

A E Van Vogt
The Rull

I

Trevor Jamieson saw the other space boat out of the corner of his eye. He was sitting in a hollow about a dozen yards from the edge of the precipice, and some score of feet from the doorway of his own lifeboat. He had been intent on his survey book, annotating a comment beside the voice graph, to the effect that Laertes III was so close to the invisible dividing line between Earth-controlled and Rull-controlled space that its prior discovery by man was in itself a major victory in the Rull-human war.

He had written: "The fact that ships based on this planet could strike at several of the most densely populated areas of the galaxy, *Rull* or *human*, gives it an AA priority on all available military equipment. Preliminary defense units should be set up on Mount Monolith, where I am now, within three weeks

It was at that point that he saw the other boat, above and somewhat to his left, approaching the tableland. He glanced up at it, and froze where he was, torn between two opposing purposes. His first impulse, to run for the lifeboat, yielded to the realization that the movement would be seen instantly by the electronic reflexes of the other ship. For a moment, then, he had the dim hope that, if he remained quiet enough, neither he nor his ship would be observed.

Even as he sat there, perspiring with indecision, his tensed eyes noted the Rull markings and the rakish design of the other vessel. His vast knowledge of things Rull enabled him to catalogue it instantly as a survey craft.

A *survey* craft. The Rulls had discovered the Laertes sun.

The terrible potentiality was that, behind this small craft, might be fleets of battleships, whereas he was alone. His own lifeboat had been dropped by the *Orion* nearly a parsec away, while the big ship was proceeding at antigravity speeds. That was to insure that Rull energy tracers did not record its passage through this area of space. The *Orion* was to head for the nearest base, load up with planetary defense equipment, and then return. She was due in ten days.

Ten days. Jamieson groaned inwardly and drew his legs under him and clenched his hand about the survey book. But still the possibility that his ship, partially hidden under a clump of trees, might escape notice if *he* remained quiet, held him there in the open. His head tilted up, his eyes glared at the alien, and his brain willed it to turn aside. Once more, while he waited, the implications of the disaster that could be here struck deep.

The Rull ship was a hundred yards away now and showed no signs of changing its course. In seconds it would cross the clump of trees, which half hid the lifeboat.

In a spasm of movement, Jamieson launched himself from his chair. With complete abandon, he dived for the open doorway of his machine. As the door clanged behind him, the boat shook as if it had

been struck by a giant. Part of the ceiling sagged; the floor heaved under him, and the air grew hot and suffocating. Gasping, Jamieson slid into the control chair and struck the main emergency switch. The rapid-fire blasters huzzaed into automatic firing positions and let go with a hum and a depthroated *ping*. The refrigerators whined with power; a cold blast of air blew at his body. The relief was so quick that a second passed before Jamieson realized that the atomic engines had failed to respond. And that the lifeboat, which should have already been sliding into the air, was still lying inert in an exposed position.

Tense, he stared into the visiplates. It took a moment to locate the Rull ship. It was at the lower edge of one plate, tumbling slowly out of sight beyond a clump of trees a quarter of a mile away. As he watched, it disappeared; and then the crash of the landing came clear and unmistakable from the sound board in front of him.

The relief that came was weighted with an awful reaction. Jamieson sank into the cushions of the control chair, weak from the narrowness of his escape. The weakness ended abruptly as a thought struck him. There had been a sedateness about the way the enemy ship fell. *The crash hadn't killed the Rulls aboard.* He was alone in a damaged lifeboat on an impassable mountain with one or more of the most remorseless creatures ever spawned. For ten days he must fight in the hope that man would still be able to seize the most valuable planet discovered in half a century.

Jamieson opened the door and went out onto the tableland. He was still trembling with reaction, but it was rapidly growing darker and there was no time to waste. He walked quickly to the top of the nearest hillock a hundred feet away, taking the last few feet on his hands and knees. Cautiously, he peered over the rim. Most of the mountaintop was visible. It was a rough oval some eight hundred yards wide at its narrowest, a wilderness of scraggly brush and upjutting rock, dominated here and there by clumps of trees. There was not a movement to be seen, and not a sign of the Rull ship. Over everything lay an atmosphere of desolation, and the utter silence of an uninhabited wasteland.

The twilight was deeper now that the sun had sunk below the southwest precipice. And the deadly part was that, to the Rulls, with their wider vision and more complete equipment, the darkness would mean nothing. All night long he would have to be on the defensive against beings whose nervous systems outmatched his in every function except, possibly, intelligence. On that level, and that alone, human beings claimed equality. The very comparison made him realize how desperate his situation was. He needed an advantage. If he could get to the Rull wreck and cause them some kind of damage before it got pitch-dark, before they recovered from the shock of the crash, that alone might make the difference between life and death for him.

It was a chance he had to take. Hurriedly, Jamieson backed down the hillock and, climbing to his feet, started along a shallow wash. The ground was rough with stone and projecting edges of rock and the gnarled roots and tangle of hardy growth. Twice he fell, the first time gashing his right hand. It slowed him mentally and physically. He had never before tried to make speed over the pathless wilderness of the

table-land. He saw that in ten minutes he had covered a distance of no more than a few hundred yards. He stopped. It was one thing to be bold on the chance of making a vital gain. It was quite another to throw away his life on a reckless gamble. The defeat would not be his alone but man's.

As he stood there he grew aware of how icy cold it had become. A chilling wind from the east had sprung up. By midnight the temperature would be zero. He began to retreat. There were several defenses to rig up before night; and he had better hurry. An hour later, when the moonless darkness lay heavily over the mountain of mountains, Jamieson sat tensely before his visiplates. It was going to be a long night for a man who dared not sleep. Somewhere about the middle of it, Jamieson saw a movement at the remote perimeter of his all-wave vision plate. Finger on blaster control, he waited for the object to come into sharper focus. It never did. The cold dawn found him weary but still alertly watching for an enemy that was acting as cautiously as he himself. He began to wonder if he had actually seen anything.

Jamieson took another antislumber pill and made a more definite examination of the atomic motors. It didn't take long to verify his earlier diagnosis. The basic gravitation pile had been thoroughly frustrated. Until it could be reactivated on the *Orion*, the motors were useless. The conclusive examination braced him. He was committed irrevocably to this deadly battle of the tableland. The idea that had been turning over in his mind during the night took on new meaning. This was the first time in his knowledge that a Rull and a human being had faced each other on a limited field of action, where neither was a prisoner. The great battles in space were ship against ship and fleet against fleet. Survivors either escaped or were picked up by overwhelming forces.

Unless he was bested before he could get organized, here was a priceless opportunity to try some tests on the Rulls—and without delay. Every moment of daylight must be utilized to the uttermost limit.

Jamieson put on his special "defensive" belts and went outside. The dawn was brightening minute by minute; and the vistas that revealed themselves with each increment of light-power held him, even as he tensed his body for the fight ahead. Why, he thought, in sharp, excited wonder, this is happening on the strangest mountain ever known.

Mount Monolith stood on a level plain and reared up precipitously to a height of eight thousand two hundred feet. The most majestic pillar in the known universe, it easily qualified as one of the hundred nature wonders of the galaxy.

He had walked the soil of planets a hundred thousand light-years from Earth, and the decks of great ships that flashed from the eternal night into the blazing brightness of suns red and suns blue, suns yellow and white and orange and violet, suns so wonderful and different that no previous imaginings could match the reality.

Yet, here he stood on a mountain on far Laertes, one man compelled by circumstances to pit his cunning against one or more of the supremely intelligent Rull enemy.

Jamieson shook himself grimly. It was time to launch his attack—and discover the opposition that could be mustered against him. That

was Step One, and the important point about it was to insure that it wasn't also Step Last. By the time the Laertes sun peered palely over the horizon that was the northeast cliff's edge, the assault was under way. The automatic defenders, which he had set up the night before, moved slowly from point to point ahead of the mobile blaster. He cautiously saw to it that one of the three defenders also brought up his rear. He augmented that basic protection by crawling from one projecting rock after another. The machines he manipulated from a tiny hand control, which was connected to the visiplates that poked out from his headgear just above his eyes. With tensed eyes, he watched the wavering needles that would indicate movement or that the defensor screens were being subjected to energy opposition.

Nothing happened. As he came within sight of the Rull craft, Jamieson halted, while he seriously pondered the problem of no resistance. He didn't like it. It was possible that all the Rulls aboard had been killed, but he doubted it.

Bleakly he studied the wreck through the telescopic eyes of one of the defenders. It lay in a shallow indentation, its nose buried in a wall of gravel. Its lower plates were collapsed versions of the original. His single energy blast of the day before, completely automatic though it had been, had really dealt a smashing blow to the Rull ship.

The over-all effect was of lifelessness. If it were a trick, then it was a very skillful one. Fortunately, there were tests he could make, not final but evidential and indicative.

The echoless height of the most unique mountain ever discovered hummed with the fire sound of the mobile blaster. The noise grew to a roar as the unit's pile warmed to its task and developed its maximum kilo-curie of activity. Under that barrage, the hull of the enemy craft trembled a little and changed color slightly, but that was all. After ten minutes, Jamieson cut the power and sat baffled and indecisive.

The defensive screens of the Rull ship were full on. Had they gone on automatically after his first shot of the evening before? Or had they been put up deliberately to nullify just such an attack as this? He couldn't be sure. That was the trouble; he had no positive knowledge.

The Rull could be lying inside dead. (Odd, how he was beginning to think in terms of one rather than several, but the degree of caution being used by the opposition—if opposition existed—matched his own, and indicated the caution of an individual moving against unknown odds.) It could be wounded and incapable of doing anything against him. It could have spent the night marking up the tableland with nerve control lines—he'd have to make sure he never looked directly at the ground—or it could simply be waiting for the arrival of the greater ship that had dropped it onto the planet.

Jamieson refused to consider that last possibility. That way was death, without qualification of hope. Frowning, he studied the visible damage he had done to the ship. All the hard metals had held together, so far as he could see, but the whole bottom of the ship was dented to a depth that varied from one to four feet. Some radiation must have got in, and the question was, what would it have damaged? He had examined dozens of captured Rull survey craft, and if this one ran to the pattern, then in the front would be the control center, with a sealed-

off blaster chamber. In the rear the engine room, two storerooms, one for fuel and equipment, the other for food and— *For food*. Jamieson jumped, and then with wide eyes noted how the food section had suffered greater damage than any other part of the ship. Surely, surely, some radiation must have got into it, poisoning it, ruining it, and instantly putting the Rull, with his swift digestive system, into a deadly position.

Jamieson sighed with the intensity of his hope and prepared to retreat. As he turned away, quite incidentally, accidentally, he glanced at the rock behind which he had shielded himself from possible direct fire. Glanced at it and saw the lines on it. Intricate lines, based on a profound and inhuman study of human neurons. He recognized them for what they were and stiffened in horror. He thought, *Where—where* am I being directed?

That much had been discovered after his return from Mira 23, with his report of how he had been apparently, instantly, hypnotized; the lines impelled movement to somewhere. Here, on this fantastic mountain, it could only be to a cliff. But which one?

With a desperate will, he fought to retain his senses a moment longer. He strove to see the lines again. He saw, briefly, flashingly, five wavering verticals and above them three lines that pointed east with their wavering ends. The pressure built up inside him, but still he fought to keep his thoughts self-motivated. Fought to remember if there were any wide ledges near the top of the east cliff. There were. He recalled them in a final agony of hope. There, he thought, that one, that one. Let me fall on that one. He strained to hold the ledge image he wanted and to repeat, many times, the command that might save his life. His last dreary thought was that here was the answer to his doubts. The Rull was alive. Blackness came like a curtain of pure essence of night.

From the far galaxy had he come, a cold, remorseless leader of leaders, the *yeli*, Meesh, the un of Ria, the high Aaish of Yeel. And other titles, and other positions, and power. Oh, the power that he had, the power of death, the power of life and the power of the Leard ships.

He had come in his great anger to discover what was wrong. Many years before, the command had been given: Expand into the Second Galaxy. Why were they-who-could-not-be-more-perfect so slow in carrying out these instructions? What was the nature of the two-legged creatures whose multitudinous ships, impregnable planetary bases and numerous allies had fought those-who-possessed-Nature's-supreme-nervous-system to an impasse?

"Bring me a live human being!"

The command echoed to the ends of Riatic space. It produced a dull survivor of an Earth cruiser, a sailor of low degree with an **I.Q.** of ninety-six, and a fear index of two hundred and seven. The creature made vague efforts to kill himself, and squirmed on the laboratory tables, and finally escaped into death when the scientists were still in the beginning of the experiments which *he* had ordered to be performed before his own eyes.

"Surely *this is not the enemy.*"

"Sire, we capture so few that are alive. Just as we have conditioned our own, so do they seem to be conditioned to kill themselves in case of capture."

"The environment is wrong. We must create a situation where the captured does not know himself to be a prisoner. Are there any possibilities?"

"The problem will be investigated."

He had come, as the one who would conduct the experiment, to the sun where a man had been observed seven periods before. The man was in a small craft—as the report put it—"which was precipitated suddenly out of subspace and fell toward this sun. The fact that it used no energy aroused the suspicions of our observing warship, which might otherwise have paid no attention to so small a machine. And so, because an investigation was made immediately, we have a new base possibility, and of course an ideal situation for the experiment."

The report continued: "No landings have been made yet. as you instructed; so far as we know, our presence is not suspected. it may be assumed that there was an earlier human landing on the third planet, for the man quickly made that curious mountaintop his headquarters. It will be ideal for your purposes."

A battle group patrolled the space around the sun. But *he* came down in a small ship, and because he had contempt for his enemy, he had flown in over the mountains, fired his disabling blast at the ship on the ground—and then was struck by a surprisingly potent return blast that sent his machine spinning to a crash. Death almost came in those seconds. But he crawled out of his control chair, shocked but still alive. With thoughtful eyes, he assessed the extent of the disaster that had befallen him. He had issued commands that he would call when he wanted them to return. But he could not call. The radio was shattered

beyond repair. He had an uneasy sensation when he discovered that his food was poisoned.

Swiftly, he stiffened to the necessity of the situation. The experiment would go on, with one proviso. When the need for food became imperative, he would kill the man, and ~ survive until the commanders of the ships grew alarmed and came down to see what had happened.

He spent part of the sunless period exploring the cliff's edge. Then he hovered on the perimeter of the man's defensor energies, studying the lifeboat and pondering the possible actions the other might take against him. Finally, with a tireless patience, he examined the approaches to his own ship. At key points, he drew the lines-that-could-seize-the-minds-of-men. There was satisfaction, shortly after the sun came up, in seeing the enemy "caught" and "compelled." The satisfaction had but one drawback. He could not take the advantage of the situation that he wanted. The difficulty was that the man's blaster had been left focused on his main airlock. It was not emitting energy, but the Rull did not doubt that it would fire automatically if the door opened.

What made the situation serious was that, when he tried the emergency exit, it was jammed. It hadn't been. With the forethought of his kind, he had tested it immediately after the crash. Then, it opened. Now it didn't. The ship, he decided, must have settled while he was out during the sunless period. Actually, the reason for what had happened didn't matter. What counted was that he was locked in just when he wanted to be outside. It was not as if he had definitely decided to destroy the man immediately. If capturing him meant gaining control of his food supply, then it would be unnecessary to give him death. It was important to be able to make the decision, however, while the man was helpless. And the further possibility that the *el/ed* fall might kill him made the ~*eli* grim. He didn't like accidents to disturb his plans.

From the beginning the affair had taken a sinister turn. He had been caught up by forces beyond his control, by elements of space and time which he had always taken into account as being theoretically possible, but he had never considered them as having personal application.

That was for the depths of space where the Leard ships fought to extend the frontiers of the perfect ones. Out there lived alien creatures that had been spawned by Nature before the ultimate nervous system was achieved. All those aliens must die because they were now unnecessary, and because, existing, they might accidentally discover means of upsetting the balance of Yeelian life. In civilized Ria accidents were forbidden.

The Rull drew his mind clear of such weakening thoughts. He decided against trying to open the emergency door. Instead, he turned his blaster against a crack in the hard floor. The frustrators blew their gases across the area where he had worked, and the suction pumps caught the swirling radioactive stuff and drew it into a special chamber. But the lack of an open door as a safety valve made the work dangerous. Many times he naiticed while the air was cleansed, so that he could come out again

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ad ea~ c him an opening into the gra\ e/ and rock underneath.
The problem of tunneling out into the open was easy except that
it took time and physical effort. Dusty and angry and hungry, the
Rull emerged from the hole near the center of the clump of trees
beside which his craft had fallen.

His plan to conduct an experiment had lost its attraction. He had
obstinate qualities in his nature, but he reasoned that this situation
could be reproduced for him on a more civilized level. No need to take
risks or to be uncomfortable. He would kill the man and chemically
convert him to food until the ships came down to rescue him. With
hungry gaze, he searched the ragged, uneven east cliff, peering down
at the ledges, crawling swiftly along until he had virtually circumvented
the tableland. He found nothing he could be sure about. In one or two
places the ground looked lacerated as by the passage of a body, but
the most intensive examination failed to establish that anyone had
actually been there.

Somberly, the Rull glided toward the man's lifeboat. From a safe
distance, he examined it. The defense screens were *up*, but he couldn't
be sure they had been put up before the attack of the morning, or had
been raised since then, or had come on automatically at his approach.
He couldn't be sure. That was the trouble. Everywhere on the tableland
around him was a barrenness, a desolation unlike anything he had
ever known. The man could be dead, his smashed body lying at the
remote bottom of the mountain. He could be inside the ship badly
injured; he had, unfortunately, *had* time to get back to the safety of his
craft. Or he could be waiting inside, alert, aggressive, and conscious of
his enemy's uncertainty, determined to take full advantage of that
uncertainty.

The Rull set up a watching device that would apprise him when the
door opened. Then he returned to the tunnel that led into his ship,
laboriously crawled through it, and settled himself to wait out the
emergency. The hunger in him was an expanding force, hourly taking
on a greater urgency. It was time to stop moving around. He would
need all his energy for the crisis. The days passed.

Jamieson stirred in an effluvium of pain. At first it seemed all-
enveloping, a mist of anguish that bathed him in sweat from head to
toe. Gradually, then, it localized in the region of his lower left leg. The
pulse of the pain made a rhythm in his nerves. The minutes lengthened
into an hour, and then he finally thought, *Why, I've got a sprained
ankle!* There was more to it than that, of course. The pressure that had
driven him here oppressed his life force. How long he lay there, partly
conscious, was not clear, but when he finally opened his eyes, the sun
was still shining on him, though it was almost directly overhead.

He watched it with the mindlessness of a dreamer as it withdrew
slowly past the edge of the overhanging precipice. It was not until the
shadow of the cliff suddenly plopped across his face that he started to

full consciousness with a sudden memory of deadly danger. It took a while for him to shake the remnants of the effect of the nerve lines from his brain. And, even as it was fading, he sized up, to some extent, the difficulties of his position. He saw that he had tumbled over the edge of a cliff to a steep slope. The angle of descent of the slope was a sharp fifty-five degrees, and what had saved him was that his body had been caught in the tangled growth near the edge of the greater precipice beyond. His foot must have twisted in those roots and been sprained.

As he finally realized the nature of his injuries, Jamieson braced up. He was safe. In spite of having suffered an accidental defeat of major proportions, his intense concentration on this slope, his desperate will to make *this* the place where he must fall, had worked out. He began to climb. It was easy enough on the slope, steep as it was; the ground was rough, rocky and scraggly with brush. It was when he came to the ten-foot overhanging cliff that his ankle proved what an obstacle it could be. Four times he slid back reluctantly; and then, on the fifth try, his fingers, groping, caught an unbreakable root. Triumphant, he dragged himself to the safety of the tableland.

Now that the sound of his scraping and struggling was gone, only his heavy breathing broke the silence of the emptiness. His anxious eyes studied the uneven terrain. The tableland spread before him with not a sign of a moving figure anywhere. To one side, he could see his lifeboat. Jamieson began to crawl toward it, taking care to stay on rock as much as possible. What had happened to the Rull he did not know. And since, for several days, his ankle would keep him inside his ship, he might as well keep his enemy guessing during that time.

It was getting dark, and he was inside the ship, when a peevish voice said in his ear, "When do we go home? When do I eat again?"

It was the Ploian, with his perennial question about returning to Ploia. Jamieson shrugged aside his momentary feeling of guilt. He had forgotten all about his companion these many hours.

As he "fed" the being, he thought, not for the first time, How could he explain the Rull-human war to this untutored mind? More important, how could he explain his present predicament?

Aloud, he said, "Don't you worry. You stay with me, and I'll see that you get home." That—plus the food—seemed to satisfy the being.

For a time, then, Jamieson considered how he might use the Ploian against the Rull. But the fact was that his principal ability was not needed. There was no point in letting a starving Rull discover that his human opponent had a method of scrambling the electrical system of his ship.

Jamieson lay in his bunk thinking. He could hear the beating of his heart. There were the occasional sounds when he dragged himself out of bed. The radio, when he turned it on, was dead—no static, not even the fading in and out of a wave. At this colossal distance, even subspace radio was impossible. He listened on all the more active Rull wave lengths. But the silence was there too. Not that they would be broadcasting if they were in the vicinity. He was cut off here in this tiny ship on an uninhabited planet, with useless motors. He tried not to think of it like that. Here, he told himself, is the opportunity of a lifetime for an experiment. He warmed to the idea as a moth to flame. Live Rulls were hard to get hold of. And here was an ideal situation. *We're prisoners, both of us.* That was the way he tried to picture it. Prisoners of an environment and, therefore, in a curious fashion, prisoners of each other. Only each was free of the conditioned need to kill himself.

There were things a man might discover. The great mysteries—as far as men were concerned—that motivated Rull actions. Why did they want to destroy other races totally? Why did they needlessly sacrifice valuable ships in attacking Earth machines that ventured into their sectors of space when they knew that the intruders would leave in a few weeks anyway?

The potentialities of this fight of man against Rull on a lonely mountain exhilarated Jamieson as he lay on his bunk, scheming, turning the problem over in his mind. There were times during those dog days when he crawled over to the control chair and peered for an hour at a stretch into the visiplates. He saw the tableland and the vista of distance beyond it. He saw the sky of Laertes III, pale orchid in color, silent and lifeless. He saw the prison. Caught here, he thought bleakly. Trevor Jamieson, whose quiet voice in the scientific council chambers of Earth's galactic empire spoke with considerable authority—that Jamieson was here, alone, lying in a bunk, waiting for a leg to heal, so that he might conduct an experiment with a Rull. It seemed incredible. But he grew to believe it as the days passed.

On the third day, he was able to move around sufficiently to handle a few heavy objects. He began work immediately on the light-screen. On the fifth day it was finished. Then the story had to be recorded. That was easy. Each sequence had been so carefully worked out in bed that it flowed from his mind onto the visiwire.

He set it up about two hundred yards from the lifeboat, behind a screening of trees. He tossed a can of food a dozen feet to one side of the screen.

The rest of the day dragged. It was the sixth day since the arrival of the Rull, the fifth since he had sprained his ankle. Came the night.

A gliding shadow, undulating under the starlight of Laertes III, the Rull approached the screen the man had set up. How bright it was, shining in the darkness of the tableland, a blob of light in a black universe of uneven ground and dwarf shrubbery. When he was a hundred feet from the light, he sensed the food—and realized that here was a trap. For the Rull, six days without food had meant a stupendous loss of energy, visual blackouts on a dozen color levels, a dimness of life-force that fitted with the shadows, not the sun. That inner world of disjointed nervous systems was like a rundown battery, with a score of organic “instruments” disconnecting one by one as the energy level fell. The *yeli* recognized dimly, but with a savage anxiety, that the keenest edges of that nervous system might never be fully restored. Speed was essential. A few more steps downward, and then the old, old conditioning of mandatory self-inflicted death would apply even to the high Aaish of the Yeel.

The reticulated body grew quiet. The visual centers which were everywhere accepted light on a narrow band from the screen. From beginning to end, he watched the story as it unfolded, and then watched it again, craving repetition with all the ardor of a primitive.

The picture began in deep space with the man’s lifeboat being dropped from a launching lock of a battleship. It showed the battleship going to a military base, and there taking on supplies and acquiring a vast fleet of reinforcements, and then starting on the return journey. The scene switched to the lifeboat dropping down on Laertes III, showed everything that had subsequently happened, suggested the situation was dangerous to them both—and pointed out the only safe solution. The final sequence of each showing of the story was of the Rull approaching the can, to the left of the screen, and opening it. The method was shown in detail, as was the visualization of the Rull busily eating the food inside. Each time that sequence drew near, a tenseness came over the Rull, a will to make the story real. But it was not until the seventh showing had run its course that he glided forward, closing the last gap between himself and the can. It was a trap, he knew, perhaps even death—it didn’t matter. To live, he had to take the chance. Only by this means, by risking what was in the can, could he hope to remain alive for the necessary time.

How long it would take for the commanders cruising up there in the black of space—how long it would be before they would decide to supersede his command, he didn’t know. But they would come. Even if they waited until the enemy ships arrived before they dared to act against his strict orders, they would come. At that point they could come down without fear of suffering from his ire. Until then he would need all the food he could get. Gingerly, he extended a sucker and activated the automatic opener of the can.

It was shortly after four in the morning when Jamieson awakened to the sound of an alarm ringing softly. It was still pitch-dark outside—the Laertes day was twenty-six side-real hours long, and dawn was still three hours away. He did not get up at once. The alarm had been activated by the opening of the can of food. It continued to ring for a full

fifteen minutes, which was just about perfect. The alarm was tuned to the electronic pattern emitted by the can, once it was opened, and so long as any food remained in it. The lapse of time involved fitted with the capacity of one of the Rull mouths in absorbing three pounds of treated food. For fifteen minutes, accordingly, a member of the Rull race, man's mortal enemy, had been subjected to a pattern of mental vibrations corresponding to its own thoughts. It was a pattern to which the nervous systems of other Rulls had responded in laboratory experiments. Unfortunately, those others had killed themselves on awakening, and so no definite results had been proved. But it had been established by the ecpthoriometer that the unconscious and not the conscious mind was affected. It was the beginning of hypnotic indoctrination and control.

Jamieson lay in bed, smiling quietly to himself. He turned over finally to go back to sleep, and then he realized how excited he was. It was the greatest moment in the history of Rull-human warfare. Surely he wasn't going to let it pass unremarked. He climbed out of bed and poured himself a drink.

The attempt of the Rull to attack him through his unconscious mind had emphasized his own possible actions in that direction. Each race had discovered some of the weaknesses of the other. Rulls used their knowledge to exterminate. Man tried for communication and hoped for association. Both were ruthless, murderous, pitiless in their methods. Outsiders sometimes had difficulty distinguishing one from the other. But the difference in purpose was as great as the difference between black and white, the absence, as compared to the presence, of light. There was only one trouble with the immediate situation. Now that the Rull had food, he might develop a few plans of his own.

Jamieson returned to bed and lay staring into the darkness. He did not underrate the resources of the Rull, but since he had decided to conduct an experiment, no chances must be considered too great. He turned over finally and slept the sleep of a man determined that things were working in his favor.

Morning. Jamieson put on his cold-proof clothes and went out into the chilly dawn. Again he savored the silence and the atmosphere of isolated grandeur. A strong wind was blowing from the east, and there was an iciness in it that stung his face. He forgot that There were things to do on this morning of mornings. He would do them with his usual caution.

Paced by defensors and the mobile blaster, he headed for the metal screen. It stood in open high ground, where it would be visible from a dozen different hiding places, and so far as he could see it was undamaged. He tested the automatic mechanism, and for good measure ran the picture through one showing.

He had already tossed another can of food in the grass near the screen, and he was turning away when he thought, That's odd. The metal framework looks as if it's been polished.

He studied the phenomenon in a de-energizing mirror and saw that the metal had been covered with a clear varnish-like substance. A dreadful sickness came over him as he recognized it. He decided in agony: If the cue is not to fire at all, I won't do it. I'll fire even if the

blaster turns on me.

He scraped some of the “varnish” into a receptacle and began his retreat to the lifeboat. He was thinking violently: Where does he get all this stuff? That isn’t part of the equipment of a survey craft.

The first suspicion was on him that what was happening was not just an accident. He was pondering the vast implications of that when off to one side he saw the Rull. For the first time, in his many days on the table-land, he saw the Rull.

What’s the cue?

Memory of purpose came to the Rull shortly after he had eaten. It was a dim memory at first, but it grew stronger. It was not the only sensation of his returning energy. His visual centers interpreted more light. The starlit tableland grew brighter, not as bright as it could be for him, by a large percentage, but the direction was up instead of down. He felt unutterably fortunate that it was no worse.

He had been gliding along the edge of the precipice. Now he paused to peer down. Even with his partial light vision, the view was breathtaking. There was distance below and distance afar. From a spaceship, the effect of height was minimized. But gazing down that wall of grave! into those depths was a different experience. It emphasized how greatly he had suffered, how completely he had been caught by an accident. And it reminded him of what he had been doing before the hunger. He turned instantly away from the cliff and hurried to where the wreckage of his ship had gathered dust for days—bent and twisted wreckage, half buried in the hard ground of Laertes III. He glided over the dented plates inside to one in which he had the day before sensed a quiver of anti-gravity oscillation—tiny, potent, tremendous minutiae of oscillation, capable of being influenced.

The Rull worked with intensity and purposefulness. The plate was still firmly attached to the frame of the ship. And the first job, the extremely difficult job, was to tear it completely free. The hours passed.

With a tearing sound, the hard plate yielded to the slight rearrangement of its nucleonic structure. The shift was infinitesimal, partly because the directing nervous energy of his body was not at norm and partly because it was calculated to be small. There was such a thing as releasing energy enough to blow up a mountain.

Not, he discovered finally, that there was any danger in this plate. He found that out the moment he crawled onto it. The sensation of power that pulsed from it was so slight that, briefly, he doubted that it would lift from the ground. But it did. The test run lasted seven feet and gave him his measurement of the limited force he had available. Enough for an attack only.

There were no doubts in his mind. The experiment was over. His only purpose must be to kill the man, and the question was, how could he insure that the man did not kill him while he was doing it? The varnish!

He applied it painstakingly, dried it with a drier, and then, picking up the plate again, he carried it on his back to the hiding place he wanted. When he had buried it and himself under the dead leaves of a clump of brush, he grew calmer. He recognized that the veneer of his

civilization was off. It shocked him, but he did not regret it. In giving him the food, the two-legged being was obviously doing something to him. Something dangerous. The only answer to the entire problem of the experiment of the tableland was to deal death without delay. He lay tense, ferocious, beyond the power of any vagrant thoughts, waiting for the man to come.

What happened then was as desperate a venture as Jamieson had seen in Service. Normally, he would have handled it expertly. But he was watching intently—for the paralysis to strike him. The paralysis that was of the varnish. And so, it was the unexpected normal act that confused him. The Rull flew out of a clump of trees mounted on the antigravity plate. The surprise of that was so great that it almost succeeded. The plates had been drained of all such energies, according to his tests, the first morning. Yet here was one alive again and light again with the special antigravity lightness which Rull scientists had brought to the peak of perfection.

The action of movement through space toward him was, of course, based on the motion of the planet as it turned on its axis. The speed of the attack, starting as it did from zero, did not come near the eight-hundred-mile-an-hour velocity of the spinning planet, but it was swift enough. The apparition of metal and reticulated Rull body charged at him through the air. And even as he drew his weapon and fired at it, he had a choice to make, a restraint to exercise: *Do not kill!*

That was hard, oh, hard. The necessity imposed a limitation so stern that during the second it took him to adjust, the Rull came to within ten feet of him. What saved him was the pressure of the air on the metal plate. The air tilted it like the wing of a plane becoming airborne. He fired his irresistible weapon at the bottom of the metal plate, seared it, and deflected it to a crash landing in a clump of bushes twenty feet to his right. Jamieson was deliberately slow in following up his success. When he reached the bushes, the Rull was fifty feet beyond them and disappearing into a clump of trees. He did not pursue it or fire a second time. Instead, he gingerly pulled the Rull antigravity plate out of the brush and examined it.

The question was, how had the Rull degravitized it without the elaborate machinery necessary? And if it were capable of creating such a "parachute" for itself why hadn't it floated down to the forest far below, where food would be available and where it would be safe from its human enemy? One question was answered the moment he lifted the antigravity plate. It was about normal weight, its energy apparently exhausted after traveling less than a hundred feet. It had obviously never been capable of making the mile-and-a-half trip to the forest and plain below.

Jamieson took no chances. He dropped the plate over the nearest precipice and watched it fall into distance. He was back in the lifeboat when he remembered the "varnish." There had been no cue; not yet. He tested the scraping he had brought with him. Chemically, it turned out to be simple resin, used to make varnishes. Atomically, it was stabilized. Electronically, it transformed light into energy on the vibration level of human thought. It was alive all right. But what was the

recording? He made a graph of every material and energy level, for comparison purposes. As soon as he had established that it had been altered on the electronic level—which had been obvious but which, still, had to be proved—he recorded the images on a visiwire. The result was a hodgepodge of dreamlike fantasies.

Symbols. He took down his book, *Symbol Interpretations of the Unconscious*, and found the cross-reference: "Inhibitions Mental." On the referred page and line, he read, "Do not kill!"

"Well, I'll be. . ." Jamieson said aloud into the silence of the lifeboat interior. "That's what happened."

He was relieved, and then not so relieved. It had been his personal intention not to kill at this stage. But the Rull hadn't known that. By working such a subtle inhibition, it had dominated the attack even in defeat. That was the trouble. So far he had gotten out of situations but had created no successful ones in retaliation. He had a hope, but that wasn't enough.

He must take no more risks. Even his final experiment must wait until the day the *Orion* was due to arrive. Human beings were just a little too weak in certain directions. Their very life cells had impulses which could be stirred by the cunning and the remorseless. He did not doubt that, in the final issue, the Rull would try to stir him toward self-destruction.

On the ninth night, the day before the *Orion* was due, Jamieson refrained from putting out a can of food. The following morning he spent half an hour at the radio trying to contact the battleship. He made a point of broadcasting a detailed account of what had happened so far, and he described what his plans were, including his intention of testing the Rull to see if it had suffered any injury from its period of hunger.

Subspace was totally silent. Not a pulse of vibration answered his call. He finally abandoned the attempt to establish contact and went outside and swiftly set up the instruments he would need for his experiment. The tableland had the air of a deserted wilderness. He tested his equipment, then looked at his watch. It was eleven minutes to noon. Suddenly jittery, he decided not to wait the extra minutes. He walked over, hesitated, and then pressed a button. From a source near the screen, a rhythm on a very high energy level was being broadcast. It was a variation of the rhythm pattern to which the Rull had been subjected for four nights. Slowly Jamieson retreated toward the lifeboat. He wanted to try again to contact the *Orion*. Looking back, he saw the Rull glide into the clearing and head straight for the source of the vibration. As Jamieson paused involuntarily, fascinated, the main alarm system of the lifeboat went off with a roar. The sound echoed with an alien eeriness on the wings of the icy wind that was blowing, and it acted like a cue. His wrist radio snapped on, synchronizing automatically with the powerful radio in the lifeboat.

A voice said urgently, "Trevor Jamieson, this is the *Orion*. We heard your earlier calls but refrained from answering. An entire Rull fleet is cruising in the vicinity of the Laertes sun. In approximately five minutes, an attempt will be made to pick you up. Meanwhile, *drop everything.*"

Jamieson dropped. It was a physical movement, not a mental one. Out of the corner of one eye, even as he heard his own radio, he saw a movement in the sky: two dark blobs that resolved into vast shapes. There was a roar as the Rull super-battleships flashed by overhead. A cyclone followed their passage that nearly tore him from the ground, where he clung desperately to the roots of intertwining brush. At top speed, obviously traveling under gravitonic power, the enemy warships made a sweeping turn and came back toward the tableland. Jamieson expected death momentarily, but the fire flashed past; then the thunder of the released energies rolled toward him, a colossal sound, almost yet not quite submerging his awareness of what had happened. His lifeboat! They had fired at his lifeboat.

He groaned as he pictured it destroyed in one burst of intolerable flame. And then there was no time for thought of anguish.

A third warship came into view, but, as Jamieson strained to make out its contours, it turned and fled.

His wrist radio clicked on. "Cannot help you now. Save yourself. Our four accompanying battleships and attendant squadrons will engage the Rull fleet, and try to draw them toward our larger battle group cruising near the star, Bianca, and then re—"

A flash of fire in the distant sky ended the message. It was a full

minute before the cold air of Laertes III echoed to the remote burst of the broadside. The sound died slowly, reluctantly, as if little overtones of it were clinging to each molecule of air. The silence that settled finally was, strangely, not peaceful, but a fateful, quiescent stillness, alive with unmeasurable threat.

Shakily, Jamieson climbed to his feet. It was time to assess the immediate danger that had befallen him. The greater danger he dared not even think about. He headed first for his lifeboat. He didn't have to go all the way. The entire section of the cliff had been sheared away. Of the ship, there was no sign. He had expected it, but the shock of the reality was numbing. He crouched like an animal and stared up into the sky. Not a movement was there, not a sound came out of it, except the sound of the east wind. He was alone in a universe between heaven and earth, a human being poised at the edge of an abyss.

Into his mind, tensely waiting, pierced a sharp understanding. The Rull ships had flown once over the mountain to size up the situation on the tableland and then had tried to destroy him. Equally disturbing and puzzling was the realization that battleships of the latest design were taking risks to defend his opponent on this isolated mountain.

He'd have to hurry. At any moment they might risk one of their destroyers in a rescue landing. As he ran, he felt himself one with the wind. He knew that feeling, that sense of returning primitiveness during moments of excitement. It was like that in battles, and the important thing was to yield one's whole body and soul to it. There was no such thing as fighting efficiently with half your mind or half your body. All was demanded.

He expected falls, and he had them. Each time he got up, almost unaware of the pain, and ran on again. He arrived bleeding, almost oblivious to a dozen cuts. And the sky remained silent.

From the shelter of a line of brush, he peered at the Rull. The captive Rull, *his* Rull to do with as he pleased. To watch, to force, to educate—the fastest education in the history of the world. There wasn't any time for a leisurely exchange of information. From where he lay, he manipulated the controls of the screen.

The Rull had been moving back and forth in front of the screen. Now it speeded up, then slowed, then speeded up again, according to his will.

Nearly a thousand years before, in the twentieth century, the classic and timeless investigation had been made of which this was one end result. A man called Pavlov fed a laboratory dog at regular intervals, to the accompaniment of the ringing of a bell. Soon the dog's digestive system responded as readily to the ringing of the bell without the food as to the food and the bell together. Pavlov himself did not, until late in his life, realize the most important reality behind his conditioning process. But what began on that remote day ended with a science that could brainwash animals and aliens—and men—almost at will. Only the Rulls baffled the master experimenters in the later centuries when it was an exact science. Defeated by the will to death of all the Rull captives, the scientists foresaw the doom of Earth's galactic empire unless some beginning could be made in penetrating the minds

of Rulls. It was his desperate bad luck that he had no time for penetrations. There was death here for those who lingered.

But even the bare minimum of what he had to do would take time. Back and forth, back and forth; the rhythm of obedience had to be established. The image of the Rull on the screen was as lifelike as the original. It was three-dimensional, and its movements were like those of an automaton: Basic nerve centers were affected. The Rull could no more help falling into step than it could resist the call of the food impulse. After it had followed that mindless pattern for fifteen minutes, changing pace at his direction, Jamieson started the Rull and its image climbing trees. Up, then down again, half a dozen times. At that point, Jamieson introduced an image of himself.

Tensely, with one eye on the sky and one on the scene before him, he watched the reactions of the Rull. When, after a few minutes, he substituted himself for his image, he was satisfied that this Rull had temporarily lost its normal hate and suicide conditioning when it saw a human being.

Now that he had reached the stage of final control, he hesitated. It was time to make his tests. Could he afford the time? He realized that he had to. This opportunity might not occur again in a hundred years.

When he finished the tests twenty-five minutes later, he was pale with excitement. He thought, This is it. We've got it. He spent ten precious minutes broadcasting his discovery by means of his wrist radio—hoping that the transmitter on his lifeboat had survived its fall down the mountain—and was rebroadcasting the message out through subspace. There was not a single answer to his call, however, during the entire ten minutes.

Aware that he had done what he could, Jamieson headed for the cliff's edge he had selected as a starting point. He looked down and shuddered, then remembered what the *Orion* had said: "An entire Rull fleet cruising . . .

Hurry!

He lowered the Rull to the first ledge. A moment later he fastened the harness around his own body and stepped into space. Sedately, with easy strength, the Rull gripped the other end of the rope and lowered him down to the ledge beside it. They continued on down and down. It was hard work although they used a very simple system. A long plastic line spanned the spaces for them. A metal climbing rod held position after position while the rope did its work.

On each ledge, Jamieson burned the rod at a downward slant into solid rock. The rope slid through an arrangement of pulleys in the metal as the Rull and he, in turn, lowered to ledges farther down. The moment they were both safely in the clear of one ledge, Jamieson would explode the rod out of the rock, and it would drop down ready for use again. The day sank toward darkness like a restless man into sleep. Jamieson's whole being filled with the melancholy of the fatigue that dragged at his muscles.

He could see that the Rull was growing more aware of him. It still cooperated, but it watched him with intent eyes each time it swung him down. The conditioned state was ending. The Rull was emerging from

its trance. The process should be complete before night.

There was a time, then, when Jamieson despaired of getting down before the shadows fell. He had chosen the western, sunny side for that fantastic descent down a sheer, brown and black cliff like no other in the known worlds of space. He watched the Rull with quick, nervous glances during the moments when they were together on a ledge.

At 4:00 **P.M.** Jamieson had to pause again for a rest. He walked to the side of the ledge away from the Rull and sank down on a rock. The sky was silent and windless now, a curtain drawn across the black space above, concealing what must already be the greatest Rull-human battle in ten years. It was a tribute to the five Earth battleships that no Rull ship had yet attempted to rescue the Rull on the tableland. Possibly, of course, they didn't want to give away the presence of one of their own kind.

Jamieson gave up the futile speculation. Warily, he compared the height of the cliff above with the depth that remained below. He estimated they had come two thirds of the distance. He saw that the Rull had turned to face the valley. Jamieson turned and gazed with it. The scene, even from this reduced elevation, was still spectacular. The forest began a quarter of a mile from the bottom of the cliff, and it almost literally had no end. It rolled up over the hills and down into the shallow valleys. It faltered at the edge of a broad river, then billowed out again, and climbed the slopes of mountains that sprawled mistily in the distance.

Time to get going again. At twenty-five minutes after six, they reached a ledge a hundred and fifty feet above the uneven plain. The distance strained the capacity of the rope, but the initial operation of lowering the Rull to freedom and safety was achieved without incident. Jamieson gazed down curiously at the creature. What would it do now that it was in the clear?

It merely waited. Jamieson stiffened. He was not taking any such chance as that. He waved imperatively at the Rull and took out his blaster. The Rull backed away, but only into the safety of a group of rocks. Blood-red, the sun was sinking behind the mountains. Darkness moved over the land. Jamieson ate his dinner, and as he was finishing, he saw a movement below. He watched as the Rull glided along close to the foot of the precipice, until it disappeared beyond an outjut of the cliff.

Jamieson waited briefly, then swung out on the rope. The descent strained his strength, but there was solid ground at the bottom. Three quarters of the way down, he cut his finger on a section of the rope that was unexpectedly rough. When he reached the ground, he noticed that his finger was turning an odd gray. In the dimness, it looked strange and unhealthy. As he stared at it, the color drained from his face. He thought in bitter anger. The Rull must have smeared it on the rope on the way down.

A pang went through his body and was followed instantly by a feeling of rigidity. With a gasp, he clutched at his blaster, intending to kill himself. His hand froze in mid-air. He toppled stiffly, unable to break his fall. There was the shock of contact

with the hard ground, then unconsciousness.

The will to death is in all life. Every organic cell ecphorizes the inherited engrams of its inorganic origin. The pulse of life is a squamous film superimposed on an underlying matter so intricate in its delicate balancing of different energies that life itself is but a brief, vain straining against that balance. For an instant of eternity a pattern is attempted. It takes many forms, but these are apparent. The real shape is always a time and not a space shape. And that shape is a curve. Up and then down. Up from darkness into the light, then down again into the blackness.

The male salmon sprays his mist of milt onto the eggs of the female. And instantly he is seized with a mortal melancholy. The male bee collapses from the embrace of the queen he has won, back into that inorganic mold from which he climbed for one single moment of ecstasy. In man, the fateful pattern is impressed time and again into numberless ephemeral cells, but only the pattern endures.

The sharp-minded Rull scientists, probing for chemical substances that would shock man's system into its primitive forms, had, long before, found the special secret of man's will to death.

The *yeli*, Meesh, gliding toward Jamieson, did not think of the process. He had been waiting for the opportunity. It had occurred. Briskly, he removed the man's blaster; then he searched for the key to the lifeboat. Then he carried Jamieson a quarter of a mile around the base of the cliff to where the man's ship had been catapulted by the blast from the Rull warships. Five minutes later the powerful radio inside was broadcasting on Rull wave lengths an imperative command to the Rull fleet.

Dimness. Inside and outside his skin. Jamieson felt himself at the bottom of a well, peering out of night into twilight. As he lay, a pressure of something swelled around him, lifted him higher and higher, and nearer to the mouth of the well. He struggled the last few feet, a distinct mental effort, and looked over the edge. Consciousness.

He was lying on a raised table inside a room which had several large mouselike openings at the floor level, openings that led to other chambers. Doors, he identified, odd-shaped, alien, unhuman. Jamieson cringed with the stunning shock of recognition. He was inside a Rull warship.

He could not decide if the ship were in motion, but he guessed that it was. The Rull would not linger in the vicinity of a planet.

He was able to turn his head, and he saw that nothing material held him. Of such things he knew as much as any Rull, so in an instant he had located the source of gravitonic beams that interlaced across him.

The discovery was of abstract value, he realized bitterly. He began to nerve himself, then, for the kind of death that he could expect. Torture by experiment.

Nerving himself was a simple procedure. It had been discovered that if a man could contemplate every possible type of torture, and what he would do while it was occurring, and became angry rather than afraid, he could maintain himself to the very edge of death with a minimum of pain.

Jamieson was hurriedly cataloguing the types of torture he might receive when a plaintive voice said into his ear, "Let's go home, huh?"

It took a moment to recover; it took seconds to consider that the Ploian was probably invulnerable to energy blasts such as had been dealt his lifeboat by the Rull warship. And at least a minute went by before Jamieson said in a low voice, "I want you to do something for me."

"Of course."

"Go into that box over there and let the energy flow through you."

"Oh, goody. I've been wanting to go in there."

An instant later the electric source of the gravitonic beams was obviously rechanneled. For Jamieson was able to sit up. He moved hastily away from the box and called, "Come out."

It required several calls to attract the Ploian's attention. Then Jamieson asked, "Have you looked this ship over?"

"Yes," the Ploian replied.

"Is there a section through which all the electric energy is channeled?"

"Yes."

Jamieson drew a deep breath. "Go into it and let the energy flow through you. Then come back here."

"Oh, you're so good to me," the Ploian responded.

Jamieson took the precaution of hastily finding a nonmetallic object to stand on. He was barely in a safe position when a hundred thousand volts crackled from every metal plate.

"What now?" said the Ploian two minutes later.

"Look the ship over and see if any Rulls are alive."

Almost instantly, Jamieson was informed that about a hundred Rulls were still alive. From the reports of the Ploian, the survivors were already staying away from contact with metal surfaces. Jamieson accepted the information thoughtfully. Then he described the radio equipment to the Ploian, and finished, "Whenever anyone attempts to use this equipment, you go inside it and let the electricity flow through you—understand?"

The Ploian agreed to do this, and Jamieson added, "Report back to me periodically, but only at times when no one is trying to use the radio. And don't go into the main switchboard without my permission."

"Consider it done," the Ploian said.

Five minutes later the Ploian located Jamieson in the weapon room. "Somebody tried to use the radio just now; but he gave up finally, and went away."

"Fine," said Jamieson. "Keep watch—and listen—and join me as soon as I'm through here."

Jamieson proceeded on the positive assumption that he had one decisive advantage over the Rull survivors: he knew when it was safe to touch metal. They would have to rig up elaborate devices before they could dare move.

In the weapon control room he worked with energy cutting tools, hurriedly but effectively. His purpose: to make certain that the gigantic blasters could not be fired until the weapon control wiring was totally repaired.

That job done, he headed for the nearest lifeboat. The Ploian joined him as he was edging his way through an opening.

"There're some Rulls that way," the Ploian warned. "Better go this way."

They finally entered a Rull lifeboat without mishap. A few minutes later Jamieson launched the small craft, but five days went by before they were picked up.

The high Aaish of Yeel! was not on the ship to which Jamieson had been taken as a captive. And so he was not among the dead, and, indeed, did not learn of the escape of the prisoner for some time. When the information was finally brought to him, his staff took it for granted that he would punish the Rull survivors of the wrecked battleship.

Instead, he said thoughtfully, "So that was the enemy? A very powerful being."

He silently considered the week of anguish he had endured. He had recovered almost all of his perceptive powers—so he was able to have a very unusual thought for an individual of his high estate.

He said, using the light-wave communicator, "I believe that this is the first time that a Prime Leader has visited the battlefield. Is this not correct?"

It was correct. A Super-General had come from rear headquarters to the "front lines." Top brass had come out of the sheltered and protected home planet and risked a skin so precious that all of Ria shuddered anxiously when the news was released.

The greatest Rull continued his speculations: "It would seem to me that we have not received the most accurate intelligence about human beings. There appears to have been an attempt to underestimate their abilities, and while I commend the zeal and courage of such attempts, my reaction is that this war is not likely to be successful in any decisive way.

It is therefore my conclusion that the Central Council reexamine the motives for the continuation of the battle effort. I do not foresee an immediate disengagement, but it might well be that the fighting could gradually dissipate, as we assume a defensive position in this area of space, and perhaps turn our attention to other galaxies."

Far away, across light-years of space, Jamieson was reporting to an august body, the Galactic Convention:

"I feel that this was a Very Important Person among the Rulls; and, since I had him under complete hypnosis for some time, I think we should have a favorable reaction. I told him that the Rulls were underestimating human beings, and that the war would not be successful, and I suggested that they turn their attention to other galaxies."

Years were to pass before men would finally be certain that the Rull-human war was over. At the moment, the members of the convention were fascinated by the way in which a mind-reading baby ezwal had been used to contact an invisible Ploian; and of how this new ally had been the means of a human being escaping from a Rull

battleship with such vital information as Jamieson had brought with him.

It was justification for all the hard years and patient effort that men had devoted to a policy of friendship with alien races. By an overwhelming majority the convention created for Jamieson a special position which would be called: Administrator of Races.

He would return to Carson's Planet as the ultimate alien authority, not only for ezvals, but as it turned out, the wording of his appointment was later interpreted to mean that he was Man's negotiator with the Rull.

While these matters developed, the galactic-wide Rull-human war ended.