

DISCOVERY

I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.

—Isaac Newton

He was wearing a jumpsuit of radiation armor, colored white, signifying executive level. He wore a white helmet with the visor down. He was armed, as all executives were in this quasi-military installation. He walked stately across the floodlit concrete plain toward the giant hangar looming in the night. His control seemed to be massive.

At the towering hangar, shaped like a domed observatory, a squad of black-armored guards lay dozing before an entry hatch. The executive kicked the sergeant brutally but quite dispassionately. The squad leader exclaimed and scrambled to his feet, followed by the rest of his men. They opened the hatch for the man in white who stepped through into pitch black. Then, almost as an afterthought, he turned back into the light, contemplated the squad standing fearfully at attention and, quite dispassionately, shot their sergeant.

There was no light inside the hangar, only sound. The executive spoke quietly in the darkness.

“What is your name?”

The reply was a sequence of binary bits, treble blips and bass beeps, “_’ “_”_’_”

“Not in binary. Switch to phonetics. RW what is your name? RR answer.”

The answer was as quiet as the question; but it was not a single voice, it was a chorus of voices speaking in unison. “Our name is R-OG-OR 1001.”

“What is your mission, Rogor?”

“To obey.”

“To obey what?”

“Our program.”

“Have you been programmed?”

“Yes.”

“What is your program?”

“Convey passengers and freight to OxCam University Dome on Mars.”

“Will you receive commands?”

“Only from authorized control.”

“Am I authorized?”

“Your voice print has been programmed into the command bank. Yes.”

“I.D. me.”

“We identify you as Executive Level One.”

“My name?”

The reply was again a series of high-low bits.

“That is my statistical I.D. What is my social name?”

“It has not been entered.”

“You will receive it now and link it to my voice print.”

“Circuits open.”

“I am Doctor Damon Krupp.”

“Received. Entered. Linked.”

“Are you programmed for inspection?”

“Yes, Doctor Krupp.”

“Open for inspection.”

The hangar dome slowly split into two hemispheres which slid down and admitted the soft light of the starry sky, revealing the two-man craft with which Krupp had been speaking. Standing tall over the deep ignition pit, it bore a startling resemblance to a giant antique Russian samovar; small crown head, wide cylindrical body with what might have been odd handles thrusting out, then tapering to a square base on four feet which actually were jet nozzles.

A hatch opened at the base, flooding the hangar with light from the craft's interior—the ship had no need for port-holes—and Krupp stepped up two inset rungs and entered to inspect. R-OG-OR 1001 was surprisingly overheated. Krupp stripped off his clothes and crawled and clung his way up toward the control deck which was the samovar crown. (There would be no such climbing constraint out in weightless space.) In the main belly cabin he discovered the reason for the tropical heat; a naked woman was sweating and swearing over the maintenance gear surrounding a transparent incubator. She was tinkering and crawling over and under the complications like an octopus.

It was his assistant, Dr. Cluny Decco, and Krupp had never seen her nude before, but his controlled voice did not betray his delighted amazement.

“Cluny?”

“Yeah, Damon. I heard you and the ship exchanging compliments. Ouch! Goddamn!”

“Trouble?”

“This sonofabitch oxygen feed is temperamental. Now you see it, now you don't. It may kill the kid.”

“We won't let it.”

“We can't take any chances. After seven months of the care and feeding of our fetus, I'm not going to have a piece of machinery blow it for us.”

“It's not the gear, Cluny, it's ambient pressure that's throwing off readings and choking the feed. The gear was designed for space, and space will make all the difference.”

“And if it doesn't?”

“Then we crack the crib and give the boy mouth-to-mouth.”

“Crack this thing? Christ, Damon, it'd take a sledge to split it open.”

“Don't be so literal, Cluny. I meant crack it open procedurewise.”

“Oh.” She crawled out and stood up, steaming in skin and temper. Krupp had never seen her look so desirable. “Sorry. I never did have any sense, humorwise.” She gave him a peculiar look. “Was the mouth-to-mouth a joke, too?”

“Not any more,” Krupp said, seizing her. “I've been promising myself this as soon as our boy was decanted. He's born now, Cluny ...”

And this is why R-OG-OR 1001 crashed on Ganymede.

The ship had been swung off-course by a lucky hit on the guidance system by a rare million Bev cosmic particle. This happens occasionally and is corrected manually, but Krupp and Decco had too much blind faith in computers and were too involved with their passion to check, so all three, the man, the woman, and the boy in the incubator, went down.

* * *

All this on Jekyll Island (no relation to Mr. Hyde) where the story began. I'm rather proud of this because it's unusual to discover the very first link in a chain of events. I'm not proud of the fact that I'm using 20-20 hindsight, since my business must be 20-20 foresight. You'll find out why later on in the chain.

I'm Odessa Partridge, and I was in a unique position to ferret out and sometimes reconstruct the events before and after the facts and put them in proper sequence in this telling. *Exempli gratia*: I began with the encounter in R-OG-OR 1001 which I didn't unearth until long afterward, mostly from the gossip still current at Cosmotron Gesellschaft. That answered a lot of questions much too late. Anyway, it was only a fringe benefit; I was after something else.

By the way, if I seem to be flip in my attitude, it's because my business can be so damned grueling that humor is the only sovereign remedy. God knows, the grim patterns generated on Jekyll Island which tortured the lives of the Synergist from Ganymede, the Sprite from Titania, and my own, needed all the humor I possessed.

Now let's have a look at the events surrounding that first link in the chain.

When Cosmotron set up their Metastasis Energy Plant they threatened, blackmailed, bribed and finally were permitted to buy Jekyll Island on the Georgia coast. It took them a year to roust out and even kill off the squatters and dedicated ecologists entrenched in the Greenbelt preserve. It took them that same year to clean up the trash, garbage and corpses deposited by transients. Then they encircled Jekyll Island with 1,500 megavolts of electrified privacy and built their energy plant.

For the production they required apparatus long abandoned and forgotten. Another year was spent exploring and raiding museums for antique gear. Then they discovered that the brilliant young engineering Ph.Ds hadn't the foggiest notion of how to handle these antiquities. They hired a high-level personnel expert who heisted ancient professor-types out of retirement and put them under contract to operate the *apparat* which they alone could understand. The expert was elevated to supervisor status. He was Dr. Damon Krupp who had taken his degrees in Persona Analysis.

Krupp's doctoral dissertation had been on Huntington's chorea (Saint Vitus' Dance), a dazzling exploration of the concept that the disease magnified the intellectual and creative potential of the victim. It was so dramatic and caused such a stir that backbiters used to say, "Krupp has Huntington's chorea and Huntington has Krupp's."

He was still hipped on magnification of the intellect and the Cosmotron plant opened the door for a dangerous experiment. Cosmotron synthesized every element in the periodic table from atomic weights 1.008 (Hydrogen) to 259.59 (Asimovium) by a metastatic process which duplicated in miniature the solar thermonuclear caper. Radiation byproducts were a constant problem, which is why the staff was required to wear armor at all times; but the radiation inspired Krupp's experiment, Maser Generated Fetal Amplification by Syndetic Emission of Radiation.

His assistant, Cluny Decco, was an M.D. and was delighted to participate, mostly because she was slavishly in love with Krupp, partly because she loved playing with machinery. Together they designed and set up the lab gear for what they called "The Magfaser Experiment," which, of course, was the acronym for Maser Generated Fetal, etc. Then came the problem of materiel. Here Cluny delivered.

She placed guarded advertisements in the Georgia media which, to the harassed alone, meant free abortions. Together, they examined all applicants, physically and psychologically, until the

ideal one came along. She was a tall, dark, handsome mountain girl with a keen illiterate intelligence, the victim of a rural rape, two months pregnant. This time, Dr. Decco took extra pains to preserve the fetus intact in its sac which was placed in an amniotic fluid in a flask.

Cluny's microsurgery linking the umbilical cord to a balanced nutrient supply had been, by then, so explicitly researched that it was almost Standard Operational Procedure, but the tricky Maser amplification was the first ever. How it was done will never be known because only Krupp and Decco knew it and the secret died with them on Ganymede. However, Cluny had had a brief encounter with one of the Cosmotron executives, who must remain anonymous, and he reported this conversation from the bed.

"Listen, Cluny, you and Dr. Krupp have been overheard whispering about something you call 'Magfaser.' What is it?"

"An acronym."

"For what?"

"You've been very nice to me."

"Likewise, I'm sure."

"So can I put you on exec's honor?"

"I am already."

"No tell no one?"

"Not even President Gesellschaft himself."

"Maser generated fetal amplification by syndetic emission of radiation."

"What!"

"Yeah. We've been using some of our radiation byproducts."

"To do what?"

"Amplify a fetus during gestation."

"A fetus! Inside you?"

"Hell no. It's a test-tube baby floating in a Maser womb. It's about nine months ready to decant now."

"Where'd you get it?"

"Even if I knew her name I wouldn't tell you."

"What are you amplifying it into?"

"That's the headache, we don't know. Damon thought we were doing an overall amplification, sort of putting the kid through a magnifying glass ..."

"Sizewise?"

"Brainwise, but we've been monitoring his dream patterns—you know that the fetus does dream, sucks its thumb and all that—and they're just average. Now we suspect that what we did was multiply a single aptitude by itself into a kind of quadratic X-square."

"Crazy!"

"So what's X, the unknown quantity, that's been multiplied by itself? Your guess is as good as mine."

"D'you think you'll find out?"

"Damon thinks we'd better get help. He's a brilliant guy, really the greatest, and what makes him great is his modesty. He's willing to admit when he's licked."