



**PHILIP K. DICK**

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**LIES, INC.**

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THE SUBINFO COMPUTERS owned by Lies, Incorporated had been caught in an unnatural act by a service mechanic. SubInfo computer Five had transmitted information which was not a lie.

It would have to be taken apart to see why. And to whom the correct information had gone.

Probably there would be no way to discern to whom the correct information had gone. But a carrier check maintained an automatic record of all subinformation transmitted by the bank of computers located here and there on Terra. The information had to do with a rat. According to the carrier check the rat lived with a colony of other rats in a garbage dump in Oakland, California.

What importance could information dealing with a rat have? Lewis Stine, the chief mechanic for Lies, Incorporated, pondered this as he broke the flow of current to SubInfo computer Five and prepared to begin taking it apart. Of course he could ask the computer ... but the computer, being programmed to lie, would of course lie—even to Lies, Incorporated itself. That was an irony which Stine did not appreciate. This problem always surfaced when it came time to dismantle one of the computers.

Any other bank of computers, Stine thought, could be asked.

Just for a moment he restored power to SubInfo computer Five and punched buttons on the console of a terminal. Whom did you transmit to? he asked.

BEN APPLEBAUM, RACHMAEL

"Fine," Stine said. At least he knew that. Somebody on Terra with the name Rachmael ben Applebaum probably now knew more about rats than he cared to know, albeit on a subliminal basis.

You're probably thinking a lot about rats these days, Mr. ben Applebaum, Stine said to himself. And you are wondering why.

Again he cut the power to the computer. And began to go to work.

Standing before his bathroom mirror shaving, Rachmael ben Applebaum thought about the delicious taste of cheeseburger fragments—not a whole cheeseburger (you rarely found those) but the wonderful dried bits lying here and there among the coffee grounds, grapefruit rinds and egg shells.

I'll fly over to Bob's Big Boy, he decided, and order a cheeseburger for breakfast.

And then he thought, It's those damn dreams.

Actually it was one dream over and over again. And he always had it around three A.M.; several times he had awakened, gotten out of bed, bewildered and disturbed by the intensity of the dream, and noted the clock. The *place* he dreamed of; it was awful. And yet, for some reason, while he was actually there—actually dreaming—the place seemed great. And this was the part that bothered him the most: that he liked it so. It seemed familiar; it seemed to be a place he regarded as home.

However, so did a number of other people—

People. They hadn't looked exactly like people, although they had talked like people.

"That's mine," Fred said, holding on to an armload of dog kibble.

"The hell you say," Rachmael said angrily. "I saw it first. Give it here or I'll pop you."

He and Fred fought over the armload of dog kibble, and Rachmael finally won. But he won in an odd way: by biting Fred on the shoulder. He hadn't hit him; he had bitten him.

Strange, Rachmael thought as he continued to shave.

I'm going to have to see a psychiatrist, he said to himself. Maybe it's memories of a former life. Millions of years ago before I ... before I had evolved into a human being. Far lower on the evolutionary scale. Biting people, or rather biting animals. Yes, he thought; Fred was an animal of

some kind. But we talked English.

—In his dream he kept a secret hoard of valuables which the others in the settlement knew nothing about. He thought of them now, those precious artifacts which he cherished, which he had gone to such lengths—and effort—to acquire. Mostly food, of course; nothing was more important than food. And yet—you could sometimes find string. He had a lot of string: fine brown string; he had wound it up into a heap and, during the day, he slept in the midst of it. The pile of string comforted him; it lulled him and made his dreams peaceful. All but one; there at the settlement, asleep during the day in his pile of string, he had one dreadful dream which kept coming back.

It had to do with a huge fish opening its mouth wide ... and vast ugly teeth strove to crunch him, crunch him with avid relish.

Jeez, Rachmael said. Maybe I'm not here shaving; maybe I'm just dreaming this. Maybe I'm asleep in my pile of string, and having a good dream, not the bad one; having the dream where I'm a—  
He thought, *A man.*

So then, by inference, he thought, I'm not a man when I'm at the settlement. That would explain why I bit, and why Fred bit. That son-of-a-bitch, he said to himself. He knows where a lot of dog kibble is and he won't tell any of the rest of us. I'll find it; I'll find his trove.

But then, he realized, while I'm out doing that, maybe Fred (or someone else) will find *my* trove and take away my string. My wonderful string which was so hard to drag back to my hiding place; it kept snagging and catching on things ... I'll defend that string with my life, Rachmael said to himself. Any son-of-a-bitch who tries to steal it will wind up without his face.

He looked at his wristwatch. Got to hurry, he said to himself. It's late; I overslept again. And I can't get the dream out of my head. It was too vivid for a dream. It wasn't a dream; maybe it was involuntary telepathy of some kind. Or contact with an alternate universe. That's probably what it was another Earth on which I was born as an animal rather than a human being.

Or a microwave transmission, using my brain as a transducer without an electronic interface. They have those, especially the police agencies.

He was very much afraid of the world-wide police agencies. Especially Lies, Incorporated, the worst police agency of them all. Even the Soviet police were afraid of them.

They're beaming psychotronic signals at me subliminally while I'm asleep, he thought. And then he realized how paranoid that was. Christ; no sane person would think that. And even if Lies, Incorporated did transmit microwave-boosted telepathic information to him in his sleep, would it have to do with rats?

With rats!

I'm a goddamn rat, he realized. When I go to sleep I abreact back millions of years to when I was once a rat, and I think rat thoughts and have rat ideas; I cherish what a rat cherishes. That explains my fighting with Fred for the dog kibble. It's simple: memories from the paleocortex, rather than the neocortex.

There's an anatomical explanation. Has to do with accretional layers of the brain; the brain has old layers which come to wakefulness during normal sleep.

That's the trouble with living in a police state, he said to himself; you think—you imagine—the police are behind everything. You get paranoid and think they're beaming information to you in your sleep, to subliminally control you. Actually the police wouldn't do that. The police are our friends.

Or was *that* idea beamed to me subliminally? he wondered suddenly. "The police are our friends." The hell they are!

He continued shaving, feeling glum about the whole thing. Maybe the dream will stop coming, he said to himself. Or—

Pausing, he thought, Maybe the dream is trying to tell me something.

For a long time he stood without moving, the razor held away from his face. Tell me what? That I'm living in a garbage dump where there's dried scraps of food, rotting food, other rats?

He trembled.

And, as best he could, continued shaving.

"SYN-COF?" THE RECEPTIONIST asked sympathetically. "Or Martian fnikjuice tea, while you wait?"

Rachmael ben Applebaum, getting out a genuine Tampa, Florida Garcia y Vega cigarillo, said, "I'll just sit, thanks." He lit the cigar, waited. For Miss Freya Holm. He wondered what she looked like. If she was as pretty as the receptionist—

A soft voice said, almost timidly, "Mr. ben Applebaum? I'm Miss Holm. If you'll come into my office—" She held the door open, and she was perfection; his Garcia y Vega cigarillo dwindled, neglected in the ashtray as he rose to his feet. She, no more than twenty, chitin-black long hair that hung freely down her shoulders, teeth white as the glossy bond of the expensive UN info mags ... he stared at her, at the small girl in the gold-spray bodice and shorts and sandals, with the single camellia over her left ear, stared and thought, *And this is my police protection.*

"Sure." Numbly, he passed her, entered her small, contemporarily furnished office; in one glance he saw artifacts from the extinct cultures of six planets. "But Miss Holm," he said, then, candidly. "Maybe your employers didn't explain; there's pressure here. I've got one of the most powerful economic syndromes in the Sol system after me. Trails of Hoffman—"

"THL," Miss Holm said, seating herself at her desk and touching the *on* of her aud-recorder, "is the owner of Dr. Sepp von Einem's teleportation construct and hence monopolistically has made obsolete the hyper-see liners and freighters of Applebaum Enterprise." On her desk before her she had a folio, which she consulted. "You see, Mr. Rachmael ben Applebaum—" She glanced up. "I wish to keep you in data-reference distinct from your father, the late Maury Applebaum. So may I call you Rachmael?"

"Y-yes," he said, nettled by her coolness, her small, firm poise—and the folio which lay before her; long before he had consulted Listening Instructional Educational Services—or, as the pop mind called it in UN-egged-on derision, Lies, Incorporated—the police agency had gathered, with its many monitors, the totality of information pertaining to him and to the collapse from abrupt technological obsolescence of the once formidable Applebaum Enterprise. And—

"Your late father," Freya Holm said, "died evidently at his own instigation. Officially the UN police list it as *Selbstmort* ... suicide. We however—" She paused, consulting the folio. "Hmmm."

Rachmael said, "I'm not satisfied, but I'm resigned." After all, he could not bring back his heavy red-faced, near-sighted and highly over-taxed father. *Selbstmort*, in the official German of the UN, or not. "Miss Holm," he began, but she cut him off, gently.

"Rachmael, the Telpor electronic entity of Dr. Sepp von Einem, researched and paid for, developed in the several interplan labs of Trails of Hoffman, could do nothing else than bring chaos to the drayage industry. Theodoric Ferry, who is chairman of the board of THL, must have known this when he financed Dr. von Einem at his Schweinfurt labs where the Tel- por ..."

Her voice faded.

Rachmael ben Applebaum sat with a circle of friends around a superior person, very wise and ancient. They called him Abba, which meant Daddy. When Abba spoke the entire settlement listened and as best they could the individuals committed to memory what Abba told them. Because what that ancient person told them had an absolute quality to it; Abba had not originated in the settlement, but knew things which no one else knew, and he guided them all.

"... breakthrough occurred," Abba said in his low, gentle voice. "And yet THL owned—outside of your father's—the largest single holding of the now-defunct Applebaum Enterprise. Therefore, my little ones, know this: Trails of Hoffman Limited deliberately ruined a corporation which it had major



investments in ... and this, I admit, has seemed strange to us."

~~The wise, elderly Abba faded out. Freya Holm glanced up alertly, tossed back her mass of black hair.~~

"And now they hound you for restitution; correct?"

Rachmael blinked; he managed to nod mutely.

Quietly, Miss Holm asked, "How long did it take a passenger liner of your father's corporation to reach Whale's Mouth with a load of, say, five hundred colonists, plus their personal effects?"

After a tormented pause he said, "We—never even tried. Years. Even at hyper-see."

The girl, across from him, still waited, wanting to hear him say it.

"With our flagship transport," he said, "eighteen years."

"And with Dr. von Einem's teleportation instrument—"

"Fifteen minutes," he said harshly. And Whale's Mouth, the number IX planet of the Fomalhaut system, was to date the sole planet discovered either by manned or unmanned observers which was truly habitable—truly a second Terra. Eighteen years ... and even deep-sleep would not help, for such a prolonged period; aging, although slowed down, although consciousness was dimmed, still occurred. Alpha and Prox; that had been all right; that had been short enough. But Fomalhaut, at twenty-four light years—

"We just couldn't compete," he said, "We simply could not carry colonists that far."

"Would you have tried, without von Einem's Telpor breakthrough?"

Rachmael said, "My father—"

"Was thinking about it." She nodded. "But then he died and it was too late and now you've had to sell virtually all your ships to meet note-payment due-dates. Now, from us, Rachmael. You wanted ... ?"

"I still own," he said, "our fastest, newest, biggest ship, the *Omphalos*. She's never been sold, no matter how great the pressure THL has put on me, within and outside the UN courts." He hesitated, then said it. "I want to go to Whale's Mouth. By ship. Not by Dr. von Einem's Telpor. And by my own ship, by what we meant to be our—" He broke off. "I want to take her all the way to Fomalhaut, on an eighteen-year voyage—alone. And when I arrive at Whale's Mouth I'll prove—"

"Yes?" Freya said. "Prove what, Rachmael?"

As he sat there, formulating his answer, he saw again the tender, intelligent shape of Abba; but Abba did not look human. A fur of darkness and complexity covered Abba and as the wise one spoke his voice seemed shrill and eerie. Remnants of the dream, Rachmael realized; coming back at me in my waking state.

Abba said, "There lies a wonderful place. In it lies very fine food. In it lies ... in it lies ... *lies*."

The last word lingered in Rachmael's mind. *Lies*.

Across from him the girl waited for him to answer.

"Lies," he said. "Something about lies."

"Oh, the name they give us." Freya laughed.

A pun, he thought. The two words sound the same, spelled the same, but mean different things.

"That we could have done it," Rachmael said. "Had von Einem not come along with that teleportation thing, that—" He gestured and felt, within him, impotent fury. And still the word lingered in his mind, traced there by Abba, who was wise but who was not human.

Lies.

Freya said, "Telpor is one of the most vital discoveries in human history, Rachmael. Teleportation, from one star-system to another. Twenty-four light-years in fifteen minutes. When you reach Whale's Mouth by the *Omphalos*, I for instance will be—" She calculated. "Forty-three years old."

He was silent.

~~"What," Freya asked in a soft voice, "would you accomplish by your trip?"~~

He thought, This is Lies, Incorporated that I am sitting here talking to. The last people in the world I should be talking to. I may have been programmed by them to come here, programmed subliminally, in my sleep, my dreams ... which explains the word *lies*.

Presently Freya said, reading from her folio, "You have, for six months now, been thoroughly checking out the *Omphalos* at a concealed—even from us—launch field and maintenance dock on Luna. She is now considered ready for the inter-system flight. Trails of Hoffman has tried, through the courts, to attach her, to claim her as their legal property; this you have managed to fight. So far. But now—"

"My lawyers tell me," Rachmael said, "that three days stand between me and THL seizing the *Omphalos*."

"You can't blast off within three days?"

"The deep-sleep equipment. It's a week from being readied." He let out his breath raggedly. "A subsidiary of THL manufactures vital components. They've been—held up."

Freya nodded. "And your coming here is to request us to pick up the *Omphalos*, with one of our veteran pilots, disappear with her for at least a week, until she's ready for the flight to Fomalhaut. Correct?"

"That's it," he said, and sat waiting.

After a pause Freya said, "You can't pilot the ship yourself?"

"I'm not good enough to lose her," Rachmael said. "They'd find me. But yours—one of your top-line pilots." He did not look directly at her; it meant too much.

"You can pay our fee of—"

"Nothing."

"*Nothing*'?"

"I have absolutely no funds. Later, as I continue to liquidate the assets of the corporation, possibly I—"

Freya said, "There's a note here from my employer, Mr. Glazer-Holliday. He observes that you're poscredless. His instructions to us—" She read the note, silently. "However, we're to cooperate with you."

"Why?"

"My employer doesn't say. We have been aware of your financial helplessness for some time." Glancing up at him she said, "We will okay the dispatch of an experienced pilot who will take—"

"Then you expect me to come here."

She gazed at him.

"Did you suggest that I come here?" he said. "Because to be honest with you I do not trust Lies, Incorporated."

"Well, we lie a lot." She smiled.

"But you can save the *Omphalos*."

"Probably. Our pilot—and he will be one of our best—will take the *Omphalos* off where THL, where even the UN agents acting for the Secretary General, Herr Horst Bertold, won't find her."

"Probably," he echoed.

"This our man can do," Freya continued, "while you manage, if you can, to obtain the final components of the deep-sleep equipment. But I doubt if you'll obtain those components, Rachmael. There's an additional memo here to that effect, too. You're correct: Theodoric Ferry sits on its board directors, too, and this is all legal, this monopoly which the firm possesses." Her smile was bitter. "Unsanctioned."

He was silent. Obviously it was hopeless; no matter how long the Lies, Incorporated professional and ultra-veteran space pilot kept the huge liner the *Omphalos* lost between planets, the components would be "held up unavoidably," as the invoices, marked back-order, would read.

"I think," Freya said presently, "that your problem is not the mere obtaining of deep-sleep components. That can be handled; there are ways ... we, for instance, can—although this will cost you a good deal of money eventually—pick them up on the black market. Your problem, Rachmael—"

"I know," he said. His problem was not *how* to get to the Fomalhaut system, to its ninth planet, Whale's Mouth which—

Again the furred body phased in, the superimposition.

"There it lies," Abba said. "Lies ... lies ... lies."

Damn double exposure of reality, Rachmael said to himself; he blinked. What is this, a reality dysfunction of some kind? Or something coming from his right hemisphere to his left, some vital information available to the right which it now urged on the left?

—which was Terra's sole thriving colony world. In fact his problem was not the eighteen-year voyage at all.

His problem was—

"Why go at all?" Abba intoned, the vast animal figure to whom they all looked for the dispensation of wisdom. "When Dr. von Einem's Telpor construct, available at a nominal cost through any of Trails of Hoffman's many retail outlets on Terra—"

Yes, yes, Rachmael thought irritably.

"—makes the trip a mere fifteen-minute minor journey, and within financial reach of even the most modest, income-wise speaking, Terran family?" Abba smiled his tender smile. "Consider that, dear son."

Aloud, Rachmael said, "Freya, the trip by Telpor to Whale's Mouth—it sounds fine." And forty million Terran citizens had taken advantage of it. And the aud and vid reports returning—via the Telpor construct—all told glowingly of a world not overcrowded, of tall grass, of odd but benign animals, of new and lovely cities built by robot-assists taken across at UN-expense to Whale's Mouth. "But—"

"But," Freya said, who was now combined with Abba into one tender and wise entity, huge and furry and pretty, "the peculiar fact is that it's a one-way trip."

Instantly he nodded. "Yes, that's it."

"Sure it is," Freya-Abba said as with a single voice.

"No one can come back," Rachmael said.

The double entity smiled in a cunning way, a sly way. "That is easily explained, my son. The So system is located at the axis of the universe."

"What the hell does that mean?" Rachmael said.

"The recession of the extra-galactic nebulae demonstrate von Einem's Theorem One that—" The voice turned into garbled noise, and the double impositions blurred, as if a locking control had gotten twisted; the entire image became warped and deformed, and then, suddenly, the double figure facing him was upside down.

"There must," Rachmael continued, as best he could, considering that he was now talking to a dual entity which was upside down, "out of those forty million people, be a few who want to return. But the TV and 'pape reports say they're all actually totally ecstatically happy. You've seen the endless TV shows, life at Newcolonizedland. It's—"

The upside-down figure belched. "Lies," it said.

"What?" Rachmael said.

"Too perfect, Rachmael?" The figure slowly rotated until it became right-side up, and then Abba faded out; only the girl remained.

"Statistically, *malcontents must exist*. Why do we never hear of them? And we can't go and take a look." Because, if you went by Telpor to Whale's Mouth and saw, you were there, as they were, *to stay*. So if you did find malcontents—what could you do for them? Because you could not take them back; you could only join them. And he had the intuition that somehow this just wouldn't be of much use. Even the UN left Newcolonizedland alone, the countless UN welfare agencies, the personnel and bureaus newly set up by the present Secretary General Horst Bertold, from New Whole Germany: the largest political entity in Europe—even they stopped at the Telpor gates. Neues Einige Deutschland NED. Far more powerful than the mangy, dwindling French Empire or the UK—they were pale remnants of the past.

And New Whole Germany—as the election to UN Secretary General of Horst Bertold showed—was the Wave of the Future ... as the Germans themselves liked to phrase it.

"So in other words," Freya said, "you'd take an empty passenger liner to the Fomalhaut system, spend eighteen years in transit, you, the sole unteleported man, among the seven billion citizens of Terra, with the idea—or should I say, the hope?—that when you arrive finally at Whale's Mouth, in the year 2032, you'll find a passenger complement, five hundred or so unhappy souls who want out? And so you then can resume commercial operations ... von Einem takes them there in fifteen minutes and then eighteen years later you return them to Terra, back home to the Sol system."

"Yes," he said fiercely.

"Plus another eighteen years—for them—too—for the flight back. For you thirty-six years in all. You'd return to Terra in the year—" She calculated. "2050 AD. I'd be sixty-one years old; Theodoric Ferry, even Horst Bertold, would be dead; perhaps Trails of Hoffman Limited wouldn't even exist, anymore ... certainly Dr. Sepp von Einem would be dead years ago; let's see: he's in his eighties now. No, he'd never live to see you reach Whale's Mouth, let alone return. So if all this is to make him feel bad—"

"Is it insane?" Rachmael said. "To believe, first, that *some* unhappy persons must be stuck at Whale's Mouth ... and yet we're not hearing, via THL's monopoly of all info media, all energy, passing back this way. And second—"

"And second," Freya said, "to want to spend eighteen years of your life in getting there to rescue them." Professional, intent, she eyed him. "Is this idealism? Or is this vengeance against Dr. von Einem because of his Telpor construct that made your family's liners and commercial carriers obsolete for inter-system travel? After all, if you do manage to leave in the *Omphalos*, it'll be big news, a novelty; it'll be fully covered on TV and in the 'papes, here on Terra; even the UN won't be able to squelch the story—the first, sole, *manned* vessel to go to Fomalhaut, not just one of those old-time instrument packages. Why, you'd be a time capsule; we'd all be waiting for you to arrive first there and then, in 2050, back here."

"A time capsule," he said, "like the one fired off at Whale's Mouth. Which never arrived here on Terra."

She shrugged. "Passed Terra by, was attracted by the sun's gravitational field; was swallowed up unnoticed."

"Unnoticed by *any* tracking station? Out of over six thousand separate monitoring devices in orbit in the Sol system *none* detected the time capsule when it arrived?"

Frowning, Freya said, "What do you mean to imply, Rachmael?"

"This time capsule," Rachmael said, "from Whale's Mouth, the launching of which we watched years ago on TV—it wasn't detected by our tracking stations because it never arrived. And it never arrived, Miss Holm, because despite those crowd scenes *it was never sent*."

"You mean what we saw on TV—"

"The vid signals, via Telpor," Rachmael said, "which showed the happy masses at Whale's Mouth cheering at the vast public launching ceremony of the time capsule—were fakes. I've run and rerun recordings of them; the crowd noise is spurious." Reaching into his cloak he brought out a seven-inch reel of iron oxide Ampex and tape; he tossed it onto her desk. "Play it back. Carefully. *There were no people cheering.* And for a good reason. Because no time capsule, containing quaint artifacts from the Fomalhaut ancient civilizations, was launched from Whale's Mouth."

"But—" She stared at him in disbelief, then picked up the aud tape, held the reel uncertainly. "Why?"

"I don't know," Rachmael said. "But when the *Omphalos* reaches the Fomalhaut system and Whale's Mouth and I see Newcolonizedland, I'll know." And, he thought, I don't think I'll find ten or sixty malcontents out of forty million ... by that time, of course, it'll be something like a billion colonists. I'll find—

He ended the thought abruptly. He did not know.

But eventually he would know. In the little matter of eighteen years.

IN THE SYBARITIC living room of his villa, on his satellite as it orbited Terra, the owner of Lies, Incorporated, Matson Glazer-Holliday, sat in his human-made dressing gown smoking a prize, rare Antonio y Cleopatra cigar and listening to the aud tape of the crowd noises.

And, directly before him he watched the oscilloscope as it transformed the audio signal into a visual one.

To Freya Holm he said, "Yes, there is a cycle. You can see it, even though you can't hear it. This aud-track is continuous, running over and over *again*. Hence the man's right; it's a fake."

"Could Rachmael ben Applebaum have—"

"No," Matson said. "I've sequestered an aud copy from the UN info archives; it agrees. Rachmael didn't tamper with the tape; it's exactly what he claims it to be." He sat back, pondering.

Strange, he thought, that von Einem's Telpor gadget works only one way, radiating matter out ... with no return of that matter, at least by teleportation, possible. So, rather conveniently for Trails of Hoffman, all we get via Telpor as a feedback from Whale's Mouth is an electronic signal, energy alone ... and this one now exposed as a fake; as a research agency I should have discovered this long ago—Rachmael, with all his creditors hounding him jet-balloonwise, keeping him awake night and day, hammering at him with countless technological assists, impeding him in the normal course of conducting routine business, has detected this spuriousness, and I—damn it. Matson thought; I missed, here. He felt gloomy.

"Cutty Sark Scotch and water?" Freya asked.

He nodded absently as Freya, who was his mistress, disappeared into the liquor antechamber of the villa to see if the 1985 bottle—worth a fortune—were empty yet.

But, on the credit side, he had been suspicious.

From the start he had doubted the so-called "Theorem One" of Dr. von Einem; it sounded too much like a cover, this one-way transmission by the technicians of THL's multitude of retail outlets. Write home from Whale's Mouth, son, when you get there, he thought acidly; tell your old mom how it is on the colony world with its fresh air, sunshine, all those cute little animals, those wondrous buildings THL robots are constructing ... and the report-back, the letter, *as electronic signal*, had duly arrived. But the beloved son; he could not personally, directly report. Could not return to tell his story and, as in the ancient story of the lion's den, all the footprints of guileless creatures led *in* to the den, yet none led *out*. It was the fable all over again—with something even more sinister added. That of what appeared more and more to be a thoroughly phony trail of *outgoing* tracks: the electronic message-units. By someone who is versed in sophisticated hardware, Matson thought; someone is tinkering around, and is there any reason to look beyond the figure of Dr. Sepp von Einem himself, the inventor of the Telpor, plus Neues Einige Deutschland's very efficient technicians who ran Ferry's retail machinery?

There was something he did not like about those German technicians who manned the Telpors. So business-like. As their ancestors must have been, Matson mused. Back in the twentieth century when those ancestors, with the same affectless calm, fed bodies into ovens or living humans into ersatz shower baths which turned out to be Zyklon B hydrogen cyanide gas chambers. And financed by reputable big Third Reich business, by Herr Krupp u. Söhne. Just as von Einem is financed by Trails of Hoffman, with its vast central offices in Grosser Berlinstadt—the new capital of New Whole Germany, the city in fact from which our distinguished UN Secretary General emanates.

"Get me," Matson said to Freya, "instead of Scotch and water, the file on Horst Bertold."

In the other room Freya rang up the autonomic research equipment wired into the walls of the villa ... electronic hardware, minned—miniaturized—for the most part, of a data-sorting and receiving nature, plus the file-banks, and—

Certain useful artifacts which did *not* involve data but which involved high-velocity A-warhead darts that, were the satellite to be attacked by any of the UN's repertory of offensive weapons, would take up the fight and abolish the missiles before they reached their target.

At his villa on his Brocard ellipse satellite Matson was safe. And, as a precaution, he conducted as much business as possible from this spot; below, in New New York City, at Lies, Incorporated's offices, he always felt naked. Felt, in fact, the nearby presence of the UN and Horst Bertold's legions of "Peace Workers," whose armed, gray-faced men and women who, in the name of Pax Terrae, roamed the world, even into the pathetic moonies, the sad, failure-but-still-extant early "colony" satellites which had come before von Einem's breakthrough and the discovery by George Hoffman of Fomalhaut IX, now called Whale's Mouth and now *the* colony.

Too bad, Matson thought archly, that George Hoffman didn't discover more planets in more star systems habitable by us, the frail needs of living, sentient, mentating biochemical upright bipeds which we humans are. Hundreds and hundreds of planets, but—

Instead, temperature which melted thermo-fuses. No air. No soil. No water.

One could hardly say of such worlds—Venus had proved a typical example—that the "living was easy." The living, in fact, on such worlds was confined to homeostatic domes with their own at, wa, and self-regu temp.

Housing, per dome, perhaps three hundred somatic souls. Rather a small number, considering that as of this year Terra's population stood at seven billion.

"Here," Freya said, sliding down to seat herself, legs tucked under her, on the deep-pile wool carpet near Matson. "The file on H.B." She opened it at random; Lies, Incorporated field reps had done a thorough job: many data existed here that, via the UN's carefully watchdogged info media, never had reached the public, even the so-called "critical" analysts and columnists. They could, by law, criticize to their hearts' content, the character, habits, abilities and shaving-customs of Herr Bertold ... except, however, the basic facts were denied them.

Not so, however, to Lies, Incorporated—an ironic sobriquet, in view of the absolutely verified nature of the data now before its owner.

It was harsh reading. Even for him.

The year of Horst Bertold's birth: 1954. Slightly before the Space Age had begun; like Matson Glazer-Holliday, Horst was a remnant of the old world when all that had been glimpsed in the sky were "flying saucers," a misnomer for a US Air Force anti-missile weapon which had, in the brief confrontation of 1982, proved ineffectual. Horst had been born to middle-class Berlin—West Berlin, had then been called, because, and this was difficult to remember, Germany had in those days been divided—parents: his father had owned a meat market ... rather fitting, Matson reflected, in that Horst's father had been an SS officer and former member of an Einsatzgruppe which had murdered thousands of innocent persons of Slavic and Jewish ancestry ... although this had not interfered with Johann Bertold's meat market business in the 1950s and '60s. And then, in 1972, at the age of eighteen young Horst himself had entered the spotlight (needless to say, the statute of limitations had run out on his father, who had never been prosecuted by the West German legal apparatus for his crimes of the '40s, and had, in addition, evaded the commando squads from Israel who, by 1970, had closed up shop giving up the task of tracking down the former mass-murderers). Horst, in 1972, had been a leader in the Reinholt Jugend.

Ernst Reinholt, from Hamburg, had headed a party which had striven to unify Germany once more; the deal would be that as a military and economic power she would be neutral between East and

West. It had taken ten more years, but in the fracas of 1982 he had obtained from the US and the USSR what he wanted: a united, free Germany, called by its present name, and just chuck full of vim and *Macht*.

And, under Reinholt, Neues Einige Deutschland had played dirty pool from the start. But no one was really surprised; East and West were busy erecting tents where major popcens—population centers such as Chicago and Moscow—had existed, and hoping to god that the Sino-Cuban wing of the CP did not, taking advantage of the situation, move in and entrench ...

It had been the secret protocol of Reinholt and his NWG that it would not be neutral after all. Or the contrary.

New Whole Germany would take out China.

So this was the unsavory basis on which the Reich had reobtained unity. Its *Waffen* technicians had devised, as instructed, weapons which had, in 1987, dealt a terminal punch to People's China. Matson, examining the folio, very rapidly scanned this part, because the Reich had come up with some show-stoppers, and even the abominable US nerve gas had seemed like a field of daisies in comparison—he did not wish to see any mention of what Krupp u. Söhne had devised as an answer to China's thousands of millions who were spilling as far west as the Volga, and toward the US, were crossing from Siberia—taken in 1983—into Alaska. In any case the compact had been agreed on, and even Faust would have blanched at it; now the world had no People's China but a New Whole Germany to contend with.

And what a quid pro quo that had proved to be. Because, correctly and legally, Neues Einige Deutschland had obtained control of the sole planet-wide and hence Sol system-wide governing structure, the UN. They held it now. And the former member of the Reinholt Jugend, Horst Bertold, was its Secretary General. And had faced squarely, as he had promised when campaigning for election—it had become, by 1985, an elective office—that he would deal with the colonization problem; he would find a Final Solution to the tormented condition that (one) Terra was as overpopulated throughout as Japan had been in 1960 and (two) both the alternate planets of the Sol system and the moonies and the domes et al. had failed wretchedly.

Horst had found, via Dr. von Einem's Telpor teleportation construct, a habitable planet in a star system too far from Sol to be reached by the quondam drayage enterprise of Maury Applebaum. Whale's Mouth, and the Telpor mechanisms at Trails of Hoffman's retail outlets, were *the* answer.

To all appearances it was duck soup, feathers, scut included. But—

"See?" Matson said to Freya. "Here's the written transcript of Horst Bertold's speech before he was elected and before von Einem showed up with the Telpor gadget. *The promise was made before teleportation to the Fomalhaut system was technologically possible*—in fact, before the existence of Fomalhaut IX was even known to unmanned elderly relay-monitors."

"So?"

Matson said grimly, "So our UN Secretary General had a mandate before he had a solution. And to the German mind that means one thing and one thing only. The cat and rat farm solution." Or, as he now suspected, the dog food factory solution.

It had been suggested, ironically, in imitation of Swift by a fiction writer of the 1950s, that the "Negro Question" in the US be solved by the building of giant factories which made Negroes into canned dog food. Satire, of course, like Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, that the problem of starvation among the Irish be solved by the eating of the children ... Swift himself lamenting, as a final irony, that he had no children of his own to offer to the market for consumption. Grisly. But—

This all pointed to the seriousness—not merely of the problem of overpopulation and insufficient food production—but to the insane, schizoid solutions seriously being considered. The brief World War Three—never officially called that; called instead a Pacifying Action, just as the Korean War had



been a "Police Action"—had taken care of a few millions of people, but—not quite enough. As a solution it had worked to a partial extent; and was, in many influential quarters, viewed exactly as that; as a partial solution. Not as a catastrophe but as a half-answer.

And Horst Bertold had promised the balance of the answer.

Whale's Mouth was it.

"So in my opinion," Matson murmured, to himself mostly, "I've always been suspicious of Whale's Mouth. If I hadn't read Swift and C. Wright Mills and the Herman Kahn Report for Rand Corporation ..." He glanced at Freya. "There have," he said, "always been people who would solve the problem that way." *And I think*, he thought, as he listened to the aud tape of the crowd noises, a tape which pretended to consist of a transcript from the launching, at Whale's Mouth, of the ritualistic, celebration-inspired time capsule back through hyper-space—or in some such ultra-high-velocity fashion—to Terra, *that we have those people and that solution with us again.*

We have, in other words, UN Secretary General Horst Bertold and Trails of Hoffman Limited and its economic multi-pseudopodia empire. And dear Dr. Sepp von Einem and his many Telpor outlets, his curiously *one way* teleporting machine.

"That land," Matson murmured, vaguely quoting, lord knew who, what sage of the past, "which all of us must visit one day ... that land beyond the grave. But no one had returned to report on't. And until they do—"

Freya said perceptively, "Until they do, you're going to stay suspicious. Of the whole Newcolonizedland settlement. Aud and vid signals are not good enough to convince you—because you know how easily they can be faked." She gestured at the deck running the tape at this very moment.

"A client," Matson corrected her. "Who on a nonverbal level, what our Reich friends call *thinking with the blood*, suspects that if he takes his one remaining inter-stellar worthy flagship, the—" What was it called? "The *Navel*," he said. "The *Omphalos*; that's what that lofty Greek word means, by the way. Takes the *Navel* direct to Fomalhaut, that after eighteen years of weary deep-sleep which is not quite sleep, more a hypnagogic, restless tossing and turning at low temp, slowed-down metabolism, he will arrive at Whale's Mouth, and oddly it will not be beer and skittles. It will not be happy conapt dwellers, smiling children in autonomic schools, tame, exotic, native life forms. But—"

*But just what would he find?*

If, as he suspected, the aud and vid tracks passing from Whale's Mouth to Terra via von Einem's Telpor mechanisms were covers—what reality lay beneath?

He simply could not guess, not when forty million people were involved. The dog food factory? Are, god forbid, those forty million men, women and children *dead*? Is it a bone-yard, with no one there, no one even to extract the gold from their teeth—because now we use stainless steel?

He did not know, but—someone knew. Perhaps entire New Whole Germany, which, having cornered the lion's share of power in the UN, hence ruled throughout the nine planets of the Sol system; perhaps as a totality it, on a subrational, instinctive level, knew. As, in the 1940s, it had intuited the existence of the gas chambers beyond the cages of twittering birds and those high walls that kept out all sight and sound ... and except for that oddly acrid smoke from chimneys all day long

"They know," Matson said aloud. Horst Bertold knew, and so did Theodoric Ferry, the owner of THL, and so did doddering but still crafty old Dr. von Einem. And the one hundred and thirty-five million inhabitants of Neues Einige Deutschland, to some degree; not verbally—you couldn't put an expert psych rep of Lies, Incorporated in a small room with a Munich cobbler, run a few routine drug injections, make the standard quasi-Psionic transcripts, EEGs of his para-psychological reactions, and learn, know, the literal, exact truth.

The whole matter was, damn it, still obscured. And this time it was not cages of twittering birds

or shower baths but something else—something, however, equally effective. Trails of Hoffman published 3-D, multi-color, brilliantly artistic, exciting brochures displaying the ecstatic life beyond the Telpor nexus; the TV ran ceaseless, drive-you-mad ads all day and night, of the underpopulated veldt landscape of Whale's Mouth, the balmy climate (via olfactory track), the warm the-answer-is-yes two-moon-filled nights ... it was a land of romance, freedom, experimentation, kibbutzim without the desert: cooperative living where oranges grew *naturally*, and as large as grapefruits, which themselves resembled melons or the breasts of the women there. But.

Matson decided carefully, "I am sending a veteran field rep across, via normal Telpor, posing as an unmarried businessman who hopes to open a watch repair retail shop at Whale's Mouth. He will have grafted subderm a high-gain transmitter; it will—"

"I know," Freya said patiently; this was evening and she obviously wished for a relaxation of the grim reality of their mutual business. "It will regularly release a signal at ultra-high-frequency on a nonused band, which will ultimately be picked up here. But that'll take *weeks*."

"Okay." He had it now. The Lies, Incorporated field rep would send back a letter, via Telpor, in the customary manner encoded. It was that simple. If the letter arrived: fine. If not—

"You will wait," Freya said, "and wait. And no encoded letter will come. And then you will really begin to think that our client, Mr. ben Applebaum, has tripped over something ominous and huge in the long darkness which is our collective life. And *then* what will you do? Go across yourself?"

"Then I'm sending you," Matson said. "As the field rep there."

"No," she said, instantly.

"So Whale's Mouth frightens you. Despite all the glossy, expensive literature available free."

"I know Rachmael is right. I knew it when he walked in the door; I knew it from your memo. I'm not going; that's that." She faced her employer-paramour calmly.

"Then I'll draw at random from the field-personnel pool." He had not been serious; why should he offer his mistress as a pawn in this? But he had proved what he wished to prove: their joint fears were not merely intellectual. At this point in their thinking neither Freya nor he would risk the crossing via Telpor to Whale's Mouth, as thousands of guileless citizens of Terra, lugging their belongings and with innocent high hopes, did daily.

I hate, he thought, to turn anyone into the goat. But—

"Pete Burnside. Rep in Detroit. We'll tell him we wish to set up a Lies, Incorporated branch at Whale's Mouth under a cover name. Hardware store. Or TV fixit shop. Get his folio; see what talents he has." We'll make one of our own people, Matson thought, the victim—and it hurt, made him sick. And yet it should have been done months ago.

But it had taken bankrupt Rachmael ben Applebaum to goose them into acting, he realized. A man pursued by those monster creditor balloons that bellow all your personal defects and secrets. A man willing to undergo a *thirty-six-year trip* to prove that something is foul in the land of milk and protein on the far side of those Telpor gates through which, on receipt of five poscreds, any adult Terran can avail himself for the purpose of—

God knew.

God—and the German hierarchy dominating the UN plus THL; he had no illusions about that: *they* did not need to analyze the crowd-noise track of the time capsule ceremony at Whale's Mouth to know.

As he had. And his job was investigations; he was, he realized with spurting, burgeoning horror, possibly the only individual on Terra *really* in a position to push through and obtain an authentic glimpse of this.

Short of eighteen years of space flight ... a time-period which would allow infinite millions, even a billion if the extrapolations were correct, to pass by way of Telpor constructs on that—to him—

terrifying one-way trip to the colony world.

~~If you are wise, Matson said to himself grimly, you never take one-way trips. Anywhere. Even to Boise, Idaho ... even across the street. Be certain, when you start, *that you can scramble back.*~~

AT ONE IN the morning, Rachmael ben Applebaum was yanked from his sleep—this was usual, because the assorted creditor-mechanisms had been getting to him on a round-the-clock basis, now. However, this time it was no robot raptor-like creditor mechanism. This was a man. Dark, a Negro; small and shrewd-looking. Standing at Rachmael's door with i.d. papers extended.

"From Listening Instructional Educational Services," the Negro said. He added, "I hold a Class- inter-plan vehicle pilot-license."

That woke Rachmael. "You're going to take the *Omphalos* off Luna?"

"If I can find her." The dark, small man smiled briefly. "May I come in? I'd like you to accompany me to your maintenance yard on Luna so there's no mistake: I know your employees there are armed; otherwise—" He followed Rachmael into the conapt living room—the sole room, in fact: living-conditions on Terra being what they were. "Otherwise Trails of Hoffman would be ferrying equipment to their domes on Mars with the *Omphalos* as of last month—right?"

"Right," Rachmael said as he blearily dressed.

"My name's Al Dosker. And I did you a small side-favor, Mr. ben Applebaum. I took out a creditor-construct waiting in the hall." He displayed, then, a side arm. "I suppose, if it got into litigation, it'd be called 'property destruct.' Anyhow, when you and I leave, no THL device is going to monitor our path." He added, half to himself, "That I could detect, anyhow." At his chest he patted a variety of *bug chasers*; minned electronic instruments that recorded the presence of vid and aud receptors in the vicinity.

Shortly the two men were on their way to the roof field—

And then Rachmael was back at the settlement.

"It's my food," Fred said.

Oh god, Rachmael thought. Here I am again.

"The thing is," Fred said amiably, as he dragged the turkey leg across the weed-pocked ground, "that SubInfo computer screwed up. Subliminal information, right? They're repairing it, but meanwhile it's transmitted a lot to the right hemisphere hebesphere—I forget." He gave up trying to drag the turkey leg and extended his hand to Rachmael. "Name's Stine," he said. "Lewis Stine. I've damn near got it fixed."

Numbly, Rachmael shook hands. He wondered what had become of Dosker.

"Want to know how I'm fixing it?" Fred said.

"I'd rather know—"

"With this," Fred said, indicating the turkey leg. "It's a highly specialized piece of technogonically sophisticated—"

"You're just a goddamn rat," Rachmael said, "and you've got about four words scrambled up together. I'm living in a rat heap with other rats."

"No, I'm a highly skilled computer repairman," Fred—or Lewis Stine—said, looking nettled. "Or am I?" He contemplated the turkey leg. "You're right. It doesn't look like something you'd fix a computer with. Maybe I should lay back for a while and think this over. The problem is, I intended to eat that turkey leg. If that's what it is. See, while I'm working on the computer—which is what I'm doing right now, although you'd never know it—my thoughts are being transmitted to you because I haven't been able to shut the computer down. I mean I *can* shut it down, but that's contravindicated."

"Indicated," Rachmael corrected him.

"Yeah; contraindicated. Thank you." Fred eyed him. "You a computer repairman, too?"

"God no," Rachmael said.

"Rats are highly telepathic," Fred said. "This was proved back in 1978 by the Russians. They took these rats, see, and shut them inside a lead enclosure which screened out all thoughts. Then they hooked up the rats to an encephalograph. And then—" Fred grinned. "Get this. They killed the rats. You know what the encephalogram showed?"

"Flat line," Rachmael said.

"Right. And then they quickly brought in a psychic. The psychic thought at the dead rats, and the encephalograph showed brainwave activity. See? Isn't that clever?"

"Fascist Russians," Rachmael said hotly. He was not amused.

"You have to admit it's a clever way to prove that rats are telepathic," Fred said.

"No," Rachmael said, "it proves that psychics are telepathic. It just showed—"

"I'll mash in your head with this crescent wrench," Fred said, grabbing up the turkey leg as best he could. "All the great scientific discoveries were made by rats—*are* made by rats."

"Made by the use of rats," Rachmael corrected. He could see that Fred would never get the turkey leg off the ground.

"Rats keep the human population down," Fred said, abandoning his attempts to pick up the turkey leg. "Abba explained that to us before he died. He also explained where we go when we die."

"I know," Rachmael said. "I was there. I heard him."

The roof field faded back in, replacing the weed-pocked settlement; Fred and his turkey leg vanished.

Dosker had parked his taxi-marked flapple off to one side. "Get in," Dosker said to him.

"Have I been here all this time?" Rachmael said.

Glancing at him, Dosker said, "I don't get you."

"Never mind," Rachmael said.

How ordinary the flapple looked. But as it arced into the night sky Rachmael blinked at its velocity; he had to accept the obvious: this was not the usual thrust which now impelled them. They had hit 3.5 Machs within nanoseconds.

As Dosker piloted the flapple he reached into the glove compartment, brought out a turkey leg and began gnawing on it. Rachmael gazed at him fixedly, stricken. "What's the matter?" Dosker said. "Haven't you ever seen a turkey leg before?"

"It's fine," Rachmael said. "Fine looking turkey leg. Damn fine." He lapsed into silence.

A computer foul-up. But being repaired. To have to be clued in by a rat ... another rat, he realized. And the tender and wise Abba had passed on to his celestial reward. But he would be reborn; always, Abba was reborn. Every year or so. He was their—eternal leader.

"You'll direct me," Dosker was saying as he gnawed on the turkey leg. "Since even we at Lies, Incorporated don't know where you've got the *Omphalos*. You did a good job of berthing her, or perhaps we're beginning to slip ... or both."

"Okay." At the 3-D Lunar map he took hold of the locating trailing-arm, linked the pivot in position, then swept out a route until the terminus of the arm touched the recessed locus where his technicians worked busily at ...

I wish he'd stop gnawing on that turkey leg, Rachmael said to himself.

... at the *Omphalos*. Worked, while waiting for parts which would never come.

"We're off course," Dosker said abruptly. Speaking not to Rachmael but into his console mike. "Shit; we've been phooed."

*Phooed*—a trade term. Rachmael felt fear, because the word was a condensation of PU—picked up. Picked up by a field, and this one was moving Dosker's small flapple out of its trajectory. At once

Dosker fired the huge Whetstone-Milton rockets, tried to reassert with their enormous strength homeo-course ... but the field continued to tug, even against the millions of pounds of thrust of the twin engines, as both fired in unison, acting as retro-jets against the field exerting its presence unseen. But, on a variety of console instruments, registering.

Rachmael, after an interval of strained, wordless silence, said to Dosker, "Where's it taking us?"

"From a Three to L course," Dosker said laconically. He set down his turkey leg, now.

"Not to Luna, then." They would not, the two of them, reach the *Omphalos'* place of berth; that was now clear. But—

Where instead?

"We're in T-orb," Dosker said. Orbit around the Earth, despite the push of the two W-M engines. Dosker, now, reluctantly, in a motion of admitted defeat, cut them. Fuel for them had no doubt dropped to a dangerously low level: if the field let go they would orbit anyhow, orbit without the possibility of being capable of creating a trajectory that would lead to an ultimate landing either on Luna or on Terra. "They've got us," Dosker said, then, half to Rachmael and half into the mike that projected from the ship's console. He recited a series of encoded instructions into the mike, listened, then cursed, said to Rachmael, "We're cut off aud and vid, all signal-contact; I'm not getting through to Matson. So that's it."

"That's what?" Rachmael demanded. "You mean we give up? We just orbit Terra forever and die when we run out of oxygen?" Was this the fight that Lies, Incorporated put up when faced by Trails of Hoffman? He, alone, had held out better; now he was disgusted, astonished and completely perplexed and he watched without comprehension as Dosker inspected his bank of *bug chasers* at his chest. At the moment the Lies, Incorporated pilot seemed interested only in whether or not monitors were picking them up—as well as controlling, externally, the trajectory of their ship.

Dosker said, "No monitors. Look, friend ben Applebaum." He spoke swiftly. "They cut my transmission on aud by micro-relay to Matson's satellite, but of course—" His dark eyes glinted with amusement. "I have on me a dead man's throttle; if a continuous signal from me is interrupted it automatically sets off an alarm at Lies, Incorporated, at its main offices in New New York and also at Matson's satellite. So by now they know something's happened." He lowered his voice, speaking almost to himself alone. "We'll have to wait to find out if they can get to us before it doesn't matter."

The ship, without power, in orbit, glided silently.

And then, jarringly, something nosed it; Rachmael fell; sliding along the floor to the far wall he saw Dosker tumble, too, and knew that this had been the locking of another ship or similar device against them—knew and then all at once realized that at least it hadn't detonated. At least it had not been a missile. Because if it had—

"They could," Dosker said, as he got unsteadily to his feet, "have taken us out permanently." By that he, too, meant a detonating weapon. He turned toward the tri-stage entrance hatch, used for null-atmosphere penetration.

The hatch, its circular seal-controls spun from impulses emanating outside, swung open.

Three men, two of them ruffraff with lasers, with the decayed eyes of those who had been bought hamstrung, lost long ago, came first. And then a clear-faced elegant man who would never be bought because he was a great buyer in the market of men; he was a dealer, not produce for sale.

It was Theodoric Ferry, chairman of the board of Trails of Hoffman Limited. Ahead of him his two employees swung a vacuum-cleaner-like mechanism; it searched, buzzing and nosing, probing until its operators were satisfied; they nodded to Theodoric, who then addressed Rachmael.

"May I seat myself?"

After a startled pause Rachmael said, "Sure."

"Sorry, Mr. Ferry," Dosker said. "The only seat is taken." He sat at the control console in such a

way that his small body had expanded at its base to fill both bucket seats; his face was hard and hating.

Shrugging, the large, white-haired man said, "All right." He eyed Dosker. "You're Lies' top pilot aren't you? Al Dosker ... yes, I recognize you from the clips we've made of you. On your way to the *Omphalos*. But you don't need Applebaum here to tell you where she is; we can tell you." Theodoric Ferry dug into his cloak, brought out a small packet which he tossed to Al Dosker. "The locus of the dry-docks where Applebaum has got her."

"Thanks, Mr. Ferry," Dosker said with sarcasm so great that his voice was almost forged into incomprehensibility.

Theodoric said, "Now look, Dosker; you sit quietly and mind your own business. While I talk to Applebaum. I've never met him personally, but I knew his very-much-missed late father." He extended his hand.

Dosker said, "If you shake with him, Rachmael, he'll deposit a virus contamination that'll produce liver toxicity within your system inside an hour."

Glowering, Theodoric said to the Negro, "I asked you to stay in your place. A pun." He then removed the membrane-like, up-to-now invisible glove of plastic which covered his hand. So Dosker had been right, Rachmael realized as he watched Theodoric carefully deposit the glove in the ship's incinerating disposal-chute. "Anyhow," Theodoric said, almost plaintively, "we could have squirted feral airborne bacteria around by now."

"And taken out yourselves," Dosker pointed out.

Theodoric shrugged. Then, speaking carefully to Rachmael, he said, "I respect what you're trying to do. Don't laugh."

"I was not," Rachmael said, "laughing. Just surprised."

"You want to keep functioning, after the economic collapse; you want to keep your legitimate creditors from attaching the few—actually sole—asset that Applebaum Enterprise still possesses—good for you, Rachmael. I'd have done the same. And you impressed Matson; that's why he's supplying you his only decent pilot."

With a mild grin, Dosker reached into his pocket for a pack of cigarillos; at once the two decayed-eyed men accompanying Theodoric caught his arm, expertly manipulated it—the harmless pack of cigarillos fell to the floor of the ship.

One after another, the cigarillos were cut open by Theodoric's men, inspected ... the fifth one turned out to be hard; it did not yield to the sharp-bladed pocket knife, and, a moment later, a more complex analytical device showed the cigarillo to be a homeostatic cephalotropic dart.

"Whose Alpha-wave pattern?" Theodoric Ferry asked Dosker.

"Yours," Dosker said tonelessly. He watched without affect as the two decayed-eyed but very expert employees of THL crushed the dart under heel, rendering it useless.

"Then you expected me," Ferry said, looking a little nonplussed.

Dosker said, "Mr. Ferry, I *always* expect you."

Returning once more to Rachmael, Theodoric Ferry said, "I admire you and I want to terminate this conflict between you and THL. We have an inventory of your assets. Here." He extended a sheet toward Rachmael; at that, Rachmael turned toward Dosker for advice.

"Take it," Dosker said.

Accepting the sheet, Rachmael scanned it. The inventory was accurate; these did constitute the slight totality of the remaining assets of Applebaum Enterprise. And—glaringly, as Ferry had said, the only item of any authentic value was the *Omphalos* herself, the great liner plus the repair and maintenance facilities of Luna which now, hive-like, surrounded and checked her as she waited futilely ... he returned the inventory to Ferry, who, seeing his expression, nodded.

"We agree, then," Theodoric Ferry said. "Okay. Here's what I propose, Applebaum. You can keep the *Omphalos*. I'll instruct my legal staff to withdraw the writ to the UN courts demanding that the *Omphalos* be placed under a state of attachment."

Dosker, startled, grunted; Rachmael stared at Ferry.

"What," Rachmael said, then, "in return?"

"This. That the *Omphalos* never leave the Sol system. You can very readily develop a profitable operation transporting passengers and cargo between the nine planets and to Luna. Despite the fact—

"Despite the fact," Rachmael said, "that the *Omphalos* was built as an inter-stellar carrier, not inter-plan. It's like using—"

"It's that," Ferry said, "or lose the *Omphalos* to us."

"So Rachmael agrees"—Dosker spoke up—"not to take the *Omphalos* to Fomalhaut. The written agreement won't mention any one particular star system, but it's not Prox and not Alpha. Right, Ferry?"

After a pause Theodoric Ferry said, "Take it or leave it."

Rachmael said, "Why, Mr. Ferry? *What's wrong at Whale's Mouth?* This deal—it proves I'm right." That was obvious; he saw it, Dosker saw it—and Ferry must have known that in making it he was ratifying their intimations. Limit the *Omphalos* to the nine planets of the Sol system? And yet—the corporation Applebaum Enterprise, as Ferry said, *would continue*; it would live on as a legal, economic entity. And Ferry would see that the UN turned a certain amount, an acceptable quantity, of commerce its way. Rachmael would wave goodbye to Lies, Incorporated, to first this small dark superior space pilot, and then, by extension, to Freya Holm, to Matson Glazer-Holliday, cut in effect himself off from the sole power which had chosen to back him.

"Go ahead," Dosker said. "Accept the idea. After all, the deep-sleep components won't arrive, but it won't matter, because you're not going into 'tween system space anyhow." He looked tired.

Theodoric Ferry said, "Your father, Rachmael; Maury would have done anything to keep the *Omphalos*. You know in two days we'll have her—and once we do, there's no chance you'll ever get her back. Think about it."

"I—know right now," Rachmael said. Lord, if he and Dosker had managed to get the *Omphalos* out tonight, lost her in space where THL couldn't find her ... and yet that was already over; it had ended when the field had overcome the enormous futile thrust of the twin engines of Dosker's Lies, Incorporated ship: Trails of Hoffman had stepped in too soon. In time.

All along, Theodoric Ferry had pre-thought them; it was not a moral issue: it was a pragmatic one.

"I have legal forms drawn up," Ferry said. "If you'll come with me." He nodded toward the hatch. "The law requires three witnesses. On the part of THL, we have those witnesses." He smiled, because it was over and he knew it. Turning, he walked leisurely toward the hatch. The two decayed-eyed employees followed, both men relaxed ... they passed into the open circularity of the hatch—

And then convulsed throughout, from scalp to foot, internally destroyed; as Rachmael, shocked and terrified, watched, he saw their neurological, musculature systems give out; he saw them, both men penetrated entirely so that each became, horrifying him, flopping, quivering, malfunctioning—more than malfunctioning: each unit of their bodies fought with all other portions, so that the two heaps on the floor became warring subsyndromes within themselves, as muscle strained against muscle, visceral apparatus against diaphragmatic strength, auricular and ventricular fibrillation; both men, unable to breathe, deprived even of blood-circulation, staring, fighting within their bodies which were no longer true bodies ...

Rachmael looked away.

"Cholinesterase-destroying gas," Dosker said, behind him, and at that instant Rachmael became



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