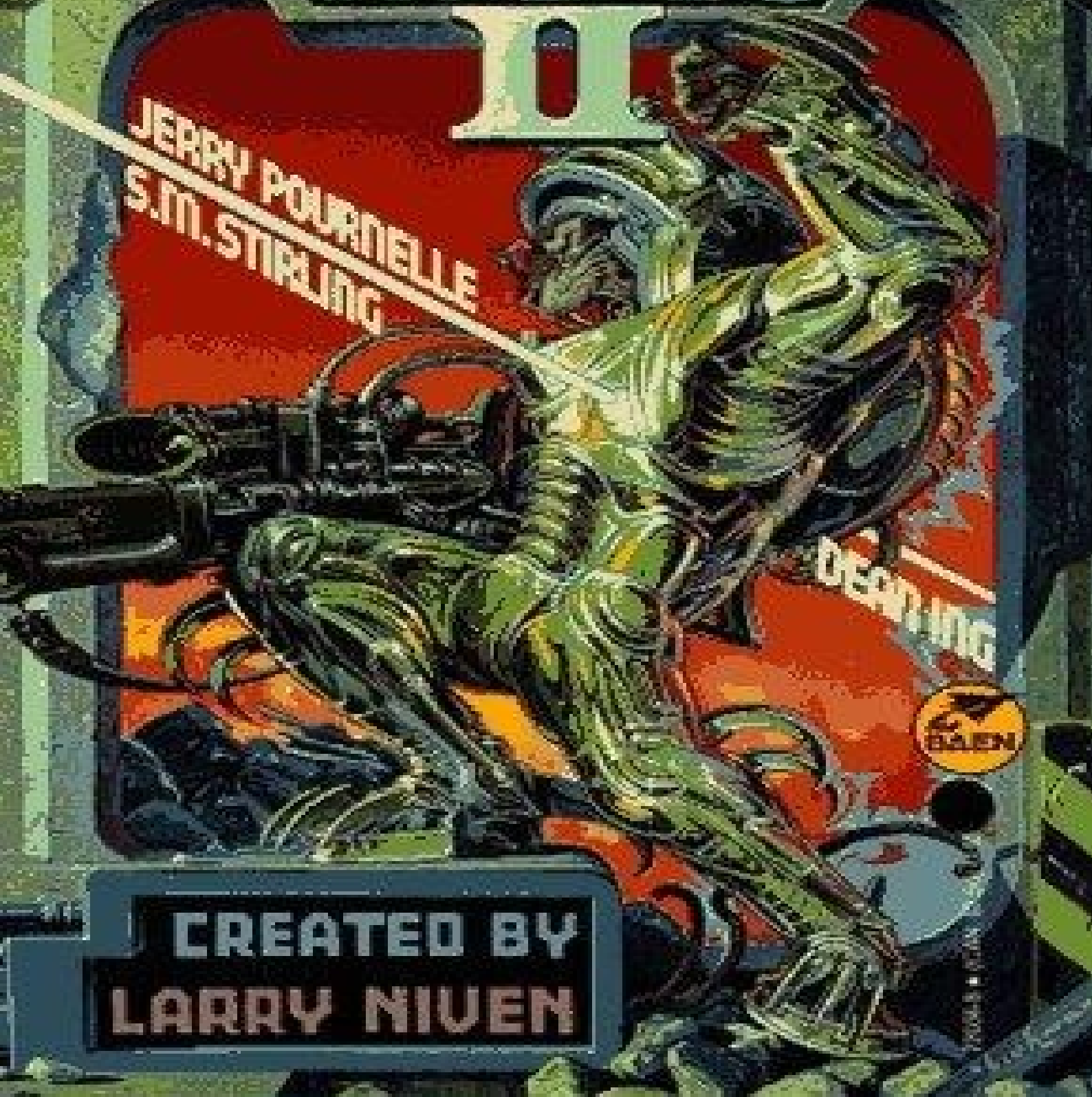


MAN-KAZIN WARS

II

JERRY POURNELLE
S.M. STIRLING



CREATED BY
LARRY NIVEN



Man-Kzin Wars

II

by

Larry Niven

with

Dean Ing,

Jerry Pournelle,

and

M. Stirling

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to real people or incidents is purely coincidental.

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Introduction

The franchise universe lives!

When I first began sneaking into the playgrounds of other authors, I had my doubts. Still, PH Farmer seemed to be having a lovely time reshaping the worlds he'd played in as a child. So I wrote a Dunsany story and an extrapolation of Lovecraft and an attempt at a Black Cat detective story and a study of Superman's sex life.

Fred Saberhagen invited me to write a Berserker story, and I found it indecently easy.

MEDEA: Harlan's World was a collaboration universe. Slow to become a book, it ultimately became a classic study of how creative minds may build and populate a solar system.

So Jim Baen and I invited selected authors to write stories set 14,000 years ago, when magic still worked. We filled two books with tales of the Warlock's era. (We also drove Niven half nuts. The idea was for Jim to do all the work and me to take all the credit. But Jim parted company with Ace Books and I had to learn more than I ever wanted to know about being an editor!)

I entered a universe infested with lizard-like pirate slavers, because of David Drake's urging, and because of a notion I found irresistible: the murder of Halley's Comet. When Susan Schwartz asked several of us to write new tales of the Thousand and One Nights, I rapidly realized that Scheherazade had overlooked a serious threat. I stayed out of Thieves World-too busy-but I was tempted.

Still, would readers and the publishing industry continue to support this kind of thing? It seemed like too much fun.

And now DC Comics has me reworking the background universe of Green Lantern! Green Lantern is almost as old as I am! But his mythos will be mine, for the next few years at least.

I'm having a wonderful time. I've got to say, being paid for this stuff feels like cheating.

What began with "The Warriors" has evolved further than my own ambitions would have carried it.

Jim Baen and I decided to open up the Man-Kzin Wars period of known space, because I don't have the background to tell war stories. Still, I had my doubts. I have friends who can write of war; but a writer good enough to be invited to play in my universe will have demonstrated that he can make his own. Would anyone accept my offer? I worried also that intruders might mess up the playground, by violating my background assumptions.

But the kzinti have been well treated, and I'm learning more about them than I ever expected. You too will be charmed and fascinated by kzinti family life as shown in "The Children's Hour," not to mention Pournelle's and Stirling's innovative use of stasis

fields. Likewise there is Dean Ing's look at intelligent stone-age kzinti females: Ing finished his story for the first volume, then just kept writing. Now Pournelle and Stirling are talking about doing the same.

I too have found that known space stories keep getting longer. It's a fun universe, easier to enter than to leave.

One thing I hoped for when I opened up the Warlock's universe to other writers. I had run out of ideas. I hoped to be re-inspired. My wish was granted, and I have written several Warlock's-era stories since. If the same doesn't hold for the era of the Man-Kzin Wars, it won't be the fault of the authors represented here. I'm having a wonderful time reading known space stories that I didn't have to write. If I do find myself re-inspired, these stories will have done it.

-Larry Niven

BRIAR PATCH

Dean Ing

If Locklear had been thinking straight, he never would have stayed in the god business. But when that man has been thrust into the Fourth Man-Kzin War, won peace with honor from the tigerlike Kzinti on a synthetic zoo planet, and released long-stored specimens so that his vast prison compound resembled the Kzin homeworld, it's hard for that man to keep his sense of mortality.

It's hard, that is, until someone decides to kill him. His first mistake was lust, impure and simple. A week after he paroled Scarface, the one surviving Kzin warrior, Locklear admitted his problem during supper. "All that caterwauling in the ravine," he said, refilling his bowl from the hearth stewpot, "is driving me nuts. Good thing you haven't let the rest of those Kzinti out of stasis; the racket would be unbelievable!"

Scarface Ariped his muzzle with a brawny forearm and handed his own bowl to Kit, his new mate. The darkness of the huge Kzersatz region was tempered only by coals, but Locklear saw those coals flicker in Scarface's cat eyes. "A condition of my surrender was that you release Kit to me," the bawling Kzin growled. "And besides; do humans mate so quietly?"

Because they were speaking Kzin, the word Scarface had used was actually "ch'rowl!"-itself a sexual goad. Kit, who was refilling the bowl, let slip a tiny mew of surprise and pleasure. "Pleasant milord," she said, offering the bowl to Scarface. "Poor Rockear is already over stimulated. Is it not so?" Her huge eyes flicked to Locklear, whom she had grown to know quite well after Locklear woke her from age-long sleep.

"Dead right," Locklear agreed with a morose glance. "Not by the word; by the goddamn deed!"

"She is mine," Scarface grinned; a Kzin grin, the kind with big fangs and no amusement.

"Calm down. I may have been an animal psychologist, but I only have leches for human females," Locklear gloomed toward his Kzin companions. "And every night when I hear you two flattening the grass out there," he nodded past the half-built walls of the hut, "I get, uh,..." He did not know how to translate "horny" into Kzin.

"You get the urge to travel!," Scarface finished, making it not quite a suggestion. The massive Kzinti stared into darkness as if peering across the force walls surrounding Kzersatz. Those towering, invisible walls separated the air, and lifeforms, of Kzersatz from other synthetic compounds of this incredible planet, Zoo. I can see the treetops in the next compound as easily as you, Locklear. But I see no monkeys in them." Before his defeat, Scarface had been "Tzak-Commander." The same strict Kzin honor that bound him to his surrender, forbade him to curse his captor as a monkey. But he could still sharpen the barb of his wit. Kit, with real affection for Locklear, did not approve. "Be nice," she hissed to her mate. "Forget it," Locklear told her, stabbing with his Kzin w'tsai blade for a hunk of meat in his stew. "Kit, he's stuck with his military code, and it won't let him insist that his captor get the hell out of here. But he's right. I still don't know if that next compound I call Newduvai is really Earthlike." He smiled at Scarface, remembering not to show his teeth, and added, "Or whether it has my kind of monkey."

"And we must not try to find out until your war wounds have completely healed," Kit replied.

The eyes of man and Kzin warrior met. "Whoa," Locklear said quickly, sparing Scarface the trouble. "We won't be scouting over there; I will, but you won't. I'm an ethologist," he went on, holding up his hand to bar Kit's interruption. "If Newduvai is as completely stocked as Kzersatz, somebody-maybe the Outsiders, maybe not, but damn' certain a long time ago-somebody intended all these compounds to be kept separate. Now, I won't say I haven't played god here a little... "

"And intend to play it over there a lot," said Kit, who had never yet surrendered to anyone.

"Hear me out. I'm not going to start mixing species from Kzersatz and Newduvai any more than we already have, and that's final." He pried experimentally at the scab running down his knife arm. "But I'm pretty much healed, thanks to your medkit, Scarface. And I meant it when I said you'd have freedom to run of this place. It's intended for Kzinti, not humans. High time I took your lifeboat over those force walls to Newduvai.

"Boots will miss you," said Kit.

Locklear smiled, recalling the other Kzin female he'd released from stasis in a very pregnant condition. According to Kit, a Kzin mother would not emerge from her birthing crèche until the eyes of her twins had opened-another week, at least. "Give her my love," he said, and swilled the last of his stew.

"A pity you will not do that yourself," Kit sighed.

"milady." Scarface became, for the moment, every inch a Tzak-Commander. "Would you ask me to ch'rowl a human female?" He waited for Kit to control her mixed expression. "Then please be silent on the subject. Locklear is a warrior who knows what he fights for."

Locklear yawned. "There's an old song that says, 'Ain't gonna study war no more,' and a slogan that goes, 'Make love, not war.' "

Kit stood up with a fetching twitch of her tail. "I believe our leader has spoken, milord," she purred.

Locklear watched them swaying together in the night, and his parting call was plaintive. "Just take it and keep it down, okay? A fellow needs his sleep,"

The Kzin lifeboat was over ten meters long, well armed and furnished with emergency rations. In accord with their handshake armistice, Scarface had given flight instructions to his human pupil after disabling the hyperwave portion of its comm set. He had given no instructions on armament because Locklear, a peaceable man, saw no further use for anything larger than a sidearm. Neither of them could do much to make the lifeboat seating comfortable for Locklear, who was small even by human standards in an acceleration couch meant for a two hundred-kilo Kzin.

Locklear paused in the airlock in midmorning and raised one arm in a universal peace sign. Scarface returned it. "I'll call you now and then, if those force walls don't stop the signal," Locklear called. "If you let your other Kzinti out of stasis, call and tell me how it works out."

"Keep your tail dry, Rockear," Kit called, perhaps forgetting he lacked that appendage.

compliment, of sorts.

"Will do," he called back as the airlock swung shut. Moments later, he brought the little craft to life and, cursing the cradle-rock motion that branded him a novice, urged the lifeboat into the yellow sky of Kzersatz. Locklear made one pass, a "goodbye sweep," high above the region with its yellow and orange vegetation, taking care to stay well inside the frostline that defined those invisible force walls. He spotted the cave from the still-flattened grass where Kit had herded the awakened animals from their crypt and their sleep of forty thousand years, then steepened his climb and used aero boost to begin his trajectory. No telling whether the force walls stopped suddenly, but he did not want to find out by plowing into the damned things. It was enough to know they stopped below orbital height, and that he could toss the lifeboat from Kzersatz to Newduvai in a low-energy ballistic arc.

And he knew enough to conserve energy in the craft's main accumulators because one day, when the damned stupid Man-Kzin War was over, he'd need the energy to jump from Zoo to some part of known space. Unless, he amended silently, somebody found Zoo first. The war might already be over and certainly the warlike Kzinti must have the coordinates of Zoo ...

Then he was at the top of his trajectory, seeing the Planetary curvature of Zoo, noting the tiny satellite sunlets that bathed hundred-mile-diameter regions in light, realizing that a warship could condemn any one of those circular regions to death with one well placed shot against its synthetic automated little sun. He was already past the circular force walls now, and felt an enormous temptation to slow the ship by main accumulator energy. A good pilot could lower that lifeboat down between the walls of those force cylinders, in the hard vacuum between compounds. Outsiders might be lurking there, idly studying the specimens through invisible walls.

But Locklear was no expert with a Kzin lifeboat, not yet, and he had to use his wristcomputer to translate the warning on the console screen. He set the wing extensions just in time to avoid heavy buffeting, thankful that he had not needed orbital speed to manage his brief trajectory. He bobbed and maneuvered once, twice, then felt the drag of Newduvai's atmosphere on the lifeboat and gave the lifting surfaces full extension. He put the craft into a shallow bank to starboard, keeping the vast circular frostline far to portside, and punched in an autopilot instruction. Only then did he dare to turn his gaze down on Newduvai.

Like Kzersatz it boasted a big lake, but this one glinted in a sun heartbreakingly like Earth's. A rugged jumble of cliffs soared into cloud at one side of the region, and green hills mounded above plains of mottled hues: tan, brown, green, Oh, God, all that green! He'd forgotten, in the saffron sky of Kzersatz, how much he missed the emerald of grass, the blue of sky, the darker dusty green of Earth's forests. For it was, in every respect, perfectly Earthlike. He wiped his misting eyes, grinned at himself for such foolishness, and eased the lifeboat down to a lazy circular course that kept him two thousand meters above the terrain. If the builders of Zoo were consistent, one of those shallow creekbeds would begin not in a marshy meadow but in a horizontal shaft. And there he would find—he dared not think through any further.

After his first complete circuit of Newduvai, he knew it had no herds of animals. No birds dotted the lakeshore; no bugs whacked his viewport. A dozen streams meandered and leapt down from the frostline where clouds dumped their moisture against cold encircling force walls. One stream ended in a second small lake with no obvious outlet, but none of the creeks or dry-washes began with a cave.

Mindful of his clumsiness in this alien craft, Locklear set it down in soft sand where a drywall ~~delta met the kidney-shaped lake. After further consulting between his wristcomp and the ship~~ computer, he punched in his most important queries and listened to the ship cool while its sensors analyzed Newduvai.

Gravity: Earth normal. Atmosphere, solar flux, and temperature: all Earth normal. "And not a critter in sight," he told the cabin walls. In a burst of insight, he asked the computer to list anything that might be a health hazard to a Kzin. If man and Kzin could make steaks of each other, they probably should fear the same pathogens. The computer took its time, but its most fearsome finding was tetanus in the dust.

He waited no longer, thrusting at the airlock in his hurry, filling his lungs with a rich soup of odors and found his eyes brimming again as he stepped onto a little piece of Earth. Smells, he reflected, really got you back to basics. Scents of cedar, of dust, of grasses and yes, of wildflowers. Just like home-yet, in some skin-prickling way, not quite. Locklear sat down on the sand then, with an earthlike sunlet baking his back from a turquoise sky, and he wept. Outsiders or not, any bunch that could engineer a piece of home on the rim of known space couldn't be all bad.

He was tasting the lake water's very faint brackishness when, in a process that took less than a minute, the sunlight dimmed and was gone. "But it's only noontime," he protested, and then laughed at himself and made a notation on his wristcomp, using its faint light to guide him back to the airlock.

As with Kzersatz, he saw no stars; and then he realized that the position of Newduvai's sun had been halfway to the horizon when-almost as it happened on Kzersatz-the daily ration of sunlight was quenched. Why should Newduvai's sun keep the same time as that of Kzersatz? It didn't; nor did it wink off as suddenly as that of Kzersatz.

He activated the still-functioning local mode of the lifeboat's comm set, intending to pass his findings on to Scarface. No response. Scarface's handset was an all-band unit; perhaps some wavelength could bounce off of debris from the Kzin cruiser scuttled in orbit but Locklear knew there was a slender hope, and soon it seemed no hope at all. He spent the longest few hours of his life there turning floodlights on the lake in the forlorn hope of seeing a fish leap, and with the vague fear that a tyrannosaur might pay him a social call. But no matter where he turned the lights he saw no gleam in eyes, and the sand was innocent of any tracks. Sleep would not come until he began to address the problem of the stasis crypt in logical ways.

Locklear came up from his seat with a bound, facing a sun that brightened as he watched. His wristcomp said not quite twelve hours had passed since the sunlet dimmed. His belly said it was late. His memory said yes, by God, there was one likely plan for locating that horizontal shaft: fly very near the frostline and scan every dark cranny that was two hundred meters or so inside the force walls. On Kzersatz, the stasis crypt had ended exactly beneath the frostline, perhaps a portal for those who built Zoo. And the front entrance had been two hundred meters inside the force walls.

He lifted the lifeboat slowly, ignoring hunger pangs, beginning to plot a rough map of Newduvai on the computer screen because he did not know how to make the computer do it for him. Soon, he passed a dry plateau with date palms growing in its declivities and followed the ship's shadow to more fertile soil. Near frostline, he set the aeroturbine reactor just above idle and, moving briskly a hundred meters above the ground, began a careful scan of the terrain because he was not expert enough with

Kzin computers to automate the search.

After three hours he had covered more than half of his sweep around Newduvai, past semi desert and grassy fields to pine-dotted mountain slopes, and the lifeboat's reactor coolant was overheating from the slow pace. Locklear set the craft down nicely near that smaller mountain lake, chopped a power systems, and headed for scrubby trees in the near distance. Scattered among the pines were cedar and small oak. Nearer stood tall poplar and chestnut, invaded by wild grape with immature fruit. But nearest of all, the reason for his landing here, were gnarled little pear trees and, amid wild shoots of rank growth, trees laden with small ripe plums. He wolfed them down until juice dripped from his chin, washed in the lake, and then found the pears unripe. No matter: he'd seen dates, grapes, and chestnut, which suggested a model of some Mediterranean region. After identifying juniper, oleander, and honeysuckle, he sent his wristcomp scurrying through its megabytes and narrowed his opinion of the area: a surrogate slice of Asia Minor.

He might have sat on sunwarmed stones until dark, lulled by this sensation of being, somehow, back home without a care. But then he glanced far across the lower hills and saw, proceeding slowly across a parched desert plateau many miles distant, a whirlwind with its whiplike curve and bloom of dust where it touched the soil.

"Uh-huh! That's how you reseed plants without insect vectors," he said aloud to the builders of Zoro. "But whirlwinds don't make honey, and they'll sting anyway. Hell, even I can play god better than that," he said, and bore a pocketful of plums into the lifeboat, filled once more with the itch to find the cave that might not even exist on Newduvai.

But it was there, all right. Locklear saw it only because of the perfect arc of obsidian, gleaming through a tangle of brush that had grown around the cave mouth.

He made a botch of the landing because he was trembling with anticipation. A corner of his mirror kept warning him not to assume everything here was the same as on Kzersatz, so Locklear stopped just outside that brush-choked entrance. His w'tsai blade made short work of the brush, revealing a polished floor. He strode forward, w'tsai in one hand, his big Kzin sidearm in the other, to the novel familiar luminous film that flickered, several meters inside the cave mouth, across an obsidian portal. He thrust his blade through the film and saw, as he had expected to see, stronger light flash behind the portal. Then he stepped through and stopped, listening.

He might have been back in the Kzersatz crypt: a quiet so deep his own breathing made echoes; the long obsidian central passage, with nine branches on each side, ending in a frost-covered force wall that filled the passageway. And the clear plastic containers ranked in the side passages were of three sizes on smooth metal bases, as expected. But Locklear took one look at the nearest specimen spinning slowly in its stasis cage, and knew that here the resemblance to Kzersatz ended forever.

The monster lay in something like a fetal crouch, tumbling slowly in response to the grav polarization as it had been doing for many thousands of years. It was black, with great forward-curving horns and heavy shoulders, and when released-if anyone dared, he amended-it would stand six feet at the shoulder.

Locklear figured its weight at a ton. Some European zoologists had once tried to breed cattle back from this brute, but with scant success, and Locklear had not seen so much as a sketch of it since he

undergrad work. It was a bull aurochs, a beast which had survived on Earth into historic times; and counting the cows, Locklear realized there were over forty of them.

No point in kidding himself about his priorities. Locklear walked past the stasized camels and gerbils, hurried faster beyond small horses and cheetahs and bats, began to trot as he ran to the next passage past lions and hares and grouse, and was sprinting as he passed whole schools of fish (without water? Why the hell not? They were in stasis, he reminded himself-) in their respective containers. He was out of breath by the time he dashed between specimens of reindeer and saw the monkeys. No! Not a mistake any Kzin might have made, but.. "How could I play such a shameful joke on myself?" They were in fetal curls, and some of them boasted a lot of body hair. And each of them, Locklear realized, was human.

In a kind of reverence he studied them all, careful to avoid touching the metal bases which, according to Kzersatz, opened the cages and released the specimens. Narrow headed and swarthy they were, much taller than he, with heavy brow ridges and high cheekbones. Noses like prizefighters; forearms like blacksmiths; and some had pendulous mammaries and a few had had "Tits," he breathed. "There's a difference! Thank you, God. "

Men and women like these had first been studied in a river valley near old Dusseldorf, hardly for anyone who had preceded modern humans on Earth and, in all probability, had intermarried with them until forty or fifty thousand years before. Locklear, rubbing at the gooseflesh on his arms, began to study each of the stasized nudes with great care. He would need every possible advantage because they would be disoriented, perhaps even furious, when they woke. And the last thing Locklear needed was to start off on the wrong foot with a frenzied Neanderthaler.

Only an idiot would release a mob of Neanderthal hunters into a tiny world without taking steps to protect endangered game animals. The killing of a dozen deer might doom the rest of that species to slow extinction here. On the other hand, Locklear might have released all the animals and waited for a season or more. But certain of the young women in stasis were not exactly repellent, and he did not intend to wait a year before making their acquaintance. Besides, his notes on a Neanderthal community could make him famous on a dozen worlds, and Locklear was anxious to get on with it. His second option was to wake the people and guide them, by force if necessary, outside to fruits and grains. But each of them would see those stasized animals, probably as meat on the hoof, and might not respond to his demands. It was beyond belief that any of them would speak a language he knew. Then it struck him that he already knew how to disassemble a stasis cage, and that he had as much time as he needed. With a longing glance backward, Locklear retraced his steps to the lifeboat and started looking for something with wheels.

But Kzin lifeboats do not carry cargo dollies, and the sun of Newduvai had dimmed before he found a way to remove the wheeled carriage below the reactor's heat exchanger unit. Evidently the unit needed replacement often enough that Kzin engineers installed a carriage with it. That being so, Locklear decided not to use the lifeboat's reactor any more than he had to.

He worked until hunger and aching muscles drove him to the cabin where he cut slices of bricklike Kzin rations and ate plums for dessert. But before he fell asleep, Locklear made some decisions that might save his hide. The lifeboat must be hidden away from inquisitive savage fingers; he would even camouflage the stasis crypt so that those savages would not know what lay inside; and it was absolutely crucial that he present himself as a shaman of great power. Without a few tawdry magic

he might not be able to distance himself as an observer might even be challenged to combat by some strong male. And Locklear remembered those hornlike fingernails and bulging muscles all too well. He saw no sense in shooting a man, even a Neanderthal, merely to prove a point that could be made in peaceable ways.

He spent over a week preparing his hardware. His trials on Kzersatz had taught him how, when all you've got is a hammer, the whole world is a nail; and that you must hammer out a few other tools as soon as possible. He soon found the lifeboat's military toolbox complete with wire, pistol-grip a welder, and motorized drill.

He took time off to gather fruit and to let his frustrations drain away. It was hard not to throw rocks at the sky when he commanded a state-of-the-art Kzin craft, yet could not cannibalize much of it for the things he needed. "Maybe I should release a dog from stasis so I could kick it," he told himself aloud, while attaching an oak branch as a wagon tongue for the wheeled carriage. But lacking any other game, he figured, the dog would probably attack before he did.

Then he used oak staves to lever a cage base up, with flat stones as blocks, and eased his makeshift wagon beneath. The doe inside was heavy with young. Most likely, she would retreat far from him before bearing her fawns, and he knew what to do with the tuneable grav polarizer below that cage. Soon the clear plastic container sat gleaming in the sun, and Locklear poked hard at the base before retreating to the cave mouth. As on Kzersatz, the container levered up, the red doe sank to the cage base, and the base slid forward. A moment later the creature moved, stood with lovely slender limbs shaking, and then saw him waving an oak stave. She reached grassy turf in one graceful bound and sped off with leaps he watched in admiration. Then, feeling somehow more lonely as the doe vanished, he sighed and disconnected the plastic container, then set about taking the entire cage to pieces. Already experienced with these gadgets, he would need at least two of the grav polarizer units before he could move stasized specimens outside with ease.

Disconnected from the stasis unit, a polarizer toroid with its power source and wiring could be tuned to lift varied loads; for example, a container housing a school of fish. The main thing was to avoid tipping it, which Locklear managed by wiring the polarizer securely to the underside of his wheeled carriage. Another hour saw him tugging his burden to the airlock, where he wrestled the entire, still-functioning cage full of fish inside. The fish, he saw, had sucking mouths meant for bottom-feeding on vegetable trash. They looked rather like carp or tilapia. Raising the lifeboat with great care, he eased toward the big lake some miles distant. It was no great trick to dump the squirming mass of life from the airlock port into the lake from a height of two meters, and then he celebrated by landing near the first laden fig tree he saw. Munching and lazing in the sun, he decided that his fortunes were looking up. But then, Locklear had been wrong before ...

He knew that his next steps must be planned carefully. Before hiding the Kzin craft away he must duplicate the airboat he had built on Kzersatz. After an exhaustive search—meanwhile mapping Newduvat's major features—he felled and stripped slender pines, hauling them in the lifeboat to his favorite spot near the small mountain lake. By now he had found a temporary spot in a barren clearing near frostline to hide the lifeboat itself, and began by stripping off its medium-caliber beam weapon from extension struts. The strut skins were attached by long screws, which Locklear saved. The weapon wiring came in handy, too, as he began fitting the raftlike platform of his airboat together. When he realized that the lifeboat's slings and emergency seats could be stripped for a fabric sail, he

began to feel a familiar excitement.

This airboat was larger than his first, with its single sail and swiveling double-pole keel for balance. With wires for rigging, he could hunker down just behind the mast and operate the gravity control vernier through a slot in the flat deck. He could carry over two hundred kilos of ballast, the mass of a stasis cage with a human specimen inside, fit from the crypt before setting that specimen free. "I have to carry the cage back, of course. Who knows what trouble a savage might create, fiddling with a stasis cage?" He snorted at himself; he'd almost said "monkeying," and it was dangerous to assume he was smarter than these ancient people. But wasn't he, really? If Neanderthals had died out on Earth, they must have been inferior in some way. Well, he was sure as hell going to find out.

If his new airboat was larger than the first, it was also more unwieldy. He used it to ferry logs to his cabin site at the small lake, cursing his need to tack in the light breezes, wishing he had a better propulsion system, for over a week before the solution hit him.

At the time he was debating the release of more animals. The mammoths, he promised himself, would come last. No wonder the builders of Newduvai had left them nearest the crypt entrance! The cage tops would each make a dandy greenhouse and their grav polarizers would lift tons. Or push tons. "Some things don't change," he told himself, laughing aloud. "I was dumb on Kzersatz and I've been dumb here." So he released the hares, gerbils, grouse, and some other species of bird with beaks meant for crunching seeds. He promptly installed their grav units around his airboat seat for propulsion, removing the mast and keel poles for reuse as cabin roof beams. That was the day Locklear nearly killed himself caroming off the lake's surface at sixty miles an hour, whooping like a fool. Now the homemade craft was no longer a boat; it was a scooter, and would scoot with an extra fifty kilos of cargo.

It might have been elation with the sporty performance of his scooter that made him so optimistic, failing to remember that you have to kill pessimists, but optimists do it themselves. The log cabin, five meters square with fireplace and frond-thatched shed roof, needed only a pallet of sling fabric and fragrant boughs beneath. A big pallet, he decided. It had been Kit who taught him that he should have food and shelter ready before waking strangers in strange lands. He had figs and apricot slices drying, Kzin rations for the strong of tooth, and Kzin-sized drinking vessels from the lifeboat. He moved a few more items, including a clever Kzin memory pad with electronic stylus and screen, from lifeboat to cabin, then attached a ten-meter cable harness from the scooter to the lifeboat's overhead weapon pylon.

It was only necessary then to set the scooter's bottom grav unit to slight buoyancy, and to pilot the Kzin lifeboat very slowly, towing the scooter.

The cleft where he landed had become a soggy meadow from icemelt near the frostline high on Newduvai's perimeter, protected on one side by the towering force wall and on the other by jagged basalt. The lifeboat could not be seen from below, and if his first aerial visitors were Kzinti, they would have to fly dangerously near that force wall before they saw it. He sealed the lifeboat and then hauled the scooter down hand over hand, puffing with exertion, letting the scooter bounce harmlessly off the lifeboat's hull as he clambered aboard. Then he cast off and twiddled with those grav unit verniers until the wind whistled in his ears en route to the stasis crypt. He was already expert at modifying stasis units, and he would have lots of them to play with. If he had to protect himself from a wild woman, he could hardly wish for anything better. He trundled the crystal cage into sunlight still

wondering if he'd chosen the right-specimen? Subject? "Woman, dammit; woman!" He was trying to wear too many hats, he knew, with the one labeled "lecher" perched on top. He landed the scooter near his cabin, placed bowls of fruit and water nearby, and pressed the cage baseplate, retreating beyond his offerings.

She sank to the cage floor but only shifted position, still asleep, the breeze moving strands of chestnut hair at her cheeks. She was small and muscular, her breasts firm and immature, pubic hair sparse, limbs slender and marked with scratches; and yes, he realized as he moved nearer, she had a forty-thousand-year-old zit on her little chin. Easily the best-looking choice in the crypt, not yet fully developed into the Neanderthal body shape, she seemed capable of sleep in any position and was snoring lightly to prove it.

A genuine teen-ager, he mused, grinning. Aloud he said, "Okay, Lolita, up and at'em. " She stirred; her hand reached up as if tugging at an invisible blanket. "You'll miss the school shuttle," he said loudly. It had never worked back on Earth with his sister.

It didn't work here, either. She woke slowly, blinking as she sat up in a lithe, nude, heartbreakingly innocent. But her yawn snapped in two as she focused on him, and her pantomime of snatching a stone and hurling it at Locklear was convincing enough to make him duck. She leaped away scabbling for real stones, and between her screams and her clods, all in Locklear's direction, she seemed to be trying to cover herself.

He retreated, but not far enough, and grabbed a chunk of dirt only after taking one clod on his thigh. He threatened a toss of his own, whereupon she ducked behind the cage, watching him warily.

Well, it wouldn't matter what he said, so long as he said it calmly. His tone and gestures would have to serve. "You're a real little shit before breakfast, Lolita," he said, smiling, tossing his clod gently toward the bowls.

She saw the food then, frowning. His open hands and strained smile invited her to the food, and she moved toward it still holding clods ready. Wolfing plums, she paused to gape as he pulled a plum from a pocket and began to eat. "Never seen pockets, hm? Stick around, little girl, I'll show you lots of interesting things." The humor didn't work, even on himself; and at his first step toward her she ran like a deer. Every time he pointed to himself and said his name, she screamed something brief. She moved around the area, checking out the cabin, draping a vine over her breasts, and after an hour Locklear gave up. He'd made a latchcord for the cabin door, so she couldn't do much harm. She watched from twenty meters distance with great wondering brown eyes as he waved, lifted the scooter, and sped away with her cage and a new idea. An hour later he returned with a second cage, cursing as he saw Lolita trying to smash his cabin window with an oak stave. The clear plastic, of cage material, was tough stuff and he laughed as the scooter settled nearby, pretending he didn't itch to whack his rump. She began a litany of stone-age curses, then, as she saw the new cage and its occupant. Locklear actually had to mount the scooter and chase her off before she would quit pelting him with anything she could throw.

He made the same preparations as before, this time with shreds of smelly Kzin rations as well, and stood leaning against the cage for long moments, facing Lolita who lurked fifty meters away, to make his point. The young woman revolving slowly inside the cage was at his mercy. Then he pressed the baseplate, turned his back as the plastic levered upward, and strode off a few paces with a sigh. The

one was a Neanderthal and no mistake; curves a little too broad to be exciting, massive forearms and calves, pug nose, considerable body hair. Nice tits, though. Stop it, fool!

The young woman stirred, sat up, looked around, then let her big jaw drop comically as she stared at Locklear, whose smile was a very rickety construction. She cocked her head at him, impassive, a moment before he spoke.

"You're no beauty, lady, so maybe you won't throw rocks at me. Too late for breakfast," he continued in his sweetest tones and a pointing finger. "How about lunch?"

She saw the bowls. Slowly, with caution and surprising grace, she stepped from the scooter's deck, still eyeing him without smile or frown. Then she squatted to inspect the food, knees apart, facing him, and Locklear grew faint at the sight. He looked away quickly, flushing, aware that she continued to stare at him while sampling human and Kzin rations with big strong teeth and wrinklins of her nose that made her oddly attractive. More attractive. Why the hell doesn't she cover up or something?

He pulled another plum from a pocket, and this magic drew a smile from her as they ate. He realized she was through eating when she wiped sticky fingers in her straight black hair, and stepped back by reflex as she stepped toward him. She stopped, with a puzzled inclination of her head, and smiled at him. That was when he stood his ground and let her approach. He had hoped for something like this, so the watching Lolita could see that he meant no harm.

When the woman stood within arm's length of him she stopped. He put a hand on his breast. "M... Locklear you Jane," he said.

"(Something,)" she said. Maybe Kh-roofeh.

He was going to try saying it himself when she startled him into a wave of actual physical weakness. With eyes half-closed, she cupped her full breasts in both hands and smiled. He looked at her erect nipples, feeling the rush of blood to his face, and showed her his hands in a broad helpless shrug. Whereupon, she took his hands and placed them on her breasts, and now her big black eyes were not those of a savage Neanderthal but a sultry smiling Levantine woman who knew how to make a point. Two points.

Three points, as he felt a rising response and knew her hands were seeking that rise, hands that had never known velcrolok closures yet seemed to have an intelligence of their own. His whole body was tingling now as he caressed her, and when her hands found that fabric closure, she shared a fresh smile with him, and tried to pull him down on the ground with her.

So he took her hands in his and walked her to the cabin. She "hmm'ed" when he pulled the latchcock loop to open the door, and "ahh'ed" when she saw the big pallet, and then offered those swarthy full breasts again and put her face against the hollow of his throat, and toyed inside his velcrolok closure until he astonished her by pulling his entire flight suit off, and offered her body in ways simple and sophisticated, and Locklear accepted all the offers he could, and made a few of his Own, all of which she accepted expertly.

He had his first sensation of something eerie, something just below his awareness, as he lay inert on his back bathed in honest sweat, his partner lying facedown more or less across him like one still

abandoned across another stick after both had been rubbed to kindle a blaze. He saw a movement
his window and knew it was Lolita, peering silently in. He sighed.

His partner sighed, too, and turned toward the window with a quick, vexed burst of some command.
The face disappeared.

He chuckled, "Did you hear the little devil, or smell her?" Actually, his partner had more of the ear
de sweatsock perfume than Lolita did; now more pronounced than ever. He didn't care. If the past half
hour had been any omen, he might never care again.

She stretched then, and sat up, dragging a heel that was rough as a rasp across his calf. Her heavy
ragged nails had scratched him, and he was oily from God knew what mixture of greases in her long
hair. He didn't give a damn about that either, reflecting that a man should allow a few squeaks in the
hinges of the pearly gates.

She said something then, softly, with that tilt of her head that suggested inquiry. "Locklear," he
replied, tapping his chest again.

Her look was somehow pitying then, as she repeated her phrase, placing one hand on her head, the
other on his. "Oh yeah, you're my girl and I'm your guy," he said, nodding, placing his hands on hers.

She sat quite still for a moment, her eyes sad on his. Then, delighting him, she placed one hand on
his breast and managed a passable, "Loch-leah."

He grinned and nodded, then cocked his head and placed a hand between her (wonderful) breasts.
No homecoming queen, but dynamite in deep shadows ...

He paid more attention as she said, approximately, "Ch'roofh," and when he repeated it she laughed
closing her eyes with downcast chin. A big chin, a really whopping big one to be honest about it, and
then he caught her gaze, not angry but perhaps reproachful, and again he felt the passage of something
like a cold breeze through his awareness. She rubbed his goseflesh down for him, responding to his
"ahh"s, and presently she astonished him again by beginning to query him on the names of things.
Locklear knew that he could thoroughly confuse her if he insisted on perfectly grammatical tense
cases, and syntax. He tried to keep it simple, and soon learned that "head down, eyes shut" was the
same as a negative headshake. "Chin elevated, smiling" was the same as a nod-and now he realized
he'd seen her giving him yesses that way from the first moment she awoke. A smile or a frown was the
same for her as for him-but that heads-up smile was a definite gesture.

She drew him outside again presently, studying the terrain with lively curiosity, miming actions and
listening as he provided words, responding with words of her own.

The name he gave her was, in part, because it was faintly like the one she'd offered; and in part
because she seemed willing to learn his ways while revealing ancient ways of her own. He named her
"Ruth." Locklear felt crestfallen when, by midafternoon, he realized Ruth was learning his language
much faster than he was learning hers. And then, as he glanced over her shoulder to see little Lolita
creeping nearer, he began to understand why.

Ruth turned quickly, with a shouted command and warning gestures, and Lolita dropped the

sharpened stick, she'd been carrying. Locklear knew beyond doubt that Lolita had made no sound at her approach. There was only one explanation that would fit all his data: Ruth unafraid of him from the first; offering herself as if she knew his desires; keeping track of Lolita without looking; and her uncanny speed in learning his language.

And that moment when she'd placed her hand on his head, with an inquiry that was somehow pitying. Now he copied her gesture with one hand on his own head, the other on hers, and lowered his head, eyes shut. "No," he said... "Locklear, no telepath. Ruth, yes?"

"Ruth, yes." She pointed to Lolita then. "No-telpat. "

She needed another ten minutes of pantomime, attending to his words and obviously to his thoughts as he spoke them, to get her point across. Ruth was a gentle," but like Locklear himself, Lolita was "new."

When darkness came to Newduvai, Lolita got chummier in a hurry, complaining until Ruth let her into the cabin. Despite that, Ruth didn't seem to like the girl much and accepted Locklear's name for her, shortening it to "Loh." Ruth spoke to her in their common tongue, not so much guttural as throaty and Locklear had a strong impression that they were old acquaintances. Either of them could tend a fire expertly, and both were wary of the light from his Kzin memory screen until they found that it would not singe a curious finger.

Locklear was bothered on two counts by Loh's insistence on taking pieces of Kzin plastic film to make a bikini suit: first because Ruth plainly thought it silly, and second because the kid was more appealing with it than she was when stark naked. At least the job kept Loh silently occupied, listening and watching as Locklear got on with the business of talking with Ruth.

Their major breakthrough for the evening came when Locklear got the ideas of past and future "before" and "soon," across to Ruth. Her telepathy was evidently the key to her quick grasp of his language; yet it seemed to work better with emotional states than with abstract ideas, and she grew upset when Loh became angry with her own first clumsy efforts at making her panties fit. Clearly Ruth was a lady who liked her harmony. For Ruth was, despite her rude looks, a lady when she was in the sack. Even so, when at last Ruth had seen to Loh's comfort with spare fabric and Locklear snapped off the light, he felt inviting hands on him again. "No thanks," he said, chuckling, patting his shoulder, even though he wanted her again. And Ruth knew he did, judging from her sly insistence. "No. Loh here," he said finally, and felt Ruth shrug as if to say it didn't matter. Maybe it didn't matter to Neanderthals, but-"Soon," he promised, and shared a hug with Ruth before they fell asleep.

During the ensuing week, he learned much. For one thing, he learned that Loli was a chronic pain on the backside. She ate like a Kzin warrior. She liked to see if things would break. She liked to spy. She interfered with Locklear's pace during his afternoon naps" with Ruth by whacking on the door with sticks and stones, until he swore he would hit Loli soon." But Ruth would not hear of that. -Hit Loli same hit Ruth head. Locklear like hit Ruth head?"

But one afternoon, when she saw Locklear studying her with friendly intensity, Ruth spoke to Loli at some length. The girl picked up her short spear and, crooning her happiness, loped off into the forest. Ruth turned to Locklear smiling. "Loli find fruitwater, soon Ruth make fruitfood." A few minutes of miming showed that she had promised to make some kind of dessert, if Loli could find

beehive for honey.

Locklear had seen beehives in stasis, but explained that there were very few animals loose on Newduvai, and no hurtbugs.

"No hurtbugs? Loli no find, long time. Good," Ruth replied firmly, and led him by the hand into their cabin, and "good" was the operative word. On his next trip to the crypt, Locklear needed all day for his solitary work. He might put it off forever, but it was clear by now that he must populate Newduvai with game before he released their most fearsome predators. The little horses needed only a few minutes to see daylight before galloping off. Camels were quicker still, and the deer bounded off like golf balls down a freeway. The predators would simply have to wait until the herds were larger, and the day was over before he could rig grav polarizers to trundle mammoths to the mouth of the crypt. His last job of the day was his most troublesome, releasing small cages of bees near groves of fruit trees and wildflowers.

Locklear and Ruth managed to convey a lot with only a few hundred words, though some of those words had to do multiple duty while Ruth expanded her vocabulary. When she said "new," for example, it often carried a stigma. Neanderthals, he decided, were very conservative folk, and they sensed a lie before you told it. If Ruth was any measure, they also had little aptitude for math. She understood one and two and many. She understood "none," but not as a number. If there wasn't any, she conveyed to him, why try to count it? She had him there.

Eventually, between food-gathering forays, he used pebbles and sketches to tell Ruth of the many other animals and people he could bring to the scene. She was no sketch artist; in fact, she insisted, women were not supposed to draw things-especially hunt-things. Ah, he said, magics were only for men? Yes, she said, then mystified him with pantomimes of sleep and pain. That was for men, too, and food gathering was for women. He pursued the mystery, sketching with the Kzin men on a screen. At last, when she pretended to cut her throat with his w'tsai knife, he understood, and added the word "kill" to her vocabulary. Men hunted and killed.

Dry-mouthed, he asked, "Man like kill Locklear?"

Now it was her turn to be mystified. "No kill. Why kill magic man?" Because, he replied, "Locklear like Ruth, one-two other men like Ruth. Kill Locklear for Ruth?"

He had never seen her laugh aloud, but he saw it now, the big teeth gleaming, breasts shaking with merriment. "Locklear like Ruth, good. Many man like Ruth, good."

He was silent for a long time, fighting the temptation to tell her that many men liking Ruth was not good. Then: "Ruth like many man?"

She had learned to nod by now, and did it happily.

The next five minutes were troubled ones for Locklear. Ruth did not seem to understand monogamy in any form. Apparently, everybody took pot luck in the sex department and was free to accept or reject. Some people were simply more popular than others. "Many man like Ruth," she said. "Many many, many ..."

"Okay, for Christ's sake, I get the idea, he exploded, and again he saw that look of sadness—perhaps pain. "Locklear see, Ruth popular with man." It seemed to be their first quarrel. Tentatively he said, "Locklear little popular with woman."

"Much popular with Ruth," she said, and began to rub his shoulders. That was the day she asked him about her appearance, and he responded the best way he could. She thought it silly to trim her strong useful nails; sillier to wash her hair. Still, she did it, and he claimed she was pretty, and she knew he lied.

When it occurred to him to ask how he could look nice for her, Ruth said, "Locklear pretty now. But he never thought to wonder if she might be lying.

Whatever Ruth said about women and hunting, it did not seem to apply to Loli. While aloft in the scooter one day to study distribution of the animals, Locklear saw the girl chasing a hare across a meadow. She was no slouch with a short spear and nailed the hare on her second toss, dispatching it with a stone after a brief struggle. He lowered the scooter very, very slowly, watching her tear at the animal, disgusted when he realized she was eating it raw.

She saw his shadow when the scooter was hovering very near, and sat there blushing, looking at him with the innards of the hare across her lap. She understood few of his words—or seemed to, at the cabin—but his tone was clear enough. "You couldn't share it, you little bastard. No, you sneak out here and stuff yourself." She began to suck her thumb, pouting. Then perhaps Loli realized the boss must be placated; she tried a smile on her bloodstreaked face and held her grisly trophy out.

"No. Ruth. Give to Ruth," he scowled, pointing toward the cabin. She elevated her chin and smiled and he flew off grumbling. He couldn't much blame the kid; Kzin rations and fruit were getting pretty tiresome, and the gruel Ruth made from grain wasn't all that exciting without bits of meat. It was going to be rougher on the animals when he woke the men. And why wake them at all? You've got it good here, he reminded himself in Sequence Umpteen of his private dialogue. You have your own little world and a harem of one, and you know when her period comes so you know when not to play. And one of these days, Loli will be a knockout, I suspect. A much niftier dish than poor Ruth, who doesn't know what a skag she'd be in modern society, thank God.

Moments like this made him squirm. Setting Ruth's looks aside, he had no complaint, not even about the country itself. Not much seasonal change, no dangerous animals unless you want to release them, certainly none of the most dangerous animal of all. Except for Kzinti, of course. One on one they were meaner predators than men—even Neanderthal savages.

"That's why I have to release them", he said to the wind. "If a fully-manned Kzin ship comes, I need an army." He no longer kidded himself about scholarship and the sociology of hominid neanderthalensis, which was strictly a secondary item. It was sobering to look yourself over and see self-interest riding you like a hunchback. So he flew directly to the crypt and spent the balance of the day releasing the whoppers: aurochs and bison, which didn't make him sweat much, and a half-dozen mammoths, which did.

A mammoth, he found, was a flighty beast not given to confrontations. He could set one shambling off with a shout, its trunk high like a periscope tasting the breeze. Every one of them turned into the wind and disappeared toward the frostline, and now the crypt held only its most dangerous creatures.

He returned to the cabin perilously late, the sun of Newduvai dying while he was still a hundred meters from the wisp of smoke rising from the cabin. He landed blind near the cabin, very slowly but with a jolt, and saw the faint gleam of the Kzin light leap from the cabin window. Ruth might not have a head for figures, but she'd seen him snap that light on fifty times. And she must've sensed my panic. I wonder how far off she can do that.... Ruth already had succulent broiled haunches of Loli's hare keeping them warm over coals, and it wrenched his heart as he saw she was drooling as she waited for him. He wiped the corner of her mouth, kissed her anyhow, and sat at the rough pole table while she brought his supper. Loli had obviously eaten, and watched him as if fearful that he would order her outside.

Hauling mammoths, even with a grav polarizer, is exhausting work. After finishing off a leg of hare and falling asleep at the table, Locklear was only half-aware when Ruth picked him up and carried him to their pallet as easily as she would have carried a child.

The next day, he had Ruth convey to Loli that she was not to hunt without permission. Then, with less difficulty than he'd expected, he sketched and quizzed her about the food of a Neanderthal tribe. Yes, they hunted everything: bugs to mammoths, it was all protein, but chiefly they gathered roots, grains, and fruits.

That made sense. Why risk getting killed hunting when tubers didn't fight back? He posed his basic question then. If he brought a tribe to Newduvai (this brought a smile of anticipation to her broad face), and forbade them to hunt without his permission, would they obey?

Gentles might, she said. New people, such as Loh, were less obedient. She tried to explain what conveying something about telepathy and hunting, until he waved the question aside. If he showed her sleeping gentles, would she tell him which ones were good? Oh yes, she said, adding a phrase she knew he liked: "No problem."

But it took him an hour to get Ruth on the scooter. That stuff was all very well for great magic men she implied, but women's magics were more prosaic. After a few minutes idling just above the turf, he sped UP, and she liked that fine. Then he slowed and lifted the scooter a bit. By noon, he was cruising fast as they surveyed groups of aurochs, solitary gazelles, and skittish horses from high above. It was she, sampling the wind with her nose, who directed him higher and then pointed out a mammoth, a huge specimen using its tusks to find roots.

He watched the huge animal briefly, estimating how many square miles a mammoth needed to feed and then made a decision that saddened him. Earth had kept right on turning when the last mammoth disappeared. Newduvai could not afford many of them, ripping up foliage by the roots. Perhaps the Outsiders didn't care about that, but Locklear did. If you had to start sawing off links in your food chain, best if you started at the top. And he didn't want to pursue that thought by himself. At the very top was man. And Kzin. It was the kind of thing he'd like to discuss with Scarface, but he'd made two trips to the lifeboat without a peep from its all-band comm set. Finally, he flew to the crypt and set his little craft down nearby, reassuring Ruth as they walked inside. She paused for flight when she saw the rest of the mammoths, slowly tumbling inside their cages... Much, much, much magic," she said, and patted him with great confidence. But it was the sight of forty Neanderthals in stasis that really affected Ruth. Her face twisted with remorse, she turned from the nearest cage and faced Locklear with tears streaming down her cheeks. "Locklear kill?"

"No, no! Sleep," he insisted, miming it.

She was not convinced. "No sleeptalk," she protested, placing a hand on her head and pointing toward the rugged male nearby. And doubtless she was right; in stasis you didn't even dream.

"Before, Locklear take Ruth from little house," he said, tapping the cage, and then she remembered and wanted to take the man out then and there. Instead, he got her help in moving the cage onto his improvised dolly and outside to the scooter.

They were halfway to the cabin and a thousand feet up on the heavily-laden scooter when Ruth somehow struck the cage base with her foot. Locklear saw the transparent plastic begin to rise and shouted, and nearly turned the scooter on its side as he leaped to slam the plastic down.

"Good God! You nearly let a wild man loose on a goddamn raft, a thousand feet in the air," he raged, and saw her cringe, holding her head in both hands. "Okay, Ruth. Okay, no problem," he continued more slowly, and pointed at the cage base. "Ruth no hit little house more. Locklear hit soon."

They remained silent until they landed, and Locklear had time to review Newduvai's first in-flight airline emergency. Ruth had not feared a beating. No, it was his own panic that had punished her. This he figured: a Kzin telepath sometimes suffered when someone nearby was suffering. He brought food and water from the cabin, placed it near the scooter, then paused before pressing the cage base. "Ruth-gentle man talk in head same Ruth talk in head?"

"Yes, all gentles talk in head." She saw what he was getting at. "Ruth talk to man, say Locklear much, much good magic man."

He pointed again at the man, a muscular young specimen who, without so much body hair, might have excited little comment at a collegiate wrestling match. "Ruth friend of man?"

She blushed as she replied: "Yes. Friend long time.

"That's what I was afraid of, " he muttered with a heavy sigh, pressed the baseplate, and then stepped back several paces, nearly bumping into the curious Loli.

The man's eyes flicked open. Locklear could see the heavy muscles tense, yet the man moved on his eyes, looking from him to Ruth, then to him again. When he did move, it was as though he'd been playing possum for forty thousand years, and his movements were as oddly graceful as Ruth's. He held up both hands, smiling, and it was obvious that some silent message had passed between them.

Locklear advanced with the same posture. A flat touch of hands, and then the man turned to Ruth with a burst of throaty speech. He was no taller than Locklear, but immensely more heavily-boned and muscled. He stood as erect as any man, unconcerned in his nakedness, and after a double handclasp with Ruth he made a smiling motion toward her breasts. Again, Locklear saw the deeper color of flushing over her face and, after a head-down gesture of negation, she said something while staring at the young man's face. Puzzled, he glanced at Locklear with a comical half-smile, and Locklear tried to avoid looking at the man's budding erection. He told the man his name, and got a reply, but as usual Locklear gave him a name that seemed appropriate. He called him "Minuteman." After a quick me

of fruit and water, Ruth did the translating. From the first, Minuteman accepted the fact that Locklear was one of the "new" people. After Locklear's demonstrations with the Kzin memo screen and levitation of the scooter, Minuteman gave him more physical space, perhaps a sign of deference. Or perhaps wariness; time would tell.

Though Loli showed no fear of Minuteman, she spoke little to him and kept her distance-with an egg-sized stone in her little fist at all times.

Minuteman treated Loli as a guest might treat an unwelcome pet. Oh yes, thought Locklear, Loli knows her, all righty....

The hunt, Locklear claimed, was a celebration to welcome Minuteman, but he had an ulterior motive. He made his point to Ruth, who chattered and gestured and, no doubt, silently communed with Minuteman for long moments. It would be necessary for Minuteman to accompany Locklear on the scooter, but without Ruth if they were to lug any sizeable game back to the cabin.

When Ruth stopped, Minuteman said something more. "Yes, no problem," Ruth said then.

Minuteman, his facial scars writhing as he grinned, managed, "Yes, no problem," and laughed when Locklear did. Amazing how fast these people adapt, Locklear thought. He wakes up on a strange planet, and an hour later he's right at home. A wonderful trusting kind of innocence; even childlike. Then Locklear decided to see just how far that trust went, and gestured for Minuteman to sit down on the scooter after he wrestled the empty stasis cage to the ground.

Soon they were scudding along just above the trees at a pace guaranteed to scare the hell out of any sensible Neanderthal, Minuteman desperately trying to make a show of confidence in the leadership of this suicidal shaman, and Locklear was satisfied on two counts, with one count yet to come. First, the scooter's pace near trees was enough to make Minuteman hold on for dear life. Second, the young Neanderthal would view Locklear's easy mastery of the scooter as perhaps the very greatest of magical feats, and maybe Minuteman would pass that datum on, when the time came.

The third item was a shame, really, but it had to be done. A shaman without the power of ultimate punishment might be seen as expendable, and Locklear had to show that power. He showed it after passing over specimens of aurochs and horse, both noted with delight by Minuteman. The goat had been grazing not far from three does until he saw the scooter swoop near. He was an old codge, probably driven off by the younger buck nearby, and Locklear recalled that the gestation period for goats was only five months-and besides, he told himself, the Outsiders could be pretty dumb in some matters. You didn't need twenty bucks for twenty does.

All of the animals bounded toward a rocky slope, and Minuteman watched them as Locklear maneuvered, forcing the old buck to turn back time and again. When at last the buck turned to face them, Locklear brought the scooter down, moving straight toward the hapless old fellow. Minuteman did not turn toward Locklear until he heard the report of the Kzin sidearm which Locklear held in both hands, and by that time the scooter was only a man's height above the rocks.

At the report, the buck slammed backward, stumbling, shot in the breast. Minuteman ducked away from the sound of the shot, seeing Locklear with the sidearm, and then began to shout. Locklear let the scooter settle but Minuteman did not wait, leaping down, rushing at the old buck which still kicked

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