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Savage Planet

by Barry L. Longyear

Armath squatted in the snow as his deep red eyes studied the two-tracked vehicles in the valley below. The wind gusted, causing a light rain of fine snow to fall upon his broad, hairy back. As two creatures emerged from one of the vehicles, Armath drew back his lips, exposing gleaming white fangs. A low growl issued from his throat and he pawed the snow with dagger-tipped fingers.

"Hey, Charlie! Bring the caps!"

A third creature emerged from one of the vehicles, it walked over to the other two and handed something to them. The first two stooped over and dug at the snow while the third watched them. Armath looked at the marks the vehicles had made over the floor of the valley. Twenty times the vehicles had stopped, and as many times the creatures had emerged, buried something, then climbed back into the roaring metal carts. The two stood, waved at the one vehicle, then the three of them climbed into the second. The carts roared to life, then moved away.

Armath's heavy black brows wrinkled as the carts kept going instead of following the pattern that had been established. He waited a moment longer, then rose on his four walking legs, shook his heavy mane to free it from the accumulation of snow, and began walking toward the most recent burial site. His eyes darted left and right, instinctively searching for darkness against the snow. Halfway down the slope, he spotted another male. Armath reared up, bellowed and held out his arms, fingers and claws extended. The other male reared up and returned the bellow. They both came down together and altered their paths slightly to avoid meeting.

Armath's new course took him away from the nearest burial site, and he chose another. As he approached it, he saw the other male squatting at one of the first sites, and clawing at the snow. He turned back to see the disturbed area, marked with a tiny orange flag. Five paces from the flag, the snow around Armath seemed to erupt with an ear-shattering slam. He fell to the shaking snow, covered his eyes, and howled as lumps of ice struck his back. When the ice stopped falling, Armath uncovered his eyes and stood, his ears ringing.

The tiny orange flag was gone. Cautiously he approached the site and saw a hole that extended deep into the snow, through the frozen soil, into the hard rock beneath. He frowned and looked toward another site. It too was nothing but a hole. Armath turned to look at the other male and saw him crumpled next to the site he had been investigating. Armath growled, then fell silent as he padded toward the other male. He was lying on the snow, his back toward Armath, the wind blowing back his long black hair, showing the gray skin beneath.

Armath halted the customary four paces away. "You!" The male did not move. "You!" Armath bellowed. Still nothing. Armath traversed a circle, four paces from the reclining figure, until he came to the male's other side. Armath looked down at the hole in the snow. It too went all the way to the rock of the valley floor. He looked up at the other male and howled. His face was missing.

On the liner to Bendadn to accept his post of chair of the Bendadn School Department of History, Michael studied two texts on the planet and its population. The Benda had evolved to dominate other lifeforms, and had been at the brink of their Iron Age, when RMI put down its ships and missionaries preaching the creed of the bountiful god of multiplanetary corporate domination. Earth was signatory to neither the Ninth Quadrant Council of Planets, nor the United Quadrants. However, both bodies had made clear to RMI that invading Bendadn with a combination of money and mercenaries would incur opposition by the combined armed forces of both organizations. Michael picked up the senior high-school text that was RMI's secret weapon: *Manifest Destiny—A History of Human Expansionism*.

Michael again opened the text and leafed through it. He had finished reading the thing eight days before, and it still hadn't changed. Michael shook his head. Some fantasy writer must have collaborated with an

advertising copywriter to produce *Manifest*. Certainly no historian had anything to do with it. It was a simplistic, highly romanticized, overblown account of the human expansion into space, ignoring the warts and highlighting the invincible, inevitable nature of human force. The message was clear: humanity, because of its nature and tradition, was meant to rule. Willing subjugation meant peace and prosperity; resistance meant destruction. Michael closed the text with a snap. "What drivel."

He leaned back on his couch and closed his eyes. At first he'd refused to take the top history post, but as the good Mr. Sabin had pointed out, "you're selling your professional soul for eleven hundred a month; why not sell for twenty-five hundred? It's the same soul in either case." A good point, thought Michael. Whether or not my soul is for sale is the concern of principle; how much is only the concern of economics and bargaining. The crime is no more severe by being a high-ranked flunky rather than a middle- or low-ranked flunky. Michael nodded. The good Mr. Sabin had a definite way with words.

Michael closed his eyes and clenched his jaw. Then he shook his head. Opening his eyes, he leaned his head against the back of the seat. *No one who has sold out has a right to be bitter*, he thought. *Why am I doing this? As the good Mr. Sutton replied when asked why he robbed banks: "That's where the money is."* He nodded and tried to sleep. *Recognize it, accept it, and to Hell with it.*

A week to Bendadn, and Michael Fellman parked his water wagon and headed toward the ship's lounge for the first time. He had played with a vague thought of using his experience on Bendadn as an excuse for turning over a new leaf, but as the trip and his studies of *Manifest* dragged on, his resolve wore as thin as the cliché. As he slouched in an overpadded booth sipping his fifth Martini, he had to admit that Rolf Mineral Industries allowed one to sell out in style.

"Mind if I join you?"

Michael looked up and made out the face of Jacob Lynn, RMI's Project Manager for Bendadn. The man who would be the top RMI man on the planet. Michael held out a hand. "Be my guest, *sahib*."

Lynn raised his eyebrows, then laughed as he sat and placed his drink on the table. "You ivory-tower hypocrites really kill me." He sipped at his drink, then laughed again as he lowered it to the table.

"Perhaps you could share the cause of your amusement, Mr. Lynn."

His face in smiles, but his eyes colder than RMI steel, Lynn leaned back and studied Michael. "I've been wandering around the lounge listening to some of you old mossbacks bitching and whining about life in general, and their own places in it in particular."

Michael nodded. "And, Mr. Lynn, you are pleased with your place in this universe?"

"Yes." He nodded and sipped again from his drink. "There are still things that I want, but now that I've made my peace with reality, I know I'll get most of them." He smiled and waved a hand in the direction of a booth full of graying instructors working hard with the free booze, trying to forget its price. "Look at them. For the first time in their lives they are being practical. But all they can do is pickle their heads to try and ease the pain of growing up."

"You seem to take a perverse pleasure in their distress, Mr. Lynn." Michael sipped again at his Martini. "Particularly when they in all likelihood don't even understand why they are unhappy."

Lynn nodded, then faced Michael. "But you understand it, Fellman. That's why you're the biggest hypocrite in the bunch. And, yes, I do enjoy it." Lynn finished off his drink and motioned to a steward for a refill. "The reason isn't too hard to understand, Fellman. When I left the university, after having you dream merchants stuff my head with nonsense for four years, reality slammed me right in the face. Every ideal you people implanted in my skull was a program for disaster. You didn't teach me what I had to do to survive in reality as it is. No, you and your fuzzy-headed colleagues taught me what you thought really *should* be." Lynn laughed, then took his fresh drink from the steward. "And here you all are, putting should be on the back burner while dancing to the tune of what is—if you'll pardon the mixed metaphor." He nodded and grinned. "I once had an instructor who was very picky about mixed metaphors. Now she's working for me as a secretary."

Michael raised his eyebrows, then finished off his drink. He lowered the glass, then frowned. "Tell me, Mr. Lynn. Why do I get the feeling that you want me to argue with you; to tell you that ideals are still important?"

"You're drunk."

"Which does not answer the question."

Lynn looked for a moment at the overhead, then brought his glance down to look at Michael. "Maybe I'd like to see you put up at least a little fight; something to tell me that those years I wasted in and after college were worth something. You know, when I finally made my peace with reality and got with the program, I felt guilty—like I was betraying myself. I didn't stop feeling guilty until I saw you characters being frozen out of teaching positions, and finally hopping on the RMI bandwagon." He shook his head. "And all the time the truth was staring me right in the face."

"Truth?"

"Biology. Any lifeform faced with the circumstances of its environment must either adapt to those circumstances, or perish."

"And you have adapted?"

Lynn nodded. "And so have you, finally. And there really wasn't any choice, was there? Powerful blocs of capital, labor, and governmental force are the circumstances of our environment, and those blocs aren't ruled by foggy ideals, Fellman, but by pragmatics."

Michael shrugged. "I still have the feeling that you expect some kind of protest from me."

Lynn curled his lip. "Don't you just make yourself the least little bit sick? Where are all those ideals you and your bunch held so dear?"

Michael motioned for another drink. "They went the way of the snail darter and the dodo, Mr. Lynn. As you put it, I have adapted." Lynn narrowed his eyes and stared at Michael for a moment, then he left his half-finished drink on the table, stood and walked quickly from the lounge. Michael took his fresh drink from the steward and gulped it down. As he held the glass in his hand, he glanced at the door through which Jacob Lynn had disappeared. He looked back at his glass and nodded. "Of course, some of us adapt better than others." He studied the glass until it shattered in his hand.

Armath squatted sullenly as his wives moved away from the eating fire. He watched Nanka, his head wife, as she went to the edge of the forest and

brought back an armload of wood for the fire. He studied her short golden fur, her sleek flanks and gracefully arched back. He scratched at the long black fur on his shoulder. "Need not burn all wood in forest, wife. The eating is done."

Nanka tossed her head to one side, added another stick to the fire, then dropped the wood at the fire's edge. Armath frowned, then folded his arms. "You not speak."

Nanka squatted by the fire. "Husband. I speak for your wives. Our *Tueh* is almost ended—"

"Stop!" Armath reared back, then settled to the fire under Nanka's unblinking stare. "Hear no more of this, wife."

"Must talk, Armath. Your duty to your wives—"

"No!" Armath growled, then swiped at the snow with a clawed hand. "No talk! Enough!"

Nanka studied her husband for a moment, then looked down at the fire. "Last *Tueh* season, when you saw the male killed in the valley, then the teachers came. This started. Armath, you sired only six females last season. This season you have sired none. Is our *Dishah* to die, Armath?"

Armath scratched at his shoulder and frowned. He lowered his hand, then brought up both hands and folded his arms. "The school, Nanka. You have not seen it. You do not understand."

"The school." Nanka nodded, then drew her left arm down her flanks. "You get from this school what your wives exist to give you?"

Armath lowered his head and shook it. "No. You no understand the school... It..." He shook his head again. He looked up at Nanka. "Join the others. I talk no more." As she rose and loped off toward the edge of the forest, Armath looked back to the fire. The little gray human and his assistants had been teaching at the big houses for three winters. The Benda males would watch, listen and hear of the mighty human advance through space—a huge rock reeling down a steep hill, with other races nothing but feeble blades of grass. Armath looked up from the fire to see his wives talking together at the edge of the forest. He rose, shook his head

and moved away from them to seek the solitude of the frozen river.

At his unit in the lavish instructors' complex, Michael Fellman put down his history of the Roman Empire, removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes. He looked at his watch, noted the time, then mentally calculated the remaining Bendadn minutes left before his self-appointed happy hour. He looked at the bottle on his clothes dresser, then stood. "To Hell with it." He went to the dresser, uncapped the bottle, and poured a glass full of straight gin. Returning to his chair, he sipped at the drink, closed his eyes, and let the familiar taste of juniper berries fill his mouth. He smiled, remembering that he had taken to drinking Martinis in an effort to curb his drinking. Michael had hated the taste of gin—once, long ago. Since then he had acquired a taste for the stuff. He raised his glass to take another sip, then the chimes sounded.

He stood, went to the door and opened it. Standing outside, his overcoat collar hunched against the cold, stood a frowning Dale Stevenson. "Oh, it's you. Won't you come in? I was just about to have a drink."

Stevenson nodded, then walked through the door. "Doctor Fellman, I've come about something pretty important."

Michael closed the door, then moved back to his chair. "You can dispose of your own coat." He sipped at his drink as Stevenson removed his coat and tossed it on a chair. Stevenson pulled up his sweater as he turned and withdrew a large envelope that had been hidden there. "What have you got there, Dale?"

Stevenson held out the envelope, then walked to the dresser and poured himself a generous quantity of gin. "Something I want you to read."

Michael weighed the thing, then chuckled. "What is it? Your rough draft on the history of human conquest?"

Stevenson took a chair across from Michael, reached out a hand and tapped the envelope with his finger. "It's a confidential RMI report. It's a biological study that was done on Bendadn by the company five years ago."

Michael shrugged. "I have no interest in biology. And what are you doing with a confidential report? We're not exactly in the inner circle

around here."

Stevenson took a gulp of his drink, twisted his face up until the fumes cleared his lungs, then lowered his glass. "I had it stolen from Lynn's office."

Michael raised his eyebrows. "How very imaginative of you, Dale. Would you mind informing me why you placed both of our positions in jeopardy in this manner?"

Stevenson lowered his glass after his second gulp, then nodded. "Doctor, do you know anything about the sexual habits of the Benda?"

"Not a thing."

"Didn't you wonder why males are the only students?"

Michael frowned. "The black-haired ones? I had no idea they were all male. I had supposed that the blonde ones were on a lower social scale—you know, something racial."

Stevenson shook his head, finished his drink, then stood and went again to the dresser. As he poured, he talked. "The Benda are all females at birth."

"Interesting, but how do they reproduce?"

Stevenson took his drink and resumed his seat. "It's all in the report. When they are young, all during their growing-up years, they have competitions, fights, and eventually combats to determine a pecking order of sorts. The ones who wind up on top become males. They then form a harem of females around each male. That's what they call a *Dishah*. That's the family unit on Bendadn." Stevenson paused as he took a long pull at his drink.

Michael looked at the envelope on his lap. "I suppose it's of some interest to someone, but why a confidential report on it—and, I might add, why did you steal it?"

"In college I had a minor in evolutionary biosystems. It's a hobby, I guess. That's why the Benda interested me in a biological sense. Because of their method of reproduction and the social organizations that were

determined by it, it is almost impossible that the Benda evolved to become a sentient, time-binding race." Stevenson shook his head. "That's why my ears perked up when I overheard a couple of clerks talking at the executive complex about a proposed update on this report. To make a long story short, I heard enough to prompt me to spread around a few credits to get a copy."

Michael shrugged. "I only hope your dedication to history is as commendable as your interest in biology." He tossed the envelope onto his coffee table. "However, it's just not my subject."

Stevenson studied Michael for a moment. "Doctor, there's only two things you have to know about that report. The first is that males in this race are determined by conquest. Females are determined by being dominated."

"I know, the competition thing—"

"The other thing you should know is that the Benda look upon our little history course as a form of competition."

"What are you talking about?"

"Every reproducing male within RMI's claim area is in a position to compare his race's history with that of another race—that towering monument of lies called *Manifest Destiny*."

Michael sighed. "I still don't see what you're driving at, Dale. None of us are happy with the texts, but we knew what the job was when we took it."

Stevenson put his glass on the coffee table, stood and put on his coat. "I guess I misread you for all these years, Doctor. I'm sorry to have taken up your time."

Michael stood and faced Stevenson. "What do you mean?"

"You're rather a cynical character now, aren't you, Doctor?"

Michael sighed again and held out his hands. "Whatever does any of this have to do with me?"

Stevenson shook his head. "When a Benda male recognizes he is

dominated, he reverts and becomes female again. What do you *think* will happen to the Benda after all the reproducing males have reverted?"

Michael's eyes widened. "Come now, Dale, I can't believe that."

Stevenson pointed at the coffee table. "Then, Doctor, I suggest you break your rule and read something in biology! I think you'll find it has a lot to do with the history you've been teaching."

"How?"

"In that report is an outline for *Manifest Destiny*." Stevenson opened the door. "RMI is having us—you, me and the others—the company is having us teach an entire race to death!" Stevenson walked through the open door, slamming it behind him. Michael picked up the envelope, pulled the report from it, then sat down and turned to the first page.

Jacob Lynn looked up in surprise as Michael Fellman burst into his office unannounced. Lynn's secretary followed in the historian's wake. "I'm sorry, Mr. Lynn, he just walked right past me, and—"

Lynn waved a hand. "It's all right." The secretary scowled at Michael, then turned and left, closing the door. "Now, Fellman, what's this all about?"

Michael took a bound sheaf of papers from under his arm and dropped it on Lynn's desk. "That."

Lynn raised his eyebrows as he read the title on the report, then he looked at Michael. "Where did you get this?"

"Transportation problems don't interest me, Lynn. What does interest me is are you aware of what's in that report?"

Lynn leaned back in his chair and half-closed his eyes. "Of course."

"Well?"

"Well what?"

Michael studied the project manager. With each sweep of his eyes, new information presented itself. "You knew all along about this."

"Of course."

"Why? This will mean the death of a race!"

Lynn smiled and shook his head. "You're overstating things, Fellman. We're not doing this outside the claim area." He shook his head again, then fixed Michael to the floor with his eyes. "Let me introduce you to a few realities, Fellman. Developed planets with advanced populations already are exploiting their mineral resources. Uninhabited planets are many, but expensive to investigate. Therefore, we, that is, RMI finds itself in a position where it always has to deal with semi-barbaric populations. To maximize our profits, it is necessary that the local population cooperate."

"And death is the ultimate cooperation."

"You said it, Fellman. I didn't."

"Which makes one Helluvalot of difference, Lynn."

Lynn smiled. "Is your conscience bothering you, Doctor? Is the size of the cynicism beginning to gnaw at you? You must know that any principle that you thought worth preserving was tossed down the toilet when you signed your contract with RMI." Lynn held out his hands. "What is this performance, Fellman? Are you trying to manufacture a rationalization for your own purity?"

"Lynn, you ought to be sporting a forked tail and red suit."

Lynn frowned, then laughed. "Are you complaining because I made a better deal when I sold out than you did? Or are old ideals beginning to shake their coffin lids?"

"You know, Lynn, you are the lowest form of life that ever crawled."

Lynn, still smiling, shook his head. "No, Fellman. There we disagree. I know what I'm doing, and I accept it. You are doing the same thing and crying about it. At least I'm honest. What does that make you, Fellman? You and the rest of your ivory-tower crew?"

"What does that make me?" Michael sat on the crude stone wall overlooking the encampments of five of the Benda families. Each family

was removed from the others by distance and strict custom. The families had moved from their permanent sites in order that their males could attend his lecture at the local RMI auditorium. Michael pushed himself from the wall and began walking the rough path through the encampments back to his quarters. He thought of Stevenson's anger and Lynn's smugness, and the words Michael had uttered many years before when a young idealist at the university had sought his support in protesting some rights-diminishing law. "I am tired. Too tired to again break my back on the knee of another lost cause." A coldness had crept into his heart as he made his peace with uncontestable power; a coldness that allowed him to sweep together a few shards of career ruined by following impossible ideals.

As he approached the first encampment, he saw twelve young females competing to see which of them would have the strength, courage and stamina to become males. Michael remembered a line from the report. *The Benda cannot conceptualize of an organization beyond the family level. It appears, then, that the company must either treat with separate families—with the entailing impossible conflicts inherent in such arrangements—or devise apian that will enable the Benda to be either treated as a unity, or eliminated.*

Michael shook his head at the frigid sense of purpose implied by the report. The cynicism of pragmatics brought to the ultimate cynicism: the elimination of a race to achieve the kind of political stability that would attract investment capital to the RMI coffers. He watched one of the Benda females deliver a savage blow to another, sending the stricken child writhing to the dust. The victorious female whirled around on her four walking hands, motioning to her sisters to come and try their luck. Most of them hung back, but one reared up and charged. The two met with a bone-crunching thud, then were lost to view in a cloud of dust.

Michael turned and saw the females of another family similarly engaged. Then, he saw the family male squatting at the edge of the clearing, studying his children at their combat. The male's burly arms and strong back showed patches of fine blond hair amidst the black shag of his coat. The male turned his head, saw Michael, then jumped up, startled. Michael smiled and nodded his head at the Benda male. The creature only stared at the human, then hung his head and walked slowly away from the encampment.

Michael turned and hurried away.

Armath waited at the auditorium door for the opening to clear. At a break in the ingoing traffic, Armath spaced himself behind the most recent entrant the customary four paces, then moved into the huge, vaulted structure. Its size was necessary to seat the Benda students in such a manner that no two of them came any closer than four paces apart. Armath moved down the ranks, spotted an open place, then walked to it and squatted, facing the tiny stage at the front of the room. He noticed blond patches on many backs, and that the smell of *Tueh* was in the air. Armath bowed his head, sighed and waited. After a few moments, the auditorium grew silent. The frail gray human called Fellman entered at the front of the room and climbed up on the stage.

He placed his papers on the lectern, adjusted the microphone, then looked at the assembled males. "Humans will bury you." The words echoed throughout the auditorium. Armath frowned, for the human's style had changed. "If this were a classroom full of humans, there would be talking, laughing, playing about. But not with *you*." Armath could feel the scorn washing from the lectern across the students. "You *can't* talk with your neighbor, can you? Look at you. Look at yourselves squatting as though each one of you was an island unto himself." Armath looked and saw the other Benda males also looking around.

"Do any of you know why you sit apart like that? I'm asking a question? Do any of you know?"

Armath stood. "It is our custom."

Fellman nodded. "And how is it that it became a custom? Can you answer that?"

Armath held out his hands. "It has always been so."

The human motioned with his hand. "Sit back down." He looked over the audience for a long moment, then fixed one of the males in the front row with its eyes. "You!" The student stood. "Why are we speaking my language—the language of humans?"

The Benda frowned, then shrugged. "Our own language is not... it is not complex as is yours. Our only need of language is to care for our *Dishah*."

We needed nothing more before the humans came."

Fellman nodded. "And we *are* here, aren't we? And you will all die because we came—because we are *better* than you!"

Armath swallowed as the last echoes of the human's challenge faded. Inside his chest he felt a tightening. The human walked from behind the lectern, then went from one end of the stage to the other, looking over the students. He returned to the lectern and leaned his arms on it. "The custom of separation dates back before the earliest memory of your oldest. Before the custom, a male chancing to meet another would enter combat to decide who was the stronger." Fellman nodded. "Of course you know what happened to the loser. You know because it's happening to all of *you!*

The tightening in Armath's chest grew, and he recognized it to be anger. The human removed his arms from the lectern and held them behind his back. "Your ancestors were at least intelligent enough to see that this reduced an already small male population. Hence, it was agreed, long ago, that there was no challenge between males beyond four paces. This solved the problem, but it also eliminated the need for one male to talk to another. You cannot even talk to your own fathers if they can still reproduce, can you?" Fellman shook his head. "That's why you are nothing, and will remain nothing, until your race is extinct!"

Armath snarled and stood, along with several other Benda. His fingers ached to rip the little man apart, but other Benda had him boxed in on all four sides and corners. Fellman pointed his finger at Armath. "You!"

The growls among the Benda quieted. Armath held his head high, his eyes flashing. "Yes, human?"

"You want to come up here, do you not?"

Armath nodded and flexed his fingers. "Yes. Ah, *yes!*"

Fellman moved a little to his left and pointed at the four-pace-wide path between Armath and the stage. "There is a clear path. Walk through there."

Armath looked at the two Benda males flanking the entrance to the path. He saw the hair on one rise as the fellow stood. The male looked at Fellman, then back at Armath. He nodded. The male across from him

nodded as well. The human screamed from the lectern. "Tell him it's all right! Tell him with *words*, damn it!"

The male to Armath's right looked at the human, then back at Armath. He held out a fist, then opened his hand, pointing it toward the human. "Pass."

The Benda male across from him nodded and held out his hand. "Pass."

Armath moved forward, his body tense, as he passed between the two males, then approached the next pair. They held out their hands toward the stage.

"Pass."

"Pass."

Armath walked between the two rows, stopping before each new pair, with each new pair holding out their hands toward the stage.

"Pass."

"Pass."

As he left the last pair behind and stood before the stage, he discovered to his amazement that he was no longer angry. Instead, his mind was filled with the wonder of what had just transpired. The auditorium was silent. Fellman walked to the edge of the stage. "Come up here."

Armath walked the five steps to the stage and moved to the lectern. He stopped four paces from the human. Fellman glared at him and pointed at a spot on the stage next to the lectern. Armath reared up a bit, blew in and out a few times, then stood next to the human. Fellman turned to the auditorium and folded his arms. To the Benda males seated in the ranks, he appeared foolish and small standing next to the tall, husky Armath. The odd couple stood together until the picture was firmly implanted in everyone's mind. Then the human spoke into the microphone.

"All over this Universe there is life that has a special quality. Humans have this quality; the Benda has this quality. You are not creatures of instinct, Benda. You are not slaves to the Universe's whim. You are creatures of choice. What you are is by choice; what you will become is by

choice—*your* choice." Fellman looked at Armath, then returned his gaze to the assembled Benda males. "My job is to teach you about human history. That history has been one of expansionism, conquest and oppression." The little gray man rubbed his chin, then dropped his hand to his side. "But no race has a longer history of resisting human oppression, conquest, and expansion than do the humans themselves." Fellman tapped the papers on his lectern and spoke to Armath without looking at him. "Read this to the others." The man turned, left the stage, then left the auditorium.

Armath moved to the lectern, his heart stopping as he realized that he was about to talk—to talk to a room full of males. He swallowed, looked down at the papers, and studied them to keep from looking at the sea of faces before him. His eyes dashed over the hand-printed lines, then he frowned and looked back at the faces. "The human... the human has left us a story." He looked back at the paper, swallowed, then looked back at the males. "In a land far away, in a time long ago, there was a man. He was a hard man among hard men; he was a solitary man among solitary men. In the midst of a powerful empire, he was a slave, and his name was Spartacus..."

The winter closed, Bendadn saw its brief summer, then once again the winds brought the snow as two males met in the forest. Armath squatted in the field and turned to Januth. "Why do we meet here, Januth?"

Januth raised his brows and held out his hands. "Armath, can you imagine us meeting in my camp, or yours? Think of the females."

Armath nodded. "They would be disturbed." He rubbed his chin. "I wonder...about educating the females. What would Fellman think of that?"

"Armath, you are closer to the human than any of us. That is why I would ask you a question."

"What question?"

Januth frowned and scratched at the new black hair on his arm. "This human, Spartacus, and the few humans who fought the Persians at that pass..."

"Thermopylae."

Januth nodded. "And the human Hale who hung, and all those others. Humans who faced impossible odds, it is true. But they all failed."

"What is your question?"

"I feel that Fellman would have us... become something different, something better, stronger." Januth held out his hands, then dropped them. "But the examples he gives us all fail. What is the purpose of this?"

Armath studied the ground, then looked into Januth's eyes. "Can there be, Januth, something more important than the *Dishah!* We serve our own lives, and that of our *Dishah*. That is how it has always been, and it is good." Armath frowned, then held out a hand in Januth's direction. "But is there something more important? The humans Fellman talks of. They failed, but they... failed serving something more important than themselves. Perhaps that is the lesson Fellman would have us learn."

Januth shrugged. "He would have us serve something more important?"

Armath nodded. "It is what I think."

"Well, what would he have us serve?"

Armath shook his head. "I do not know. One thing I do know is that he teaches us that the contest with power is never won or lost until one side or the other breathes its last. Our contest is not over. Who is the stronger is still to be decided."

Januth smiled. "Do you... do you mean... ?"

Armath grinned and held out his arms. "Yes. Soon my home will be crawling with screaming, squabbling brats!"

A month later, a strange human waited in the darkness at the back of the RMI auditorium furthest from the company administrative complex. He observed the Benda males, totally absorbed in talk, moving into the great room together and crowding toward the small raised stage where they squatted, shoulder to shoulder. When the auditorium was half-full, the Benda lowered their chatter, then became silent as a graying human entered and climbed up onto the stage. He moved to the lectern, placed some notes upon it, then adjusted the microphone. "Questions."

Several hairy black hands rose. The man pointed at one of them and a huge Benda male stood. "Fellman, if the Benda is to serve something larger, more important, than any one of us, or any one *Dishah*, what is it that we should serve?"

The human nodded. "I am a human. What makes me better than you is that I can devise and choose those things that I serve. You are Benda. It is not for me to devise and choose the things that you will serve. You are creatures of choice; then *choose*." The graying human looked to his notes. "Today I will talk of manifest destiny—"

A moan rose from the assembled males. One male close to the front stood. "Fellman, we *choose* not to hear any more of that trash. It is trash, and you have said so yourself." The male's comment was greeted with growls of approval.

The little gray man smiled. "You speak of a book; I speak of an ideal—the true destiny of humans, and of other intelligent races."

The male standing cocked his head to one side. "Is this the destiny of the Benda as well?"

Another male stood and spoke to the first. "Fellman said that such things are a matter of choice. We cannot choose until we listen and understand."

Both males squatted on the floor. The human turned to his notes. "Intelligent life rules other life. But it is not the destiny of intelligent life to rule intelligent life. The destiny of intelligent life is *not to be ruled*. As creatures of choice, it is our nature to be free to choose. Rule is existence by the choice of others as instinct is existence by the choice of nature. Today we will begin a study of the history of human progress and revolution..."

The Benda males, absorbed in thought, did not notice the other human at the back of the auditorium moving from the shadows, then walking rapidly out of the building.

Jacob Lynn leaned back in his chair and nodded at the biologist. "All right, Hyman. You've had a look around. Now tell me why things are not following the projections in your report."

Hyman pushed a thin wisp of brown hair from his watery blue eyes. "It's your boy Fellman."

"Fellman?"

Hyman nodded. "He's made the entire *Manifest Destiny* program into a laughingstock. In addition, he has the Benda males discussing matters that should be far beyond them. Dangerous matters."

Lynn frowned. "Such as?"

Hyman shrugged. "He's got them talking philosophy, politics, revolution—"

"What?"

Hyman nodded. "In addition, none of the males I've observed have reverted. By now they should have stopped reproducing altogether. Somehow, Fellman has convinced the Benda that they are, if not superior to humans, at least not to be dominated by humans. I'm afraid that simply removing Fellman and the other teachers who are helping him will not reverse the process. The damage is done."

"What do you suggest?"

Hyman sighed, then shrugged. "There appears to be little alternative. You must convince the Benda—once and for all—that they are inferior. And this must be done in a manner understandable to the Benda."

Lynn rubbed the back of his neck. "What are you suggesting?"

"A confrontation. A demonstration of force." Hyman smiled. "I'm certain that you can devise a pretext that will satisfy the Ninth Quadrant Supervisory Forces."

Lynn pulled at his lower lip, then nodded. "In fact, if it is worked properly, I might even be able to get the Quadrant Forces to do the dirty work." He leaned forward. "One thing more. Your report said that the Benda males cannot act in concert. How can we provoke something that will appear to be an uprising?"

Hyman rubbed his chin and studied the toes of his shoes, then he

looked up. "Fellman has them sitting and talking together. Perhaps he has made our task very simple by making it possible for the Benda to act together in an attempt at force." He nodded and held up a finger. "One thing."

"What's that?"

"Fellman and his bunch must not leave the planet. Since they are aware of the report, it wouldn't do to have them wandering around Earth, talking." Hyman stood and walked toward the door. He paused and looked back at Lynn. "There is an alternative—but I suppose you know that."

"Know what, Hyman?"

"If Fellman's efforts result in a unified Benda race, RMI will have a political entity with which to deal for minerals. It will cut into the profits some, but no more than on any other planet RMI has invested in."

Lynn nodded. "I'll be getting in touch with you later, Hyman." The biologist nodded and left the office. Lynn swung his chair around and stared at the map behind his desk. On it were marked the many test-boring sites that had uncovered rich deposits of hematite, silver, tungsten, zinc, lead—a treasure house of metals. He tapped his fingertips upon the armrests of his chair, then he swung back and punched a code into his desk's tiny keyboard.

"Thorpe here."

"This is Lynn."

"Yes, Mr. Lynn."

"Thorpe, I want you to prepare to have a full crew move into the Javuud Valley tomorrow. I want full-scale production to be reached within the next two weeks."

"Yes, sir, but all the transfers of mineral rights haven't been completed."

"Let me worry about that. And Thorpe?"

"Yes, Mr. Lynn."

"I'll be having a full security company with your crew for protection."

"Is there a need? I mean, has there been some trouble that I should know about?"

"Just taking precautions." Lynn cut off the communication, then stared at the door through which the biologist had left. Lynn's eyes narrowed as he clenched his fists. "It's not profits, Hyman. It's *Fellman!*"

Dale Stevenson felt the bite of the morning chill as he walked from his quarters at the subschool to the local RMI auditorium.

There were many things that had to be prepared as Doctor Fellman made his circuit of RMI subschools. First, the auditorium had to be opened, which was the easy part. After the lecture, as the mass of Benda males divided into discussion groups, Stevenson and the other discussion-group leaders would again be embroiled in the telling questions and spirited arguments of the students for the next nine days. Then Fellman would appear for a lecture and begin the process all over again.

As he approached the door to the auditorium, he nodded at the students who had gathered there, then he motioned to the RMI security guard standing beside the door. "Let's open it up."

The guard shook his head. "My orders are to keep these doors closed."

Stevenson sighed. "Look... what's your name?"

"Bartlet, Mr. Stevenson."

"Then you know who I am."

"Yes, sir. But my orders come from Mr. Lynn. The auditorium is to remain closed for the day."

Stevenson held out his hands. "There is some mistake, Mr. Bartlet. This auditorium has to be open for Doctor Fellman to deliver his lecture."

The guard shook his head. "My orders stand until Mr. Lynn changes them. I'm sorry."

Stevenson fumed a bit, then moved to the door and tried the handle. The door rattled but would not open. He motioned to a couple of Benda males who were observing the conversation. "You two. Pull this door open."

The males grinned at each other, then moved toward the door. Bartlet pulled a solid projectile weapon from the holster at his side and aimed it at Stevenson. "If they go near that door, Stevenson, I have orders to shoot!"

Stevenson's eyes widened, then he laughed. "Nonsense!" He turned back to the two Benda and pointed at the door. "Go to it."

A sharp report deafened them all. The guard, his face red, looked around at the students, then back at Stevenson on the ground holding his thigh. "I told you! My orders are to shoot!"

Stevenson looked at the guard, his eyes wide and glassy with shock. "My god, man, have you lost your mind?"

"I got my orders!"

The guard turned and faced the circle of Benda males as a low growl began at one side. He pointed his gun at a particularly huge male who began advancing. "Stand back! Stand back or I'll shoot!" He squeezed the trigger again and again as hairy black hands reached for his throat.

Distath looked out of the door beyond his garden and examined with pleasure the rocks and fields of his *Dishah's* land. The human's lessons on property were complicated, but caused him many hours of profound thought. He rolled the words with his tongue. "Without a right to exist at some place, no other rights can exist." He nodded, then started as he saw a movement among the rocks. A Benda—a female, not of his *Dishah*. He ran from the house toward the movement, left the garden and vaulted the low fence. As he approached the rocks, a golden female stepped forth and bowed her head. "Forgive me... forgive me this intrusion. It is my husband, Virsth."

Distath glowered at the female, then held out a hand. "What of Virsth?"

"Distath, the humans have come with great machines to take my

family's land." She hung her head, then looked into the male's eyes. "Virsth sent me to warn you."

Distath swung his head back, then looked down at the female. "You realize the impropriety of a female not of my *Dishah* being on my land?" He shook his shaggy head. "What care have I that the humans take *Virsth*'s property? He is to care for his *Dishah*, and I mine."

The female looked up into Distath's eyes. "The humans come for your land as well, Distath. This is the message I was given to deliver... as my husband died from a wound delivered at the hands of the humans. Do with it what you will!"

Lynn's office door opened and two guards pulled a struggling Michael Fellman into the room, then released him before Lynn's desk. "Lynn, what are you—"

"You're fired." Lynn returned to the papers on his desk. "If you are found anywhere on company property you will be arrested under Quadrant Savage Planet Regulations as a trespasser." He glanced up. "That's all."

* * *

Five days later, as his shuttle touched down at the RMI field on Bendadn, Damon Stirnak watched from his view port as Jacob Lynn crossed the tarmac toward the craft. He heard the shuttle door open, then he waited and watched. Lynn hesitated at the bottom step, then he moved into the shuttle. Stirnak did not rise as Lynn entered the passenger compartment, nor did he offer Lynn a seat. Lynn appeared to Stirnak to be having difficulties about what to do with his hands. They clasped in front, went into his coat pockets, jumped out and clasped behind Lynn's back, then went off to hide themselves in his trouser pockets. Stirnak leaned his head back against the seat and closed his ice-blue eyes. "Stop fidgeting, Lynn."

"Yes, Mr. Stirnak." Lynn took a deep breath and halted his nervous movements through sheer will.

"You know, of course, why I am here?"

"No, sir. I was only notified of your arrival a few minutes ago."

"Surely when your office applied for military assistance under the QSP Regulations it knew that the fact would come to the attention of RMI."

Lynn shrugged. "Of course, but everything is well in hand. I see no need for an Executive Office investigator."

Stirnak nodded, then opened his eyes and fixed Lynn to the deck. "Lynn, what is going on down here?"

Lynn wet his lips. "It's all in the application for assistance, Mr. Stirnak. There have been four attacks on RMI facilities by locals—"

"Why? Why have these attacks happened? According to the Hyman Report, submitted by your office five years ago, the locals should—right now—be a whipped and dying population."

"I can explain."

"Do."

Lynn wet his lips again. "It's Fellman and some of the other instructors RMI hired to staff the school system. They turned everything around, making the locals hostile."

"How did this happen?"

Lynn shrugged. "I'm not the one who screened the applicants for those positions. That's a Main Office headache."

Stirnak rubbed his chin, closed his eyes, then opened them again. "Lynn, I am going to give you a free hand with this problem."

"Thank you, Mr. Stirnak."

Stirnak held up a hand and shook his head. "Save your thanks, Lynn. I'm putting you on the spot."

Lynn frowned. "Sir?"

"The *Manifest Destiny* plan was cooked up and submitted by your office. RMI has made and will make no official notice of the plan. That includes, as well, your present attempts at resolving the situation. You are on your own."

"I see." Lynn nodded. "If everything works out, I'm a hero, but—"

"—But if this all falls apart, Lynn, you will find yourself in a high wind, and very much alone." Stirnak motioned to a seat opposite his. "First sit, then tell me what you plan to do about the Benda."

Several mornings later, Dale Stevenson, hobbling on an improvised crutch, spotted Michael Fellman at the edge of the clearing that the instructors had been camping in. He pursed his lips against the ache in his leg, and moved toward him. Fellman looked around and smiled. "It's good to see you up and around, Dale." Michael pointed at the leg. "And how is your badge of courage?"

Stevenson snorted as he came to a halt. "Michael, if you think for an instant that if I thought that guard was serious, I would have... well, you'd be as ready for a soft-walled room as the rest of us are." Stevenson cocked his head back toward the collection of rough lean-tos that housed the former RMI Department of History on Bendadn. "Look at us, Michael. Flabby, gray, weak, and without half an idea between us as to how to survive on our own, much less as savages."

Michael looked at the camp, saw several faces turned in his direction. As they noticed him looking back, the faces turned away. Michael looked at Stevenson. "Have you been put up as a spokesman of some kind?"

"I guess I have. Look, you know as well as any of us how impossible our situation is. You know what the winter is like on Bendadn. I doubt if any of us can survive it like this."

Michael shrugged. "What would you have me do about it?"

Stevenson shook his head. "I don't know. Get in touch with Lynn. Ask for a deal."

"What kind of deal? We don't have anything he wants."

Stevenson looked into Michael's eyes for an instant, then averted his glance. "We have one thing."

Michael studied Stevenson, then as his mouth opened in surprise he pointed at the camp. "You... and the others. You want me to tell Lynn that we'll go back and implement his damnable *Manifest Destiny* plan?"

Stevenson kept his gaze down as he nodded. "What good are we doing like this? I ask you, what good? If Kurst over there hadn't had a smattering of medical training, I'd be dead right now. The same thing for those two Benda males who got wounded with me. Michael, in a couple of months we aren't going to have anything to *eat!*"

Michael sighed. "Is this the man who came to me with the Hyman Report? The same man who said that I *have* to do something?"

Stevenson shook his head. "I know. But, we aren't doing any good like this. What about the families that got tossed into the bush along with us? You and I are single, but what about the instructors with families? Could you sit and watch your son or daughter starve or freeze to death? What good are our ideals then?"

"Dale, that's when they're the most important. I'll tell you what good we've done. After you and the two Benda males were wounded, the rest of the students carried the three of you off and cared for you until we could get Kurst to you. Before we came, they wouldn't have done that—not for a human, not for a Benda."

Stevenson looked into Michael's eyes and shook his head. "But what good are we doing *now?*"

"We are abstaining from the commission of a crime."

"Aaah—"

"Listen, Dale. When you came to me with that report, what did you have as a limit on your so-called ideals? Do what you can, Fellman, just as long as I don't lose my job?" Michael turned away, then spoke with his back toward Stevenson. "First, Dale, I doubt if the *Manifest Destiny* program can be salvaged at this point. Our students, I am proud to say, have learned too well for that. But even if we could reverse what we've done, I doubt that Jacob Lynn would believe it, or, if he did, that he would take any of us back. In his mind, he is committed to the use of physical force." Michael turned back. "But if any of those in the camp want to try, I have no way of stopping them."

That evening, Armath and a scattering of Benda males looked with horror at the bodies littered across the Javuud Valley. Squads of scaled creatures moved out from the protection of the mineral extraction plant.

Each one carried one of the weapons that had felled the Benda long before any of them had reached the RMI ramparts. A hairy hand shook Armath's shoulder. "The creatures seek the rest of us, Armath. We must run!"

The speaker ran off into the underbrush leaving Armath alone. The Benda male frowned as he felt the hair below his eyes and found them wet. He lowered his hand as a fist, watched the beings coming closer, then he turned and followed the other male into the forest.

Michael, Stevenson and several of the other instructors watched as the huge Benda male drew a seven-pointed star in the dirt. Armath looked up at the circle of human faces, then pointed at the star. "This is the sign they wore on their coverings, and on their flying boats."

"That's the Ninth Quadrant insignia." One of the humans stepped forward and turned toward Michael. "Those aren't RMI guards, Fellman. Those are Ninth Quadrant troops."

Michael nodded at the man. "I can see that, DuPree. What I want to know is how RMI got the Quadrant to use its troops." He looked up at DuPree. "You have experience in Quadrant law, don't you?"

DuPree nodded. "The only way I can figure it is that RMI asked for the protection of the Quadrant under, the Savage Planet Regulations. What it amounts to, if a planet is savage, according to the law's definition of savage, then a private party on such a planet can request the Quadrant to come in as a police force if a threat has presented itself."

Michael nodded, then looked up at Armath. "Why did you do this? You cannot attack guns with bare hands."

"This is the only way we know, Fellman."

Michael nodded. "I know. I know. How many of you were lost?"

"A hundred of us charged the complex. Not more than ten escaped alive."

Michael nodded. "That a hundred of you would fight together for a common goal; this is good." He studied the star, then looked up at DuPree. "Savage?"

DuPree shrugged. "That's what they're called."

Michael turned toward Armath. "Do not be sad, Armath. Your companions joined in the right cause, but with the wrong weapons." Michael stood and turned toward the other humans. "School resumes tomorrow." He turned back to Armath. "I cannot travel the circuit as I did before. Can you spread word to the Benda?"

Armath frowned, then nodded. "I shall have them told."

As Bendadn's chilly winds gathered, sending the white flakes of winter through trees and across fields, little gray men and little gray women stood ankle deep in snow, surrounded by hulking black bodies. At night, the humans were quartered in Benda camps. They earned their keep during the days with their talk. The Benda males listened, questioned, argued, then listened some more. As spring darted warm fingers into frozen draws and hollows, the lessons ended.

Ninth Quadrant Force Captain Vaakne lifted his scaled head as the orderly entered. "Jazut, this is what?"

"Captain, the Benda at gate there are."

Vaakne stood. "Attack?"

The orderly gestured in the negative. "Talk it is they want."

Captain Vaakne buckled on his sidearms. "Guard to walls posted?"

The orderly gestured in the affirmative. "To walls posted, Captain."

* * *

Armath watched as the heavy Ninth Quadrant officer waddled from the mining complex gate. He looked up to see many of the scaled heads of the Quadrant soldiers looking back. The Quadrant officer waddled around the few remaining patches of ice and came to a halt in front of Armath. "*Negias si naad, Benda?*"

Armath shook his massive head. "Does the scaled creature understand English?"

Vaakne's slitted eyes narrowed. "The English I speak. What is that you and the others here want?"

Armath extended a roll of papers and handed it to the officer. "Take this, creature. The papers are our constitution, the record of our election, and our government's application for representation among the planets of the Ninth Quadrant Federation." Armath pointed at the roll of papers. "In there you will find my government's demand that Ninth Quadrant Forces be removed from Bendadn. Should you not leave, Bendadn shall request the United Quadrants to remove you."

Vaakne cocked his head to one side, looked at the roll of papers in his hands, then looked back at the naked, hairy creatures that had delivered it. "Government? This not understand."

Armath scratched at his shoulder with a clawed hand. "Study the regulations for savage planets, creature, and you will see. Bendadn no longer is a savage planet, and you must leave." The six Benda males turned and left Vaakne standing alone.

On the RMI ship back to Earth, Jacob Lynn frowned and turned to the two guards who had spent the first several days of the trip following him like a shadow. "Do you have to follow me around like that? It's not like I could escape."

One of the guards shrugged, then rubbed his chin. "Where'll you be, Mr. Lynn—just in case someone should ask?"

"I'm going to the ship's lounge to have a drink."

The two guards looked at each other, shrugged, then the first guard spoke to Lynn. "Okay, but don't get lost." They turned and went back to their quarters.

Lynn moved through the corridor until it widened into the ship's lounge. He walked directly to the bar, obtained a double whiskey, then turned to survey the open booth seats. He saw a graying man with glasses sipping at a Martini. He walked to the booth and looked down at him. "May I, Fellman?"

Michael looked up and smiled. "Be my guest, *sahib*."

Lynn made a wry smile, then sat down. He took a swallow from his drink, then lowered it to the table. "I suppose you know what's going to happen to me?"

Michael shook his head. "Only a little. Is it true that RMI is bringing charges against you?"

Lynn snorted. "Yeah. Like I did it all by myself. I'm their scapegoat so they can remain on Benda. It seems that they are willing to try and work within the framework of your government, Fellman."

Michael shook his head and smiled. "It's not my government, Mr. Lynn. It's theirs."

"I suppose in some philosophical sense you think you've created Utopia."

Michael sipped at his drink, then raised his eyebrows. "No, Mr. Lynn. The government of the Benda is far from perfect. Only the males can vote or serve in government. I advised them to extend those rights to the females to avoid a future headache, but as I said it's their government." Michael studied the former project manager. "Mr. Lynn, your problems stem from failing to take your own advice."

Lynn raised an eyebrow, then he turned back to his drink. "What advice?"

"Adapt to the circumstances of your environment, or go under. The environment changed, Mr. Lynn. RMI adapted; you did not."

Lynn took a swallow of his drink, then looked at Michael. "Why are you going back to Earth, Fellman? I would have thought that you would have carved a nice little place for yourself in the new society."

Michael leaned back and returned Lynn's glance. "I told you. My government isn't on Benda; mine is on Earth. Since leaving Earth, I've learned a little about environments, circumstances, and—if I may use the word—ideals. I'm going back to see if I can find ears willing to listen to what I have to teach."

Lynn laughed, then shook his head. "As a teacher, Fellman, you are poison on Earth. You'll die on the vine."

Michael finished off his Martini, then stood and faced Lynn. "Perhaps, Mr. Lynn, but at least I'll find the vine I die on quite comfortable."

Lynn frowned. "I don't understand you at all, Fellman."

Michael smiled. "I don't doubt it." Michael Fellman turned and left the lounge. Lynn stared at the door through which the history instructor had left, then he turned and finished his drink.