. He had just invaded a dimension that he, nor any other living man with a normal brain, could not perceive or comprehend. This time tomorrow, with his brain cells restructured by the computer, he might well be wandering in that dimension. He alone of all the men in all the world.~~

In that moment Blade began to understand a little. And felt a growing relief. It was not so much fear, as fear, that plagued him. It was instead the terrible loneliness that he must bear. He examined the idea for several minutes and found that he was being honest with himself. The awful loneliness that he alone must bear. Just to be able to tell someone would help, but that he could not do. It was a burden that he must carry alone.

Even Lord Leighton and J could not share the load. They knew and yet they did not know. They had never been out there.

Blade laughed aloud. So be it. He was glad. Loneliness he could bear. Fear he could not. Not for long. It was good to know the true nature of his enemy. And now he could have a drink.

He poured himself a large brandy and drank it straight, then hurled the glass into the fireplace. And laughed again. He felt so much better, like a man let out of a prison cell.

Viki stirred at the sound of shattering glass. She peered from beneath the covers at him. "What is it, Dick? Are you getting drunk all by yourself?"

Blade went to tuck her in. He kissed her lightly and patted her shapely rump. "No, ducks. Now go back to sleep. I'll be getting you up at five and we've a long cold ride ahead."

"I still think you're mad," she said, and fell back into sleep.

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## Chapter Three

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Blade, naked but for the loincloth, his body smeared with tar grease, sat in what he had come to think of as the "electric chair" and watched Lord Leighton tape the last shiny electrode to his inner calf. Lord L, in a long white surgeon's coat that covered his hump, seemed his usual cheerful and efficient self. Not exactly a benign type, the old man, but Blade had never thought of him as sinister. Nor did he now. J was upset and nervous over what he imagined Lord L's plans to be.

An hour earlier, in J's cramped office in Copra House in the city, Blade had listened to his chief's suspicions with growing incredulity. J came very near to making Lord L out to be a kind of Dr. Frankenstein.

"I tell you, Dick, he means to get a knife into your brain!" J tapped his pipe nervously on his teeth. "His Lordship isn't satisfied with things as they are, particularly with your memory retention. He won't be satisfied until he works out a means of direct communication with you while you are in Dimension X."

Blade, who had deposited Viki at her Belgravia apartment half an hour before, kissed her goodbye and given her fanny a last pat, and vowed never to see her again, was feeling very fit. Better than in weeks of inaction and boredom were at an end. He had peered deep into his psyche and found the cause of his discontent, he was actually looking forward to the new foray into Dimension X. With certain reservations. He was a pitcher that did not intend going to the well forever. He intended, at the proper time, to suggest that they find a new man and begin training him.

This was not the time. He said to J, "I thought my memory cells were functioning excellently. After all the work Lord L has done on them, all the hours I've spent under the chronos machine, and he never said anything to me! Never indicated that he was dissatisfied with the results."

"He wouldn't. Not to you." J began to pace his tiny office. "And he won't say anything, not until he is ready. That, I suspect, will be sometime after you get back from this trip through the computer."

"I'll get back."

J nodded. "There is always that, of course. But when, if, you get back, then you had better be on your guard, Dick. You know how smarmy, how persuasive, the old man can be. Don't let him talk you into anything. Though even if he does, I, "

J broke off and jammed his pipe fiercely into his tobacco pouch. Blade waited.

"I am," J continued, "quite prepared to take steps. I will not allow him to tinker with your brain, Richard, in any surgical way. If you haven't the willpower to stand up to him, I, as your commanding officer, can and will forbid it."

Blade picked up his Burberry and slung it over his shoulder. It was a bleak and drizzling morning. "I think I can handle it," he assured J as he was leaving. "You should know that, sir. When, to your recollection, was the last time anyone made me do anything I didn't want to do?"

J did not appear reassured. "You don't know that old man as I have come to know him," he said bitterly. ~~"He is a scientist, not a human being. He will stoop to anything, he'll play on your sense of duty, my boy, on your devotion to England."~~

"All that is a bit of old hat now," said Blade. "But I know what you mean. I'll be careful. You're not coming to the Tower?"

J sank into his swivel chair. "Not this time. No point to it, really. I just stand around outside and worry. I can do that here."

Blade left with J's usual blessings and luck and took a taxi to the Tower of London. Now, sitting in the chair in the glass booth, deep in the guts of the huge computer, bound like Gulliver with varicolored wires, he watched Lord Leighton fiddle with a series of knobs, toggles and buttons on a large gauge board. This was a new addition and Blade had never seen it before. In another segment of the gray computer housing was the familiar red button, set alone in its plaque and festooned by a hundred wires, that would send Blade into Dimension X.

By now Blade realized that things were different. Lord L was not following the usual routine. As a rule he wasted no time. Like a compassionate executioner who wished to spare his victim the terror of waiting, Lord L would smile, clap Blade on the back and press the button that sent him swirling away. But not this morning.

His Lordship was reading the gauges carefully and making minuscule notes in a large, ledger-like book. He seemed unaware of Blade's presence. He sidled back and forth in front of the instrument board, his polio-ruined legs causing him to lurch and sway like a white, fragile spider. He kept muttering to himself as he made entries in the book. Now and then he reached back to stroke the pain in his hump.

In the minutes of waiting, Richard Blade stumbled on another truth. If the hazardous computer experiments were affecting him, they were, in no less degree if in a different manner, also affecting Lord L and J. Neither man was the same as when this thing had started. Strain, fear, tension, guilt and responsibility all had taken their toll. Odd, Blade thought, that he had not seen it before. But then he had been concentrating on his own woes.

At last Lord L turned from the board and hobbled toward the chair where the naked, electrode-bound Blade waited.

Blade, as usual, was nervous. And when he was nervous he was blunt. "What is it, sir? Something gone wrong?"

The old man did not answer at once. He stared at Blade with his yellow lion's eyes. Through the encompassing walls of the monster computer came, very faintly, the susurrations of hundreds of lesser computers in the vast outerchambers. Monitored by men in white smocks who did not dream of what went on in this small inner sanctum.

"Not exactly wrong," said Lord L at last. He pointed at the gauge board. "It's just that I want to try something new, Richard, a new approach to our work, and I think you should know beforehand."

Blade looked deep into the yellow eyes. "Does J know about this?"

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"No, my boy. J does not know about it. If he did he would only object to it. Make obstacles. And without cause. There is not the slightest danger, other than, er, the usual risks, of course."

"You had better explain it to me, sir. I'll decide about the risks."

"Of course, Richard. Of course."

Lord L flipped open his book and ran a finger beneath a line of what appeared to Blade to be ideograms. Beneath it was a cartouche with a mass of hieroglyphic symbols. Under this was a long column of mathematical abstractions. All Greek to Blade. He waited patiently.

"As you must know," Lord L said, "I have kept records of each experiment. Extremely detailed and minute records. It has long been in my mind that, if I could achieve a 'fix' on any particular setting, I could use it over and over again. That setting would always be valid and I could send you again and again into the same Dimension X. The advantages of this are obvious, Richard."

Blade nodded. He could see. One of the great disadvantages of Project DX and one over which the Prime Minister was grumbling, mindful of the millions of pounds being expended, was that they could never be sure into which Dimension X the computer would hurl Blade. In his first four trips out he had landed in a different dimension each time. The first three times it had not mattered greatly, he had found nothing of tangible value, nothing that could be exploited to enrich Home Dimension. But on his last expedition, into Sarma, he had found mountains of uranium. Enough, and cheap enough, to make England the leading atomic power in the world. All that was needed was a means of getting it back to Home Dimension, and at this moment in the Scottish Highlands a little band of top scientists was working on teleportation.

His Lordship, as though probing Blade's mind, nodded and showed his long teeth in a smile. "Yes, Richard, I know it is all very much in the future. But the Prime Minister is a practical man. He is a politician, not a scientist, and he has to make an accounting. He thinks it is time we began to show a profit. So with his permission, I might even say his urging, I am trying this new experiment. I am going to try to send you back into X Dimensions that you have visited before. I have selected Alb as the first and have set the computer accordingly."

Alb! Blade half smiled as he remembered the Princess Taleen. A saucy wench. Lovely and tawny skinned and a savage in lovemaking. It would be nice to see her again. Or would it? She was as dangerous as a barrel of dynamite.

"There is nothing of value in Alb," he said, and grinned. "Nothing to make the Prime Minister happy. Sarma would be more like it. The uranium."

Lord Leighton frowned impatiently. "I know, I know! You are missing the point, my dear boy. This is to be only a brief experiment at best. I will keep you in Alb for only a few moments, then bring you back. Because, if I can send you to Alb by choice, by predetermined setting, I can get you back any time I choose. I am sure of it."

Blade was not so sure. And he saw why Lord L had not confided in J. "You mean, sir, that this is in a

very real sense a brand-new experiment and you offer no guarantees?" He gazed at the awesome loom of the giant computer. "This is not really the same computer, sir?"

Lord L jammed his book beneath his arm and clasped his fragile blue-veined hands on his white-smocked breast. He favored Blade with one of his best smiles. As J would have put it, he was being smarmy.

"When did you return from your last trip into Dimension X, my boy?"

"Six months ago." J had insisted on six-month intervals, time to find and assess any damage to Blade's brain tissue.

Lord L nodded. "Right. Six months. And during those six months I have been working every day, up to eighteen hours a day, on this machine. Of course it is not the same computer, Richard. How could it be? I don't intend it to be. Science can never stand still."

Blade blinked at the old man and pretended to think. Pretended because he already knew what he was going to do, what he must do, go through with it. Never mind that it was a totally new approach and dangerous as hell. What else could he do? Who else was there? It was, after all, his job. His duty.

He nodded curtly to Lord L. "Okay, sir. Let's see if you can put me back in Alb. Let's get on with it."

Lord L hobbled to the red button. He waved a hand. "Good boy. Good luck." He pressed the button.

Lights flashed on the instrument board. Gauges spun. Blade felt the slow itch of the current pulsing in his veins and arteries. Soon now there would be pain and more pain and then an exploding universe. He would be hurled, flung, not up or down or out, but into a new dimension. He would awaken as naked as a newborn babe in some strange land, and the fight for survival would begin. He would,

He became aware, and because of that very awareness, knew that something had gone wrong. There was pain, yes, but it was only the current clawing at him. Racking him, flowing through the conductors of his bones, twisting him. Pain. Blade wanted to scream and found his jaws locked. He was still in the chair, still in the glass booth, still in Home Dimension. Burning and yet not scorched. There was no smell of burning flesh. Long blue sparks flashed from his toes and fingers, and a crackling halo encircled his head. And now smoke.

Smoke. Dense, greasy brown, it poured into the tiny enclosure from the guts of the machine. Miniature lightning stroked back and forth across the room and in the forked luminescence Blade saw Lord L staggering toward the instrument board. The old man was bent double, coughing and shielding his eyes as he fumbled for switches and toggles and buttons.

Blade made a great effort to leave the chair. The current still bound him. He struggled and threshed about, pitting his great muscles against the current and the tiny wires that held him as if they had been chains.

Lord L pressed a final button. The current drained away. Blade snapped the wires, brushed aside the electrodes and was about to leave the chair when he stopped and stared.

Between himself and Lord Leighton was a spinning vortex of brown smoke. It moved and undulated,

writhing, taking form and then it ceased to be smoke and became,

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What? What was it? For one of the few times in his life Blade knew the heart-shocking thrill of pure physical terror. Not so much at the man who stood there, if it was a man, but at the manner of appearance. Blade hesitated, his hands braced on the chair arms, wary, and now responsive to the massive dose of adrenaline pumped into his system by fear.

The creature shared his fear. And acted. It let out a high snarl of rage and terror and rushed at Lord Leighton. In its right hand, raised to kill, was a crude stone axe. The old man cowered back against the gauge board, his hands raised to fend off the blow, his voice quavering in a shrill scream.

"Help, Richard! Help me. Get it!"

Blade left his feet eight feet behind the thing and brought it down in a flying tackle. Its legs were covered with hair and it had a rancid animal smell. It was small, hardly half the size of Blade, but wiry and bulging with muscle. And as fast as a cat.

Lord L was screaming something that Blade could not make out. No time. The creature was on its feet and striking at him with the axe. Blade fended it off and got a wristhold and sent the axe flying across the room. The gaping mouth opened and long fangs slashed at Blade's throat. Blade held it off and struck with a tremendous right cross. He missed the jaw and jarred his hand and arm on an oversize skull.

A constant stream of furious sound came from the throat of the thing. Small deep-set eyes hated Blade. The thing screamed and slashed with long nails: "Orgggggghhhhh, Orgggggggg, Ohrrrrrggrrr."

Lord Leighton's voice, as from a far place, fell into recognizable words. "Be careful, Richard! For God's sake, be careful. Don't kill it! Don't hurt it! For God's sake, don't kill it!"

The sweating, struggling Blade had no time to appreciate the irony. He was too busy keeping whatever it was from killing him. Again and again he fought the fangs away from his throat and tried to get in a knockout blow, even a killing blow and to hell with his Lordship, but the creature was as fast and as slippery as a greased snake. It kept leaping at Blade, growling its Orgggggggggg, orgggggggggg,

Then Blade did what he should have done before. He stepped away. The thing stood gazing at him, hunched, long arms dangling, huge jaw thrust forward, looking at Blade in puzzlement and confusion.

Blade fainted with a left.

Orggggrggggggg, It sprang at him again.

Blade shifted his feet and brought the right in level and just right and with all his shoulder leverage behind it. His fist crashed home on the prognathic jaw. The man, animal, thing or creature slumped into a heap on the floor. Blade, panting and bleeding from a dozen scratches and cuts, stood looking down at it.

Lord Leighton leaped forward and caught Blade's arm. The old man was livid, sweating, shaking all over and in a mingled delirium of apprehension and delight. He literally danced round the supine figure on the rubberized floor of the computer room. The words came tumbling inchoate, hardly

understandable.

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"Don't hurt him, you mustn't hurt him, easy does it. A prize, Richard, a prize! Beyond my wildest dreams! A treasure, a veritable treasure. Must not harm it, by no means harm it, I, Something went wrong, something went wrong and, "

Blade wiped sweat from his eyes. "Yes, sir. Something sure as hell went wrong. What is it? Where did it come from? What are we going to do with it?"

Lord L ignored him. He was kneeling by the thing, examining the hairy body, stroking it like a baby with the colic.

"I don't know, Richard. Don't care. No time for all that now. But it must be from another dimension, a time lapse and possible parallel development and millions, maybe even billions of years. I, "

Lord Leighton came suddenly to his feet. He peered at Blade with his hooded eyes. "Top secret from now on, my boy. Absolute top security! No one must know about this. Absolutely no one. You understand that, my boy? Do you? An order, Richard, an absolute order."

"How about J?"

Lord L grimaced, hesitated, then with reluctance said, "Of course J. I suppose he must know. But no one else. Absolutely no one else. Now you wait here and watch it while I get a hypo and some drugs. I'll have to knock it out, I suppose. Keep it unconscious for a time. Have to. Otherwise it will only destroy itself or make us destroy it. That must not happen." He scuttled for the door. "I won't be a second."

Blade stared down at the thing on the floor. It was breathing heavily through large, flattened nostrils. There were flecks of foam around the mouth. It did not move.

Blade's hand and arm ached from the blow he had given it.

Blade sniffed at the burnt-out computer shell. He found that he could grin. The old boy had really fouled this one up. Six months of work gone up in smoke and the old man had conjured up some sort of a hairy demon from somewhere out there in limbo.

Blade shrugged. And laughed.

He touched the unconscious creature with his bare foot. The body hair was long and coarse and clotted with dirt and sweat, and the smell from it was fast overpowering the acridity of the smoke.

Blade was still chuckling when Lord L came back with a tray on which was a hypodermic needle and several small bottles containing a clear liquid. His Lordship gave him a reproving glance as he filled the needle and injected the brute thing on the floor.

"This is a very serious matter," said Lord L. "Not at all funny, Richard. We have probably made the greatest scientific discovery of all time. A serious matter, my boy. Very serious."

"Yes, sir," said Blade. "But now what, sir? Where do we go from here?"

Lord L glanced around as though he expected spies to leap from the shattered computer. "We shall have to be very careful and very cunning. And there is much hard work in store for us. All of us. I have already used my authority to clear the outer areas and seal us off. The first thing, Richard, is that you go and fetch J at once. Best not try to explain this matter to him. I will do that. Go now. Hurry."

Blade pointed out that he could not have explained the matter to J even had he wished. You cannot explain what you do not understand yourself.

Lord L ignored him. All he said was, "Go at once, please."

"Is it all right if I dress first, Lord Leighton?"

His Lordship did not hear.

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## Chapter Four

The next month was as frenetic as any Blade had experienced in his thirty years. Lord Leighton, always a martinet and a slavedriver, reached into some hidden reserve of energy and summoned a demonic fury that sorely tried Blade and J, both younger men. All three became master liars. Lord L, as chief Ananias, was a good teacher and was expert in twisting the truth into odd shapes. His Lordship's great fear, his chief nightmare, was that the world would find out about Ogar, as they had come to call the creature, from the snarling sounds he made, and wrest his prize from him before he could complete his studies.

J, who had a plan of his own, had a blazing battle with Lord L about this. J insisted that the Prime Minister be let in on the secret. His Lordship said no. J insisted.

"He must know," J said flatly. "For our protection and his. Else how do we explain the delay in Project DX? Be practical, Leighton! Our money is running out. The PM has to go before a committee and beg for more secret funds. He can't, and won't, do that unless he knows exactly what is going on."

J won that argument. It was the only one.

When the massive complex was excavated beneath the Tower someone had thought to include a single large cell, a modern dungeon, in the lowest sub-basement. It was to this cell that Blade carried the unconscious Ogar after Lord L summarily cleared the place of all personnel. It was there that Ogar slept his drugged sleep, fed intravenously, while Lord L did a detailed and loving Bertillon, crooning happily to himself as he made cranial measurements. When J rashly suggested that perhaps a professional anthropologist should be called in, the old man flew into a rage.

The Prime Minister came in the dead of night, spent half an hour viewing Ogar and listening to Lord L, and left in a state of shock, muttering to himself. His position, he told J later, was unique in every sense of the word. No politician had ever had to cope with a situation like this before.

The coming of Ogar did accomplish one other thing. For the time being, at least, it healed the growing breach between J and Lord Leighton. There was no more talk of brain surgery and, as they became less snappish, the two older men regained some of their former rapport. Even so, J, on the first day, could not refrain from jabbing the needle into Lord L.

With a malicious grin he quoted directly from the old man's computer speech at Reading University: ", we have at least succeeded in eliminating the danger of schizophrenia, when they are built, they function exactly as intended."

He received a cold glare from the hooded yellow eyes. "May I point out," said his Lordship, "that some of the greatest scientific discoveries have been made by accident. In any case I have already found the error and the computer will be rebuilt in a month or so. But that is not my chief concern at the moment. I have plans, great plans."

Both J and Blade left their apartments and moved into quarters far below the Tower computer complex. Here they were self-sufficient, with no need to venture outside. There was no elevator, it stopped on the level above, and the only way out or in was by a narrow stairway. This was guarded by

a massive steel door that was kept locked. Above them the lesser computers were humming again, all personnel back at work, and the security had been redoubled.

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The stone axe was shipped away, with elaborate security precautions, for an appraisal by experts. Within three days the report was back and his Lordship shared it with them.

HAFT, this wood is unknown to us. Suggest may be some species of iron-wood believed extinct since Lower Palaeolithic Age. Workmanship suggests culture unknown to us.

AXE, this macrolith also a puzzler. We have seen nothing like it before. Main component is undoubtedly quartz, but with a mixture of greenstone, quartzite and cherty. This is impossible according to present knowledge, yet repeated tests prove it to be so. Possible that meld might be a result of intense heat, in which case heat would have to approach that of inner sun. Workmanship again suggests no culture known to us.

At the bottom of the report was a scribble. Dear Leighton, what goes on here?

The scribble made Lord L most unhappy.

"They're bound to start nosing around sooner or later," he told J and Blade.

"All the more reason to start cracking," rejoined J, who had his plan and was keeping it to himself for the moment. J was in a very good form and biding his time. For the moment the Prime Minister was appeased, if slightly dazed, and matters were going smoothly enough. J kept a steady pressure on the old man to see that the computer was rebuilt as rapidly as possible. This was not easy, but J did it. Leighton to his own designs, Lord L would have spent every waking hour by the cot on which Ogar still lay drugged.

At the end of the first week Lord Leighton summoned them to the cell and, as they stood around the cot on which Ogar slept, gave his first full report. Blade and J were too impressed to interrupt. The cell by this time was full of the body smell of the hairy creature on the cot.

Lord L, using a ruler as a pointer, poked and prodded and explained. You would have thought, as J said later in his jest, that the old man had himself spawned the thing on the cot.

"Ogar," said Lord L, "is from another dimension. A Dimension X. It is very important to remember that."

Blade, recalling the bloody struggle in the computer room, thought that he was hardly likely to forget it.

J said: "Do get on with it, Leighton, and do remember to whom you are speaking. Dick and I aren't scholars or intellectuals. Keep it simple."

His Lordship smiled. "I will try. But remember also that any statement I make, any description, is only an analogue and not an exact statement of fact.

"We know that in our own dimension, Home Dimension, our world," the old man continued, "that evolution develops along parallel lines, but at a slower or faster pace in remote and unconnected parts"

of the world. So, to get started at all, I must have a model, an abstract and theoretical model for guidance. I have chosen one. I have, a priori, chosen to think along the lines that Ogar here came from a dimension, a world, that is much like our own, but in a much earlier stage of development. Put it like this, when the computer malfunctioned and Ogar was snatched from his world, his dimension, he left behind a world similar to our own, half a million years ago."

J, practical man, and with the Prime Minister and committee to keep happy, relished this. Would there not, in such a dimension, be gold and oil and all the rest? Untold and untouched, wealth to be exploited by England when teleportation was perfected. It made a strong talking point.

Lord L tapped the creature's flattened skull with the ruler. "A puzzle," he admitted. "Not Pithecanthropus. Far short of Cro-Magnon, though he did walk upright in the, er, short time we saw him move of his own volition. The braincase is flat and the brow ridges very heavy. Yet the arms and legs are sum and well developed, the body protected by hair with an undercoat for additional protection from cold. That itself is totally unknown to us, a subhuman species with an undercoating of hair like some dogs have."

Blade said, with a faint smile, "What makes him smell like that, sir?"

J tried not to laugh. His Lordship scowled but answered the question.

"Pure animal odor. Ogar never took a bath in his life. Over the years a protective coating of dirt and grease build up. It would come in very handy in bad weather."

Ogar turned on the cot. Despite the heavy dosage of drugs he was given to tossing and turning and had several times fallen off the cot. Each time, Blade, the only one strong enough to lift him, had been summoned for the duty. And had taken a shower immediately to get the stink off him.

Now Ogar showed his teeth and snarled in his sleep. "Ogarrrrrr, rrrrrr, Ogarrrrrrrrrr, "

"Having a bad dream," said Blade.

His Lordship tapped the hairy jaw. "Teeth much the same as ours, but larger and lacking any wisdom teeth. The canines are long and fang-like, as you can see."

Blade was still healing from the bites inflicted by Ogar in their brief scuffle.

Lord Leighton moved closer to the cot. He seized a handful of hair at the back of Ogar's neck and raised the head. He poked with the ruler at the nape of Ogar's neck. "The amazing thing is the foramen magnum. Identical with our own, or so close to being as makes no difference. So he walks upright and his brain stalk is vertical. Ogar, my dear fellows, is a human being. Or very close to being one. I only wish it were possible to work out a lineal descent pattern, a phylogeny, but that is impossible since he is not of our dimension."

His Lordship lectured them for two hours on Ogar. Blade was patient, abiding the smell and wondering what J was up to. That his chief was up to something Blade did not doubt, he had known J a long time and had come to know the meaning of that covert smile.

But it was Lord L who exploded the first bombshell. Two days later Blade awoke to the sound of

jackhammers chipping away at stone. The sound was remote, in some far off sub-basement, but there was no mistaking the source. J, over breakfast, explained it.

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"From our viewpoint," he said over the sausage and eggs, "the old boffin may have gone around the bend, but from his viewpoint it makes good sense. He is having a cave built for Ogar."

Blade halted his fork in upswing. "A cave?"

J speared the last sausage. "Yes, dear boy, a cave. Ogar is going to live in it when he comes out of the drug. So are you."

"So am I what?"

"Going to live in the cave," said J cheerfully. "With Ogar."

Blade dropped his knife and fork. "Like bloody hell I am!"

J nodded. "So right. You are. I am going to order you to do it. I'm sorry, Dick, but it has to be done. I have to humor him and I have to keep him working on the computer. He can finish repairing it in a week if I can keep him at it, but not if he gets a case of the sulks. You must be a good fellow and go along."

Blade groaned and choked back the obscenity he felt like voicing. "But why? Why in hell does he have to have a cave and why do I have to live in it with that, that whatever it is?"

J, though usually a taciturn and humorless man, was not without his moments. He said, "You mean Ogar? Our guest?"

Blade scowled at him. He tried to think of women. Tender-limbed, sweet-smelling, soft-breasted women. This monkish life was steadily taking its toll.

J shattered all that. "Lord L has deduced that Ogar, in his own dimension, lived in a cave. Probably he is right. So he is going to give Ogar a cave. And a fire, he is having special ventilation installed, and he is going to play tapes that simulate the night sounds Ogar must have been used to hearing. There will be meat, raw meat, he can hardly wait to see if Ogar eats it raw or cooks it, and of all this he is going to make moving pictures and sound tapes. In other words, he wants a record of Ogar living in his own natural environment. Or what Lord L thinks must have been his environment. It really isn't a bad idea, you know."

"It's a miserable idea," said Blade crossly. "That thing is dangerous, for God's sake. I should know."

J tutted that. He knew his Blade. "You're not afraid, Dick. Don't try to have me on. You're bored and restless and missing your totsies. But this thing you have got to do, it fits in exactly with my plans."

And J revealed his plan to Blade, who had to laugh. Lord L was in for a rude shock.

"Besides which," said J, "you will have a club and Ogar won't. You will be dressed in animal skin of some sort and Ogar will be, as usual, stark naked. That in itself should give you an overwhelming psychological advantage. Even a creature like Ogar is at a disadvantage without pants."

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