

RIVERWORLD

PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER



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RIVERWORLD

PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER

INCLUDING *To Your Scattered Bodies Go*
AND *The Fabulous Riverboat*.



A TOM DOHERTY ASSOCIATES BOOK

New York

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RIVERWORLD

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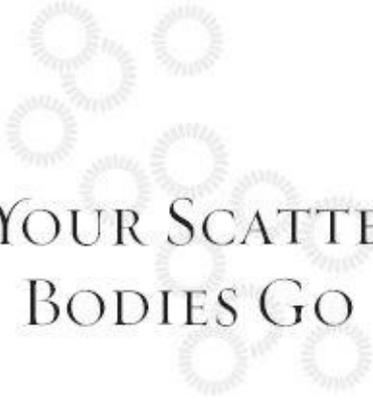
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TO YOUR SCATTERED
BODIES GO

His wife had held him in her arms as if she could keep death away from him.

He had cried out, "My God, I am a dead man!"

The door to the room had opened, and he had seen a giant, black, one-humped camel outside and had heard the tinkle of the bells on its harness as the hot desert wind touched them. Then a huge black face topped by a great black turban had appeared in the doorway. The black eunuch had come through the door, moving like a cloud, with a gigantic scimitar in his hand. Death, the Destroyer of Delights and the Sunderer of Society, had arrived at last.

Blackness. Nothingness. He did not even know that his heart had given out forever. Nothingness.

Then his eyes opened. His heart was beating strongly. He was strong, very strong! All the pain of the gout in his feet, the agony in his liver, the torture in his heart, all were gone.

It was so quiet he could hear the blood moving in his head. He was alone in a world of soundlessness.

A bright light of equal intensity was everywhere. He could see, yet he did not understand what he was seeing. What were these things above, beside, below him? Where was he?

He tried to sit up and felt, numbly, a panic. There was nothing to sit up upon because he was hanging in nothingness. The attempt sent him forward and over, very slowly, as if he were in a bath of thin treacle. A foot from his fingertips was a rod of bright red metal. The rod came from above, from infinity, and went on down to infinity. He tried to grasp it because it was the nearest solid object, but something invisible was resisting him. It was as if lines of some force were pushing against him, repelling him.

Slowly, he turned over in a somersault. Then the resistance halted him with his fingertips about six inches from the rod. He straightened his body out and moved forward a fraction of an inch. At the same time, his body began to rotate on its longitudinal axis. He sucked in air with a loud sawing noise. Though he knew no hold existed for him, he could not help flailing his arms in panic to try to seize onto something.

Now he was face "down," or was it "up"? Whatever the direction, it was opposite to that toward which he had been looking when he had awakened. Not that this mattered. "Above" him and "below" him the view was the same. He was suspended in space, kept from falling by an invisible and unfeeling cocoon. Six feet "below" him was the body of a woman with a very pale skin. She was naked and completely hairless. She seemed to be asleep. Her eyes were closed, and her breasts rose and fell gently. Her legs were together and straight out, and her arms were by her side. She turned slowly like a chicken on a spit.

The same force that was rotating her was also rotating him. He spun slowly away from her, saw other naked and hairless bodies, men, women, and children, opposite him in silent spinning rows. Above him was the rotating naked and hairless body of a Negro.

He lowered his head so that he could see along his own body. He was naked and hairless, too. His skin was smooth, and the muscles of his belly were ridged, and his thighs were packed with strong young muscles. The veins that had stood out like blue mole-ridges were gone. He no longer had the body of the enfeebled and sick sixty-nine-year-old man who had been dying only a moment ago. All the hundred or so scars were gone.

He realized then that there were no old men or women among the bodies surrounding him. A

seemed to be about twenty-five years old, though it was difficult to determine the exact age, since the hairless heads and pubes made them seem older and younger at the same time.

He had boasted that he knew no fear. Now fear ripped away the cry forming in his throat. His feet pressed down on him and squeezed the new life from him.

He had been stunned at first because he was still living. Then his position in space and the arrangement of his new environment had frozen his senses. He was seeing and feeling through a thick semiopaque window. After a few seconds something snapped inside him. He could almost hear it, as if a window had suddenly been raised.

The world took a shape which he could grasp, though he could not comprehend it. Above him, on both sides, below him, as far as he could see, bodies floated. They were arranged in vertical and horizontal rows. The up-and-down ranks were separated by red rods, slender as broomsticks, one of which was twelve inches from the feet of the sleepers and the other twelve inches from their heads. Each body was spaced about six feet from the body above and below and on each side.

The rods came up from an abyss without bottom and soared into an abyss without ceiling. The grayness into which the rods and the bodies, up and down, right and left, disappeared was neither the sky nor the earth. There was nothing in the distance except the lackluster of infinity.

On one side was a dark man with Tuscan features. On his other side was an Asiatic Indian and beyond her a large Nordic-looking man. Not until the third revolution was he able to determine who was so odd about the man. The right arm, from a point just below the elbow, was red. It seemed to lack the outer layer of skin.

A few seconds later, several rows away, he saw a male adult body lacking the skin and all the muscles of the face.

There were other bodies that were not quite complete. Far away, glimpsed unclearly, was a skeleton and a jumble of organs inside it.

He continued turning and observing while his heart slammed against his chest with terror. By the time he understood that he was in some colossal chamber and that the metal rods were radiating some force that somehow supported and revolved millions—maybe billions—of human beings.

Where was this place?

Certainly, it was not the city of Trieste of the Austro-Hungarian Empire of 1890.

It was like no hell or heaven of which he had ever heard or read, and he had thought that he was acquainted with every theory of the afterlife.

He had died. Now he was alive. He had scoffed all his life at a life-after-death. For once, he could not deny that he had been wrong. But there was no one present to say, "I told you so, you damned infidel!"

Of all the millions, he alone was awake.

As he turned at an estimated rate of one complete revolution per ten seconds, he saw something else that caused him to gasp with amazement. Five rows away was a body that seemed, at first glance, to be human. But no member of *Homo sapiens* had three fingers and a thumb on each hand and four toes on each foot. Nor a nose and thin black leathery lips like a dog's. Nor a scrotum with many small knobs. Nor ears with such strange convolutions.

Terror faded away. His heart quit beating so swiftly, though it did not return to normal. His brain unfroze. He must get out of this situation where he was as helpless as a hog on a turnspit. He would get to somebody who could tell him what he was doing here, how he had come here, why he was here.

To decide was to act.

He drew up his legs and kicked and found that the action, the reaction, rather, drove him forward a half-inch. Again, he kicked and moved against the resistance. But, as he paused, he was slowly moved back toward his original location. And his legs and arms were gently pushed toward their original

rigid position.

In a frenzy, kicking his legs and moving his arms in a swimmer's breaststroke, he managed to fight toward the rod. The closer he got to it, the stronger the web of force became. He did not give up. If he did, he would be back where he had been and without enough strength to begin fighting again. It was not his nature to give up until all his strength had been expended.

He was breathing hoarsely, his body was coated with sweat, his arms and legs moved as if in a thick jelly, and his progress was imperceptible. Then, the fingertips of his left hand touched the rod. It felt warm and hard.

Suddenly, he knew which way was "down." He fell.

The touch had broken the spell. The webs of air around him snapped soundlessly, and he was plunging.

He was close enough to the rod to seize it with one hand. The sudden checking of his fall brought his hip up against the rod with a painful impact. The skin of his hand burned as he slid down the rod, and then his other hand clutched the rod, and he had stopped.

In front of him, on the other side of the rod, the bodies had started to fall. They descended with the velocity of a falling body on Earth, and each maintained its stretched-out position and the original distance between the body above and below. They even continued to revolve.

It was then that the puffs of air on his naked sweating back made him twist around on the rod. Behind him, in the vertical row of bodies that he had just occupied, the sleepers were also falling. One after the other, as if methodically dropped through a trapdoor, spinning slowly, they hurtled by him. Their heads missed him by a few inches. He was fortunate not to have been knocked off the rod and sent plunging into the abyss along with them.

In stately procession, they fell. Body after body shooting down on both sides of the rod, while the other rows of millions upon millions slept on.

For a while, he stared. Then he began counting bodies; he had always been a devoted enumerator. But when he had counted 3,001, he quit. After that he gazed at the cataract of flesh. How far up, how immeasurably far up, were they stacked? And how far down could they fall? Unwittingly, he had precipitated them when his touch had disrupted the force emanating from the rod.

He could not climb up the rod, but he could climb down it. He began to let himself down, and then he looked upward and he forgot about the bodies hurtling by him. Somewhere overhead, a humming was overriding the whooshing sound of the falling bodies.

A narrow craft, of some bright green substance and shaped like a canoe, was sinking between the column of the fallers and the neighboring column of suspended. The aerial canoe had no visible means of support, he thought, and it was a measure of his terror that he did not even think about his pun. No visible means of support. Like a magical vessel out of *The Thousand and One Nights*.

A face appeared over the edge of the vessel. The craft stopped, and the humming noise ceased. Another face was by the first. Both had long, dark, and straight hair. Presently, the faces withdrew, the humming was renewed, and the canoe again descended toward him. When it was about five feet above him it halted. There was a single small symbol on the green bow: a white spiral that exploded to the right. One of the canoe's occupants spoke in a language with many vowels and a distinct and frequently recurring glottal stop. It sounded like Polynesian.

Abruptly, the invisible cocoon around him reasserted itself. The falling bodies began to slow their rate of descent and then stopped. The man on the rod felt the retaining force close in on him and lift him up. Though he clung desperately to the rod, his legs were moved up and then away and his body followed it. Soon he was looking downward. His hands were torn loose; he felt as if his grip on life, on sanity, on the world, had also been torn away. He began to drift upward and to revolve. He went by the aerial canoe and rose above it. The two men in the canoe were naked, dark-skinned

Yemenite Arabs, and handsome. Their features were Nordic, resembling those of some Icelanders he had known.

One of them lifted a hand which held a pencil-sized metal object. The man sighted along it as if he were going to shoot something from it.

The man floating in the air shouted with rage and hate and frustration and flailed his arms to swing toward the machine.

“I’ll kill!” he screamed. “Kill! Kill!”

Oblivion came again.

God was standing over him as he lay on the grass by the waters and the weeping willows. He lay wide-eyed and as weak as a baby just born. God was poking him in the ribs with the end of an iron cane. God was a tall man of middle age. He had a long black forked beard, and He was wearing the Sunday best of an English gentleman of the 53rd year of Queen Victoria's reign.

"You're late," God said. "Long past due for the payment of your debt, you know."

"What debt?" Richard Francis Burton said. He passed his fingertips over his ribs to make sure they all were still there.

"You owe for the flesh," replied God, poking him again with the cane. "Not to mention the spirit. You owe for the flesh and the spirit, which are one and the same thing."

Burton struggled to get up onto his feet. Nobody, not even God, was going to punch Richard Burton in the ribs and get away without a battle.

God, ignoring the futile efforts, pulled a large gold watch from His vest pocket, unsnapped its heavy engraved gold lid, looked at the hands, and said, "Long past due."

God held out His other hand, its palm turned up.

"Pay up, sir. Otherwise, I'll be forced to foreclose."

"Foreclose on what?"

Darkness fell. God began to dissolve into the darkness. It was then that Burton saw that God resembled himself. He had the same black straight hair, the same Arabic face with the dark stabbing eyes, high cheekbones, heavy lips, and the thrust-out, deeply cleft chin. The same long deep scars, witnesses of the Somali javelin which pierced his jaws in that fight at Berbera, were on His cheeks. His hands and feet were small, contrasting with His broad shoulders and massive chest. And He had the long thick moustachios and the long forked beard that had caused the Bedouin to name Burton "the Father of Moustachios."

"You look like the Devil," Burton said, but God had become just another shadow in the darkness.

Burton was still sleeping, but he was so close to the surface of consciousness that he was aware that he had been dreaming. Light was replacing the night.

Then his eyes did open. And he did not know where he was.

A blue sky was above. A gentle breeze flowed over his naked body. His hairless head and his back and legs and the palms of his hands were against grass. He turned his head to the right and saw a plain covered with very short, very green, very thick grass. The plain sloped gently upward for a mile. Beyond the plain was a range of hills that started out mildly, then became steeper and higher and very irregular in shape as they climbed toward the mountains. The hills seemed to run for about two and half miles. All were covered with trees, some of which blazed with scarlets, azures, bright green, flaming yellows, and deep pinks. The mountains beyond the hills rose suddenly, perpendicularly, and unbelievably high. They were black and bluish-green, looking like a glassy igneous rock with huge splotches of lichen covering at least a quarter of the surface.

Between him and the hills were many human bodies. The closest one, only a few feet away, was that of the white woman who had been below him in that vertical row.

He wanted to rise up, but he was sluggish and numb. All he could do for the moment, and that required a strong effort, was to turn his head to the left. There were more naked bodies there on a plain that sloped down to a river perhaps ten yards away. The river was about a mile wide, and on its other side was another plain, probably about a mile broad and sloping upward to foothills covered with more of the trees and then the towering precipitous black and bluish-green mountains. That was the east, he thought frozenly. The sun had just risen over the top of the mountain there.

Almost by the river's edge was a strange structure. It was a gray red-flecked granite and was shaped like a mushroom. Its broad base could not be more than five feet high, and the mushroom top had a diameter of about fifty feet.

He managed to rise far enough to support himself on one elbow.

There were more mushroom-shaped granites along both sides of the river.

Everywhere on the plain were unclothed baldheaded human beings, spaced about six feet apart. Most were still on their backs and gazing into the sky. Others were beginning to stir, to look around, or even sitting up.

He sat up also and felt his head and face with both hands. They were smooth.

His body was not that wrinkled, ridged, bumpy, withered body of the sixty-nine-year-old which had lain on his deathbed. It was the smooth-skinned and powerfully muscled body he had when he was twenty-five years old. The same body he had when he was floating between those rods in that dream. Dream? It had seemed too vivid to be a dream. It was *not* a dream.

Around his wrist was a thin band of transparent material. It was connected to a six-inch-long strap of the same material. The other end was clenched about a metallic arc, the handle of a grayish metal cylinder with a closed cover.

Idly, not concentrating because his mind was too sluggish, he lifted the cylinder. It weighed less than a pound, so it could not be of iron even if it was hollow. Its diameter was a foot and a half and it was over two and a half feet tall.

Everyone had a similar object strapped to their wrist.

Unsteadily, his heart beginning to pick up speed as his senses became unnumbed, he got to his feet.

Others were rising, too. Many had faces which were slack or congealed with an icy wonder. Some looked fearful. ~~Their eyes were wide and rolling; their chests rose and fell swiftly; their breaths hissed out.~~ Some were shaking as if an icy wind had swept over them, though the air was pleasantly warm.

The strange thing, the really alien and frightening thing, was the almost complete silence. Nobody said a word; there was only the hissing of breaths of those near him, a tiny slap as a man smacked himself on his leg, a low whistling from a woman.

Their mouths hung open, as if they were about to say something.

They began moving about, looking into each other's faces, sometimes reaching out to lightly touch another. They shuffled their bare feet, turned this way, turned back the other way, gazed at the hills, the trees covered with the huge vividly colored blooms, the lichenous and soaring mountains, the sparkling and green river, the mushroom-shaped stones, the straps and the gray metallic containers.

Some felt their naked skulls and their faces.

Everybody was encased in a mindless motion and in silence.

Suddenly, a woman began moaning. She sank to her knees, threw her head and her shoulders back and she howled. At the same time, far down the riverbank, somebody else howled.

It was as if these two cries were signals. Or as if the two were double keys to the human voice and had unlocked it.

The men and women and children began screaming or sobbing or tearing at their faces with their nails or beating themselves on their breasts or falling on their knees and lifting their hands in prayer or throwing themselves down and trying to bury their faces in the grass as if, ostrich-like, to avoid being seen, or rolling back and forth, barking like dogs or howling like wolves.

The terror and the hysteria gripped Burton. He wanted to go to his knees and pray for salvation from judgment. He wanted mercy. He did not want to see the blinding face of God appear over the mountains, a face brighter than the sun. He was not as brave and as guiltless as he had thought. Judgment would be so terrifying, so utterly *final*, that he could not bear to think about it.

Once, he had had a fantasy about standing before God after he had died. He had been little and naked and in the middle of a vast plain, like this, but he had been all alone. Then God, great as a mountain, had strode toward him. And he, Burton, had stood his ground and defied God.

There was no God here, but he fled anyway. He ran across the plain, pushing men and women out of the way, running around some, leaping over others as they rolled on the ground. As he ran, he howled "No! No! No!" His arms windmilled to fend off unseen terrors. The cylinder strapped to his wrist whirled around and around.

When he was panting so that he could no longer howl, and his legs and arms were hung with weights, and his lungs burned, and his heart boomed, he threw himself down under the first of the trees.

After a while, he sat up and faced toward the plain. The mob noise had changed from screams and howls to a gigantic chattering. The majority were talking to each other, though it did not seem that anybody was listening. Burton could not hear any of the individual words. Some men and women were embracing and kissing as if they had been acquainted in their previous lives and now were holding each other to reassure each other of their identities and of their reality.

There were a number of children in the great crowd. Not one was under five years of age, however. Like their elders, their heads were hairless. Half of them were weeping, rooted to one spot. Others, also crying out, were running back and forth, looking into the faces above them, obviously seeking their parents.

He was beginning to breathe more easily. He stood up and turned around. The tree under which he was standing was a red pine (sometimes wrongly called a Norway pine) about two hundred feet tall. Beside it was a tree of a type he had never seen. He doubted that it had existed on Earth. (He was su

that he was not on Earth, though he could not have given any specific reasons at that moment.) It had ~~thick, gnarled blackish trunk and many thick branches bearing triangular six-foot-long leaves, green with scarlet lacings.~~ It was about three hundred feet high. There were also trees that looked like white and black oaks, firs, Western yew, and lodgepole pine.

Here and there were clumps of tall bamboo-like plants, and everywhere that there were no trees bamboo was a grass about three feet high. There were no animals in sight. No insects and no birds.

He looked around for a stick or a club. He did not have the slightest idea what was on the agenda for humanity, but if it was left unsupervised or uncontrolled it would soon be reverting to its normal state. Once the shock was over, the people would be looking out for themselves, and that meant that some would be bullying others.

He found nothing useful as a weapon. Then it occurred to him that the metal cylinder could be used as a weapon. He banged it against a tree. Though it had little weight, it was extremely hard.

He raised the lid, which was hinged inside at one end. The hollow interior had six snapdown rings of metal, three on each side and spaced so that each could hold a deep cup or dish or rectangular container of gray metal. All the containers were empty. He closed the lid. Doubtless he would find out in time what the function of the cylinder was.

Whatever else had happened, resurrection had not resulted in bodies of fragile misty ectoplasm. He was all bone and blood and flesh.

Though he still felt somewhat detached from reality, as if he had been disengaged from the gears of the world, he was emerging from his shock.

He was thirsty. He would have to go down and drink from the river and hope that it would not be poisoned. At this thought, he grinned wryly, and stroked his upper lip. His finger felt disappointed. That was a curious reaction, he thought, and then he remembered that his thick moustache was gone. Oh, yes, he had hoped that the riverwater would not be poisoned. What a strange thought! Why should the dead be brought back to life only to be killed again? But he stood for a long while under the tree. He hated to go back through that madly talking, hysterically sobbing crowd to reach the river. Here, away from the mob, he was free from much of the terror and the panic and the shock that covered them like a sea. If he ventured back, he would be caught up in their emotions again.

Presently, he saw a figure detach itself from the naked throng and walk toward him. He saw that it was not human.

It was then that Burton was sure that this Resurrection Day was not the one which any religion had stated would occur. Burton had not believed in the God portrayed by the Christians, Moslems, Hindus, or any faith. In fact, he was not sure that he believed in any Creator whatsoever. He had believed only in Richard Francis Burton and a few friends. He was sure that when he died, the world would cease to exist.

Waking up after death, in this valley by this river, he had been powerless to defend himself against the doubts that existed in every man exposed to an early religious conditioning and to an adult society which preached its convictions at every chance.

Now, seeing the alien approach, he was sure that there was some other explanation for this event than a supernatural one. There was a physical, a scientific, reason for his being here; he did not have to resort to Judeo-Christian-Moslem myths for cause.

The creature, it, he—it undoubtedly was a male—was a biped about six feet eight inches tall. The pink-skinned body was very thin; there were three fingers and a thumb on each hand and four very long and thin toes on each foot. There were two dark red spots below the male nipples on the chest. The face was semihuman. Thick black eyebrows swept down to the protruding cheekbones and flared out to cover them with a brownish down. The sides of his nostrils were fringed with a thin membrane about a sixteenth of an inch long. The thick pad of cartilage on the end of his nose was deeply cleaved. The lips were thin, leathery, and black. The ears were lobeless and the convolutions within were nonhuman. His scrotum looked as if it contained many small testes.

He had seen this creature floating in the ranks a few rows away in that nightmare place.

The creature stopped a few feet away, smiled, and revealed quite human teeth. He said, “I hope you speak English. However, I can speak with some fluency in Russian, Mandarin Chinese, or Hindustani.”

Burton felt a slight shock, as if a dog or an ape had spoken to him.

“You speak Midwestern American English,” he replied. “Quite well, too. Although too precisely.”

“Thank you,” the creature said. “I followed you because you seemed the only person with enough common sense to get away from that chaos. Perhaps you have some explanation for this...what do you call it...resurrection?”

“No more than you,” Burton said. “In fact, I don’t have any explanation for your existence, before or after resurrection.”

The thick eyebrows of the alien twitched, a gesture which Burton was to find indicated surprise and puzzlement.

“No? That is strange. I would have sworn that not one of the six billion of Earth’s inhabitants had not heard of or seen me on TV.”

“TV?”

The creature’s brows twitched again.

“You don’t know what TV....”

His voice trailed, then he smiled again.

“Of course, how stupid of me! You must have died before I came to Earth!”

“When was that?”

The alien’s eyebrows rose (equivalent to a human frown as Burton would find), and he said slowly. “Let’s see. I believe it was, in your chronology, A.D. 2002. When did you die?”

“It must have been in A.D. 1890,” Burton said. The creature had brought back his sense that all that was not real. He ran his tongue around his mouth; the back teeth he had lost when the Somali spear ran through his cheeks were now replaced. But he was still circumcised, and the men on the riverbank—most of whom had been crying out in the Austrian-German, Italian, or the Slovenian of Trieste—were also circumcised. Yet, in his time, most of the males in that area would have been uncircumcised.

“At least,” Burton added, “I remember nothing after October 20, 1890.”

“*Aab!*” the creature said. “So, I left my native planet approximately 200 years before you died. My planet? It was a satellite of that star you Terrestrials call Tau Ceti. We placed ourselves in suspended animation, and, when our ship approached your sun, we were automatically thawed out, and...but you do not know what I am talking about?”

“Not quite. Things are happening too fast. I would like to get details later. What is your name?”

“Monat Grrautut. Yours?”

“Richard Francis Burton at your service.”

He bowed slightly and smiled. Despite the strangeness of the creature and some repulsive physical aspects, Burton found himself warming to him.

“The late Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton,” he added. “Most recently Her Majesty’s Consul at the Austro-Hungarian port of Trieste.”

“Elizabeth?”

“I lived in the nineteenth century, not the sixteenth.”

“A Queen Elizabeth reigned over Great Britain in the twentieth century,” Monat said.

He turned to look toward the riverbank.

“Why are they so afraid? All the human beings I met were either sure that there would be no afterlife or else that they would get preferential treatment in the hereafter.”

Burton grinned and said, “Those who denied the hereafter are sure they’re in Hell because they denied it. Those who knew they would go to Heaven are shocked, I would imagine, to find themselves naked. You see, most of the illustrations of our afterlives showed those in Hell as naked and those in Heaven as being clothed. So, if you’re resurrected bare-ass naked, you must be in Hell.”

“You seem amused,” Monat said.

“I wasn’t so amused a few minutes ago,” Burton said. “And I’m shaken. Very shaken. But seeing you here makes me think that things are not what people thought they would be. They seldom are. And God, if He’s going to make an appearance, does not seem to be in a hurry about it. I think there’s a good explanation for this, but it won’t match any of the conjectures I knew on Earth.”

“I doubt we’re on Earth,” Monat said. He pointed upward with long slim fingers which bore thick cartilage pads instead of nails.

He said, “If you look steadily there, with your eyes shielded, you can see another celestial body near the sun. It is not the moon.”

Burton cupped his hands over his eyes, the metal cylinder on his shoulder, and stared at the point indicated. He saw a faintly glowing body which seemed to be an eighth of the size of a full moon. When he put his hands down, he said, “A star?”

Monat said, “I believe so. I thought I saw several other very faint bodies elsewhere in the sky, but I’m not sure. We will know when night comes.”

“Where do you think we are?”

“I would not know.”

Monat gestured at the sun.

“It is rising and so it will descend, and then night should come. I think that it would be best to prepare for the night. And for other events. It is warm and getting warmer, but the night may be cool and it might rain. We should build a shelter of some sort. And we should also think about finding food. Though I imagine that this device”—he indicated the cylinder—“will feed us.”

Burton said, “What makes you think that?”

“I looked inside mine. It contains dishes and cups, all empty now, but obviously made to be filled.”

Burton felt less unreal. The being—the Tau Cetan!—talked so pragmatically, so sensibly, that he provided an anchor to which Burton could tie his senses before they drifted away again. And, despite

the repulsive alienness of the creature, he exuded a friendliness and an openness that warmed Burton. Moreover, any creature that came from a civilization which could span many trillions of miles of interstellar space must have very valuable knowledge and resources.

Others were beginning to separate themselves from the crowd. A group of about ten men and women walked slowly toward him. Some were talking, but others were silent and wide-eyed. They did not seem to have a definite goal in mind; they just floated along like a cloud driven by a wind. When they got near Burton and Monat, they stopped walking.

A man trailing the group especially attracted Burton's scrutiny. Monat was obviously nonhuman, but this fellow was subhuman or prehuman. He stood about five feet tall. He was squat and powerfully muscled. His head was thrust forward on a bowed and very thick neck. The forehead was low and slanting. The skull was long and narrow. Enormous supraorbital ridges shadowed dark brown eyes. The nose was a smear of flesh with arching nostrils, and the bulging bones of his jaws pushed his lips out. He may have been covered with as much hair as an ape at one time, but now, like everybody else, he was stripped of hair.

The huge hands looked as if they could squeeze water from a stone.

He kept looking behind him as if he feared that someone was sneaking up on him. The human beings moved away from him when he approached them.

But then another man walked up to him and said something to the subhuman in English. It was evident that the man did not expect to be understood but that he was trying to be friendly. His voice, however, was almost hoarse. The newcomer was a muscular youth about six feet tall. He had a face that looked handsome when he faced Burton but was comically craggy in profile. His eyes were green.

The subhuman jumped a little when he was addressed. He peered at the grinning youth from under the bars of bone. Then he smiled, revealing large thick teeth, and spoke in a language Burton did not recognize. He pointed to himself and said something that sounded like *Kazzintuitruaabemss*. Later Burton would find out that it was his name and it meant Man-Who-Slew-The-Long-White-Tooth.

The others consisted of five men and four women. Two of the men had known each other on Earthlife, and one of them had been married to one of the women. All were Italians or Slovenes who had died in Trieste, apparently about 1890, though he knew none of them.

"You there," Burton said, pointing to the man who had spoken in English. "Step forward. What's your name?"

The man approached him hesitantly. He said, "You're English, right?"

The man spoke with an American Midwest flatness.

Burton held out his hand and said, "Yaas. Burton here."

The fellow raised hairless eyebrows and said, "Burton?" He leaned forward and peered at Burton's face. "It's hard to say...it couldn't be...."

He straightened up. "Name's Peter Frigate. F-R-I-G-A-T-E."

He looked around him and then said in a voice even more strained, "It's hard to talk coherently. Everybody's in such a state of shock, you know. I feel as if I'm coming apart. But...here we are. I'm alive again...young again...no hellfire...not yet, anyway. Born in 1918, died 2008...because of what this extra-Terrestrial did...don't hold it against him...only defending himself, you know."

Frigate's voice died away to a whisper. He grinned nervously at Monat.

Burton said, "You know this...Monat Grrautut?"

"Not exactly," Frigate said. "I saw enough of him on TV, of course, and heard enough and read enough about him."

He held out his hand as if he expected it to be rejected. Monat smiled, and they shook hands.

Frigate said, "I think it'd be a good idea if we banded together. We may need protection."

"Why?" Burton said, though he knew well enough.

“You know how rotten most humans are,” Frigate said. “Once people get used to being resurrected they’ll be fighting for women and food and anything that takes their fancy. And I think we ought to be buddies with this Neanderthal or whatever he is. Anyway, he’ll be a good man in a fight.”

Kazz, as he was named later on, seemed pathetically eager to be accepted. At the same time, he was suspicious of anyone who got too close.

A woman walked by then, muttering over and over in German, “My God! What have I done to offend Thee?”

A man, both fists clenched and raised to shoulder height, was shouting in Yiddish, “My beard! My beard!”

Another man was pointing at his genitals and saying in Slovenian, “They’ve made a Jew of me! Jew! Do you think that...? No, it couldn’t be!”

Burton grinned savagely and said, “It doesn’t occur to him that maybe They have made a Mohammedan out of him or an Australian aborigine or an ancient Egyptian, all of whom practice circumcision.”

“What did he say?” asked Frigate. Burton translated; Frigate laughed.

A woman hurried by; she was making a pathetic attempt to cover her breasts and pubic regions with her hands. She was muttering, “What will they think, what will they think?” And she disappeared behind the trees.

A man and a woman passed them; they were talking loudly in Italian as if they were separated by a broad highway.

“We can’t be in Heaven...I know, oh my God, I know!...There was Giuseppe Zomzini and you know what a wicked man he was...he ought to burn in hellfire! I know, I know...he stole from the treasury, he frequented whorehouses, he drank himself to death...yet...he’s here!...I know, I know...!”

Another woman was running and screaming in German, “Daddy! Daddy! Where are you? It’s your own darling Hilda!”

A man scowled at them and said repeatedly, in Hungarian, “I’m as good as anyone and better than some. To hell with them.”

A woman said, “I wasted my whole life, my whole life. I did everything for them, and now...!”

A man, swinging the metal cylinder before him as if it were a censer, called out, “Follow me to the mountains! Follow me! I know the truth, good people! Follow me! We’ll be safe in the bosom of the Lord! Don’t believe this illusion around you; follow me! I’ll open your eyes!”

Others spoke gibberish or were silent, their lips tight as if they feared to utter what was within them.

“It’ll take some time before they straighten out,” Burton said. He felt that it would take a long time before the world became mundane for him, too.

“They may never know the truth,” Frigate said.

“What do you mean?”

“They didn’t know the Truth—capital T—on Earth, so why should they here? What makes you think we’re going to get a revelation?”

Burton shrugged and said, “I don’t. But I do think we ought to determine just what our environment is and how we can survive in it. The fortune of a man who sits, sits also.”

He pointed toward the riverbank. “See those stone mushrooms? They seem to be spaced out at intervals of a mile. I wonder what their purpose is?”

Monat said, “If you had taken a close look at that one, you would have seen that its surface contained about seven hundred round indentations. These are just the right size for the base of a cylinder to fit in. In fact, there is a cylinder in the center of the top surface. I think that if we examine that cylinder we may be able to determine their purpose. I suspect that it was placed there so we’d do just that.”

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