

THE WOMAN WOULD DECIDE WHAT KIND OF MAN BRITT WAS, AND WHAT KIND HE WOULD BE

Among the Amazon women, males were divided into two categories. One was that of breeders, tending the huts, raising the children, satisfying the Amazons' sexual appetites and their need to give birth to worthy daughters. The other category was that of workers, inferior types who would only pollute the breed with their sperm. Naturally, they were castrated.

Now was Britt St. Vincent's time of testing. Before him stood a naked warrior woman, flaunting before his gaze her beautifully shaped legs, her perfect pink-nippled breasts, her full wealth of golden hair. On the dirt floor by her feet was a sleeping mat. But this night there would be no sleeping on it.

For by the dawn, Britt's fate as a man would be decided—and he steeled himself to his task. . . .

WHAT POWER COULD CHECK THE AMAZONS' MARCH TO WORLD CONQUEST?
ONLY BRITT ST. VINCENT COULD FIND OUT—IF HE SURVIVED.

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THE MIND MASTERS #4

Amans

by
Ian Ross



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"AIIIIYEEEEEE!!!" The woman's shriek reverberates across the mammoth plaza and ricochets down the dozens of death-quiet streets that lead from the place. The echoes bounce between build-ings bathed blood-red by the rising tropic sun. The sound causes corpselike bodies that are strewn in the streets to tremble to life again.

The great solar orb slowly heaves itself over the horizon like the red eye of a cosmic giant curious about the cause of the cry. In the eddy of silence that follows the shriek, one can almost hear the dis-tant roar of atomic fires on the sun's surface as it stabs its searing red rays into the ultramodern build-ings of the *Plaza del Sol*.

The near naked woman who screamed is running in terror from the white marble plaza, her bare feet rapidly slapping on the cobblestones of the side streets. "*Exu! Exu!*" she screams as she runs, leav-ing in her wake the bodies which begin to rise grog-gily from the gutters. She is a beautiful Cariocan and her bare breasts bounce firmly with each fear-filled footfall that speeds her out of the alien inner city and back to the filth of the familiar *favelados* who dwell in the slums at the edge of the jungle.

Jejee-zuz! Britt thinks with angry annoyance. He shakes his head. Britt is sitting up in his bed, having been awakened and reflexively snapped into that position in response to the cry that had originated in the plaza onto which the window of his hotel room is opened. *Don't tell me that they start again this*

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early in the morning. He gently massages Ms sleep-burning eyes with his right-hand thumb and forefin-ger. The touch causes tears to flow; the salty water cools his hot eyeballs.

Britt focuses his blurry eyes on the alarm clock that ticks on the dresser across the room. *5:03! . . . forgot how early the sun rises down here near the equator.*

". . . Mmmmmmm . . ." The slow, deep sigh vi-brates through Britt's chest as he stretches the sleep stiffness out of his rippling muscles. In spite of Ms body's lingering feeling of fatigue, Britt's ever eager brain prevents him from lying back down again. *It's not already,* he thinks, taking mental note of the lin-gering coolness of the humid sheet on his naked thighs.

Britt slips his bare feet onto the cool carpet and stands up. A light tropical morning breeze is gently rustling the transparent wMte curtains which frame the open window.

Outside, the sky that backgrounds the sun-washed government buildings across the wide plaza is in-credibly blue. *Damn . . .*

Britt walks to the window. *I was hoping for some cloud cover this morning so Greg could run softer Goodyears and maybe gain a few positions on the starting grid.*

He stands at the window and surveys the scene four stories below. After several seconds, Britt sighs, folds his strong arms across Ms broad, tanned chest and leans forward, bracing himself against the win-dowsill. The wooden sill at first feels cold against Ms naked abdomen. *I'll bet it's going to be 110 degrees today.*

Britt's eyes scan the slowly awakening bodies scattered on the sidewalks and steps below. *I don't see how they do it.* Recalling an entire evening in a single eyeblink, his brain flashes scenes of Ms own revelry after yesterday's practice: the skimpy silver costume he wore; the gleaming, sweaty chests of the

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samba dancers; the glistening bare breasts and but-tocks of the wild Cariocan women. *And that was just the first night of—what do they call it?—cami-val* He smiles and shakes his head. *This is only Sat-urday morning.... I wonder if we can survive four more nights of Mardi Gras madness.*

Below, the brightening streets are strewn with streamers, cans and confetti, bottles, drunks, and banners. On the plaza below and on sidewalks ev-erywhere, disheveled dreamers raise their heavy, pounding heads, squint briefly at the rising sun and slowly stagger to their feet to drag their incongru-ously costumed bodies back to executive penthouses, middle-class homes, or the reeking, fly-filled *favelas*.

The sun's rays reflect off the snow-white slabs of this fabulous plaza and Britt feels the solar warmth on Ms chest. A small sting on Ms cheek elicits a fast reflexive slap from Ms right hand. "*Damned mosquito!*"

Britt holds up Ms hand and looks at the smashed insect on Ms fingertips: a drop of Britt's own blood from the burst body of the bug is splattered bright red on his skin. Suddenly the focus of Ms eyes snaps from the stain on Ms fingers to a similar stain on the wMte steps over on the far plaza section that leads to the house of the Brazilian Senate. "*God! Not an-other one!*"

The blood there is bright red, glistening, still draining from the groin of the lifeless nude man ly-ing on the wMte stone steps.

2

RrrrrAAAARRrrr!!!—the black machine snarls past like a jungle cat!

"1:14.32," says Dr. John Hollander as his thumb presses the button to stop the ticking hands of the stopwatch he holds. "Greg blistered that first set of gummy Goodyears, but this harder compound looks sticky enough to get him up front on the grid for Tuesday's race."

Britt nods. He is sitting in his own sleek Eagle 5000 car. The 'fingers of his left hand work to smooth the thin leather around the knuckles of the driving glove he has just pulled onto Ms right hand. A large, grease-stained towel stretched between two jack handles shades Britt as he sits sweltering in the cockpit. Sweat trickles down his hairy chest beneath his driving suit.

"*Gott in Himmel ... was fur tin heise Tag,*" murmurs mechanic Karl Krimmel. The huge Ger-man squats on his haunches behind Britt and fin-ishes a final adjustment on the engine injectors. "*Fertig,*" he says, slapping the engine cover with his large, bony paw.

Click! Britt's right hand reaches out and snaps a toggle switch on the crude dash of the cramped racer. "Switch on." He watches in the mirror beside his shoulder. Karl's reflection nods.

Br-br-br-bramm-BRAM! BRAM! BRAM.—the noisy V-8 engine blasts to life as Britt's finger touches a button on the dash at the same time that Ms right foot pumps the throttle. His legs are 4

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cramped close together inside the tubular chassis. He shifts position, squirming in the tight lay-down seat so that his feet, deep in the narrow nose of the racer, have a better angle at the tiny metal pedals. *No wonder they call these things "coffins on wheels,"* Britt thinks as he adjusts himself for his first com-petition ride in a Formula 5000 machine.

BRAM-BRAAM! He stabs the throttle and watches the tachometer needle jump up to 6000 rpms and then sag back down to a twitchy idle at 1500. *Karl's got the throttle response down well this time....I'll see if I can put his hard work to some good use out there.*

Thock! Britt's head jerks slightly under the im-pact from the firm slap of Karl's hand hitting his helmet top in the traditional signal that everything is ready,

Britt flashes back the thumbs-up signal with his right hand a second before it drops onto the stubby chrome gearshift handle that nestles beneath the curving side cowl of the brutal but sleek white machine. Simultaneously, Britt's left foot pushes in the clutch and his right hand shoves the gear lever forward fast into first gear. The ball of Britt's right foot now presses on the accelerator pedal... gently ... *brrrrRRRRR!* The throbbing metal heart of the machine instantly responds with a faster pulse, and the sleek torpedo on wheels begins to move forward, rumbling and rolling down through the pits and toward the white line that marks the entry onto the track. The tanned Brazilian official in a white jacket and green slacks is raising his hand, a sign for Britt to stop and wait for the man to wave the flag that will signal a clear track. Britt touches the brake pedal, and although he cannot hear it through his heavy helmet, he *cart feel* the brake calipers, like hy-draulic fingers, tighten on the rotating disks and squeeze the car to a stop. That *feel* signifies that Britt's conscious brain is easing into that race driver's union of man and machine in which the

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brain's cerebral circuits monitor both the electro-chemical machinery of the body and the electro-mechanical machinery of the race car without preju-dice. Race car and race driver becoming one ... a unified whole which must strive and survive at death-dealing speeds on the blistering track.

The brain's vision organs monitor the sudden movement of the green flag and cerebral cells in-stantly explode out an electric message to muscles that respond and move bone levers that move the metal levers. The sudden pressure of rocketing ac-celeration pushes against the living framework of the chest and flexes the metal framework of the car. The steering wheel is one with Britt's left hand; the metal column is a steel nerve link which feeds his brain the feel of its fingers that are the tires digging into the hot asphalt here at the first high speed left turn. The left turn is sharp and changes suddenly to a broad, sweeping right-hand swing. Britt's mind, eyes, hands and feet, his wheels, gears, levers and motor are working together in graceful unison. The jungle that crowds close to the track here smoothes into a dark green blur: Britt's speed is rising over a hundred miles per hour and continues to increase as the long, fast curve opens onto a chicaned stretch which most drivers streak through like a straighta-way by clipping the apexes from corner to corner. As the velocity of the race car rises and rises, Britt's brain shifts into computerlike speed, processing thousands of incoming bits of feel, sight and sound at billionth-of-a-second speed—working so fast that internal and external time become separate realities with the 160 mph world of racing crawling past in seeming slow motion as the brain moves into nanosecond mode.

RrrRRROOOWWerrr!!! Britt's car flashes past a small crowd of practice watchers standing on the outer edge of the track here where the chicane stretch abruptly becomes an uphill curve. He rockets toward the crest unable to see the horizon from his

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reclining position but knowing that like a roller coaster he will become. slightly airborne and dive down the

other side into a steep left-then-right switchback— Suddenly the road falls from beneath Mm! A fluttery feeling tingles in Ms solar plexus and the spinning wheels in front droop down on their chrome suspension arms! *Got to time this exactly*, Britt thinks in an exciting instant before the car noses down onto the track again.

And time it he does!—turning the steering wheel just at the moment of impact! The tires growl, hold-ing on to the track surface as the speeding man and machine try to turn against the forward pull of their momentum. The left front tire sends up a small spray of dust and gravel as it drifts off the edge of the pavement before the other tires gain a firm hold. Britt's cheeks sag and his neck feels the heavy pull as its muscles strain to hold his helmeted head up-right against the right-then-left jerk of this downhill S bend. In an eyeblink Britt's through and picking up downhill speed, rocketing toward the straight with its colorful crowded grandstands on the left and the jam-packed pits on the right.

... 160 ... 165 ... 170 ... Britt's mind is converting the tachometer readings into miles per hour even while it commands his eyes to rivet on a slightly slower car he is overtaking like a combat pi-lot closing in on the tail of an enemy plane. The end of the straight rushes at the two cars! Now they are racing side by side! There is room only for one in the groove, and the knock-off spinners on the left rear wheel of the other car whirl only an inch from Britt's right front tire as he creeps past! 6 ... 5 ... 4—the brake warning signs at the side of the track flash past as the sharMike snouts of the sleek racers skim the black surface of the track. Suddenly the nose of the red racer beside Britt's white machine dives lower, almost touching the track. Britt, too, hits his brakes a nanosecond later and takes the in-ner line through the corner an eyeblink before the

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other machine tucks in behind him, howling like an angry hornet.

Nose to tail they snick through the tight left-hander turn and accelerate on to the sweeping right-hand turn again. *OK ..* . Britt thinks reluctantly. *Here goes. ..* . Perspiration forms a dark splotch on the light leather of his gloved right hand. He drops it from the small, thick steering wheel and presses his index finger on an unmarked button on his black dash panel—

BRAM! BRAM! BRAM! BRAM! His engine be-gins to misfire. Britt's right fist shoots up into the air, signaling that he is having trouble and is pulling off the track. He jabs the brakes and the car slows as if being held back by a giant, unseen hand. He coasts toward the outer edge of the asphalt and ' eases onto the shoulder.

The gravel and dust crunch dryly under the wide racing tires. The car is almost completely stopped now. Britt looks at the dust and stones sticking to the slowly turning tires.

"Shit."

All for the cause, Dr. Webster. At this moment Britt's thoughts are emotion-charged. The fine-honed competitive edge that could make him a win-ner on that track, the trait that has helped him sur-vive so far in his work for Mero Parapsychological Institute, rebels for a moment at the way he has faked ignition trouble with the wiring rig that Karl has built into the system for just that purpose. But Britt doesn't sit here long: the terrible heat of to-day's Brazilian sun is baking him inside this tiny cockpit. "Agh! This goddamned nomex!" Britt puts a hand on each side of the cowl and heaves himself to his feet. He stands for a second on the seat and impatiently unbuckles his helmet strap.

"Ahhh," he inhales. The tropic breeze feels mo-mentarily cool in his sweaty scalp. Quickly he steps out of the low racer. He turns and drops his helmet on the seat.

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ROWR! ROWR! ROWR. '—three racers streak past in a blur of orange, yellow and blue. Britt squints in the sunlight at the disappearing cars as he unzips the front of his driving suit. The itching from the sweat-wet fireproof nomex undershirt stops instantly as the breeze blows through the mesh of the cloth. Britt slips his arms out of the suit sleeves and pulls the nomex garment off over his head.

Hmmm ... that sun's hot as hell. I'd better slip the top oj my suit on again or I'll fry. The thin white cotton of the outer suit is already cool from the evaporating perspiration. With the front left open, Britt feels comfortable from the breeze. *Well ... I'd better find some shade until they get out here with a taw. The way things move here in Brazil, that could take some time.*

The dust here on the verge of the track reflects the sun's heat. But just fifteen feet away along this deserted section of the jungle-surrounded track out-side Brasilia's city limits the humid undergrowth is so thick that one must hack with a machete to pene-trate it. There is no shelter here for man. The big green leaves of the plants gleam in the sunlight, al-most seeming to stare with silent hostility at this member of the human race which has paved and now plays on the rich earth in which plants had once thrived.

Looks like that's the only shade around here. Britt eyes the broad, flat leafy crown of a hundred-foot high *mapacu* tree about fifty yards farther up the track. As he walks toward the tree, Britt can feel, through the thin leather of his racing slippers, the heat of the earth and the small sharp stones hid-den in the thick dust.

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The humid breeze billows the top of Britt's jump-style driving suit which is opened to the waist. Sparse, stiff grass grows around the base of the *ma~ pacu* tree. Britt sits down and leans back against its trunk.

The tree towers just fifty feet from the chicane, halfway up the rise that leads to the downhill S bend. The small group of spectators here this morn-ing is out of sight from where Britt sits. Most of Brasilia's population is still asleep in the city some two miles west of this new racetrack. Britt smiles to himself as he visualizes the scenes in many house-holds where husband and wife, friend and lover are struggling to recover from last night's drunken madness and to prepare for more of the same tonight.

The electronic tension of the racing he was expe-riencing only moments earlier has now faded. Britt sits here relaxing, a bit bemused by it all. *This is in-credible ... what am I doing here? Jeez.* He shakes his head in amazement, smiles and reaches down to pluck a long piece of the waving grass. *Who would have thought that I'd be sitting here today . . . a bonafide hunter of human spirits . . . , involved in in-trigues involving realities that most people still choose to ignore.* Britt looks up.

Above the green canopy of the jungle that stretches beyond the track, the tall towers of fantas-tic Brasilia thrust shafts of gleaming white marble and glistening glass into the cobalt-blue sky. 10

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Brasilia!—city of the future surrounded by the past's primeval jungles. Here in the heart of earth's last and vast unexplored land lies one of man's most advanced cities—*Brasilia!*

Situated atop a plateau stronghold on the eastern watershed of the "River Sea"—the mighty Amazon River—Brasilia was termed an impossible dream when ground was broken in 1957 and the site was named as the capital city of mammoth Brazil. The most farseeing architects of the world were called upon to create their most futuristic buildings for this city. The structures that arose from then: visions as-tounded the world then, and today continue to make Brasilia the most ambitious example of the future human habitat.

The founding of this city in the heart of the dense, deadly jungle was calculated in 1957 to be the spear-thrust that would open the jungles to ex-plorers and permit the nation to tap the colossal wealth of diamonds and oil which lie beneath the protective forests. But the westward expansion from the beaches of Rio did not occur as planned. Whereas the technology of the 1800s dictated that the westward expansion of the United States was to be done by ground travel, thereby settling and farm-ing the nation, the trip to Brasilia in the 1950s and 1960s could be made only on the silver wings of aircraft. So, even today, the Amazon jungles remain largely untapped, unvisited ... feared as the home of savage aboriginal tribes, some of whom are known to exist only by the trail of death they leave behind,

Even today, only one passable road slices through the threatening jungle. Labeled BR-010, , the Belem-Brasilia Road runs from the Atlantic coast to Brasilia. *That's why Furtado built this track and invited us down here,* Britt thinks silently as he stares at the distant city. In front of him, the sleek racers continue to blast past from time to time—but he doesn't hear them. Britt is finally finding time to

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think about this latest assignment. He had had little opportunity to consider the task since leaving En-gland and his last encounter with the psychic forces of Pentagon and foreign plotters.

Furtado scheduled this Formula 5000 race and invited teams from all over the world here ostensibly to celebrate his inauguration as president during Tuesday night's closing Mardi Gras festivities. It's clear now that the race serves several purposes for Furtado.... BR-01Q has been clogged for days with coastal Brazilians on their way here either in the hopes of seeing Brazil's first-ever world driving champion, Emerson Fittipaldi, or on their way here to join in the week-long Mardi Gras-inauguration blast. Furtado's probably betting that many of these visitors can be persuaded to stay and help settle the region.

Suddenly, something catches Britt's eye. *Well ... it's about time.*

4

"Castrated."

Hollender nods affirmation.

"How many does that make?"

"Three senators," Hollender replies. "Or four, if you want to count the one whom Tapajos himself castrated before Furtado's soldiers cornered him hi the jungle."

Dr. John Hollender is sitting at the workbench that is built into the wall of, the garage which has been

assigned to Britt's Quasar team here behind the pits at the track.

Britt watches the bearded little man patiently soldering a hair-fine wire to a lead on the new maser tuner in their psychic communication device. Britt looks carefully at the communicator, noting how closely the instrument resembles the oscilloscope which also sits on the bench nearby. The disguise is almost perfect; the team has not yet had a problem with any customs inspections in any nation where they have used it. The disguise has permitted the team to pursue its secret work for Mero Parapsy-chological Institute, whose hidden headquarters and labs are located high in Southern California's San Gabriel Mountains.

"You know, John," chides Britt. He is sitting in the cockpit of his racer, relaxing in the familiar surroundings, listening to the sounds of engines being tuned in the garages here along pit row. "When you pass away and I try to contact you with that device you're working on there, all the while I'm talking to

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you, I'll be picturing you sitting at a workbench fooling around with some new tuner we just received from Mero. That's all I ever see you working at!"

John pauses, pivots on his stool and smiles. "And," he counters, "I'll remember you with a bottle of Budweiser in your hand."

"Only American beer left that's made with real whole grain rather than 'pellets,' " answers Britt. He raises the bottle to his lips.

John arches an eyebrow in mock surprise. "What? No praise for the natural carbonation?"

Britt wipes his lips on his driving suit. He belches quietly. "Makes a difference, John. The non-injected carbonation makes a difference ... subtle ... but nonetheless a difference—like that new tuner you're putting in there. It probably isn't all that much different from the one we started out with in Sicily and the one we switched to at Stonehenge, but there is *some* kind of important difference."

John nods, already busy again with his careful soldering.

Britt cradles his Budweiser on his belly. The bottle is cold and the breeze gusting through the garage is pleasant now that the afternoon sun is setting. The wide main door is lifted and Britt is waiting for Karl and Greg to return after Greg establishes his lap times for the day.

"You say that Karl is feeling nervous about some-thing?"

"Um-hum," John replies.

"Well," Britt muses, "his extrasensory gift has saved my can more than once. I wonder what's bothering him."

John carefully sets down the soldering iron. "He says it's just some vague feeling of hostility ... vague, but *strong*. He can't pin it down to anyone in particular."

Britt purses his lips and thinks for several silent seconds. "Well, it's a good bet with these murders that the Pentagon has a psychic crew down here too

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from the Harry Diamond Labs in Washington; I'd bet that Karl is getting something from them."

John nods. "Could be. But I haven't seen any new faces around the track here. Still, if the Pentagon or any nation has operatives from their psy-chic population control programs down here, they would be hard to spot because of all the costumes and masks everyone wears during these nightly celebrations."

"Do you have the assignment folder there, John?"

"Sure."

"Let's go over it again."

"You're the boss, Britt. But there isn't much to it ... kind of sketchy." The skillful scientist unlocks his toolbox and removes a manila folder from behind a secret steel panel in the lid. "Let's see ... about six months ago a North Korean anthropologist—Dr. Kim Sin—disappeared while on an expedition down the Juruena River near the Mato Grosso Plateau. Then about two months ago, some of the pacified Indians on the Xingu Reservation in the Mato Grosso began launching wild, frenzied attacks against the Indian Protection Service outposts on the reserve."

"*Morrer*," interrupts Britt, "*se for preciso; matar nunca*: 'die if necessary, but never kill.' With a motto like the one the IPS has, I don't think that I'd want to spend my time in an isolated reservation with aboriginal Indians who have been cut off since the dawn of civilization."

John nods. "Let's see ... survivors of the attacks report that the Indians seemed to be in some kind of stupor and that they were led by tall, blonde-haired, blue-eyed and naked white women."

"Kind of like the legendary Amazons," Britt observes as he takes another sip of his beer.

"Indeed," agrees John. "Brazilian troops fortified the IPS outposts after the initial series of attacks. In the very first attack following the arrival of troops, a rifle shot killed the 'Amazon' leading the Indian

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charge; the Indians whom she was leading instantly stopped their attack. They appeared confused, and when they were questioned they indicated that they had no idea of how they had got there. The last thing any of them could remember prior to 'awaken-ing' at the IPS outpost was the sudden appearance of the woman in their jungle camp. In spite of her stunning beauty, the thing that the Indians remem-bered most about her was her eyes. In fact, looking into her eyes was absolutely the last thing any of them could remember."

"Did they find anything unusual on the Amazon's body?" Britt asks.

"No," John answers. "The body disappeared in the confusion. And, of course, simple hypnotism has been ruled out, along with drugs. No traces of any-thing were found in blood samples from the Indians. It all points toward some type of psychic control being exercised. Based on Mero intelligence reports, facts support the assumption that the North Koreans are using their psychic military technology "to spark an overthrow of Furtado's new democratic coalition, thereby to gain a communist foothold in this nation, which is the largest and potentially the most wealthy in the Western world.

"As you recall, Britt, from our assignment briefing in Los Angeles when we picked up our new Formula 5000 cars, Dr. Sin comes from a long line of North Korean anthropologists who have special-ized in the study of this remote Amazon River watershed region. Sin's doctoral thesis at China's Pe-king University included a proposal for an expedition to the Mato Grosso to search for the fabled women warriors. Sin's theory—based on his father's translations of ancient Inca inscriptions which tell of clashes with Amazons—is that the vaunted battle prowess of these women resulted not from special *physical* strengths but from primitive *psychic* power over thek opponents." John places the folder back

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in the gray steel toolbox. He leans back against the workbench and folds his arms as he adds:

"Mero's North Korean operatives report that in late 1972, Dr. Sin became co-chairman of a psychic population control program backed by rebel army officers. This secret military effort was launched right after Jack Anderson's report of the psychic military clash between the U.S. and Russia appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* on May 12, 1972."

"So," Britt sighs wearily, "the Pentagon's Project Pandora lives up to its name."

"Actually, there is some indication that the North Korean psychic effort began on a lesser scale even earlier, like right after President Johnson and Kosy-gin put psychic military research on the secret agenda at the 1967 Glassboro conference.

"In any case," John continues, "the situation in Brazil today is that ever since the election results were in a month ago, Furtado's cabinet has been pressured by left wing radicals demanding close po-litical ties with Communist Korea. The left wing was led by the former Castro guerrilla, Tapajos, who was also a powerful *macumba* priest and feared by many superstitious Brazilians. The first Brazilian Senate supporter of Furtado who was found cas-trated was reportedly the victim of Tapajos himself in a ritual conducted at a secret and still-undiscover-ed *macumba* temple in the jungles just outside of Brasilia. Furtado's soldiers supposedly pursued Ta-pajos into the jungle and killed him. They brought back a human heart as proof, although his body was never produced.

"The castration murders, however, have contin-ued—as you discovered this morning, Britt. On the surface it appears like more brutal political murders in a country that is noted for such things. But au-topsies on the bodies of the men have revealed that they did not die from shock or loss of blood connect-ed with the crude castrations by machete. All the axons and dendrites in each victim's cerebral cortex

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have been fused—and not by externally applied electrical shock either, because no burn marks were found on the surface of the skulls. The increasingly nervous populace of Brasilia is convinced that Ta-pajos' spirit is revenging itself. Each victim has been found with a small doll strung around Ms neck, a red doll wearing a black cap—the *macumba* demon god *exu*."

A few moments of thoughtful silence fills the ga-rage, punctuated only by the familiar sounds on the track outside. Britt lifts himself out of his racer and walks to the garage doorway. He stands there squint-ing toward the track and the setting sun. The phan-tom shadows of speeding machines snarl past on the asphalt that glistens like a river in the setting sun. He leans against the side of the doorframe and stares down at his nearly gone beer. "If we are up against the revengeful spirit of Tapajos rather than 'merely' the Korean psychic military program, we could be in for some incredible trouble trying to contact the spirit on that communicator."

"We," Britt?" John comments, arching an eye-brow. "You mean 'you.' You're the one who will go into

the jungle tonight to try to find the temple where Tapajos' followers are supposed to have taken his body."

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It's dark now. But the scene below Britt's hotel window here is anything but lightless or lifeless.

It is *carnival! Mardi* Gray. The second night of the yearly four-day festivities that are celebrated on three continents—but celebrated nowhere as in Bra-zil. And nowhere in Brazil is Mardi Gras as wild as in fabulous Brasilia. Tourists still trek to Rio for Mardi Gras, but the Brazilians who can afford to fly over the jungle come to Brasilia.

"Look at them down there," says Britt, shaking Ms head in amused amazement. He glances at Karl, who stands beside him looking down. The riot of lights, sound and motion are reflected in the stalwart German's eyes.

"By the way," Britt says softly, "thanks for vol-unteering to go with me tonight to search for that rebel temple."

Karl's eyes flick quickly to Britt's and then back to the mad motion below.

Mardi Gras, a sensuous frenzy of sexual fantasy that captures the whole world's imagination!

Morality reversed. For four days, anything goes! Perversity is praised, virginity violated. The carefully cultivated shell of centuries of civilization is shat-tered by common consent to allow primitive pas-sions to erupt from the fissures.

The macabre masks of the masqueraders are the real faces of the fantasies that live in everyone's id. The energies are primitive—the will to survive, the drive to reproduce! The Mardi Gras is a spectacular

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dance of life that is also known as the "rites of Spring" in many nations. It is a tidal wave of ex-uberance. A staggering rebirth of the human spirit that has made mankind dominant on earth.

The origins of Mardi Gras are far distant from modern South America. The ritual can be imagined being spontaneously born millennia ago when the first upright ape-man emerged from his winter cave and bellowed his defiance at the forces of nature and other animals whom he had overcome to survive un-til spring.

This bellow of life became formalized by Mesopo-tamian and Greek cultures into rites of spring. Medieval Europe created the custom of spring parades in cities such as Venice, Cologne and Mu-nich. Portuguese colonists brought the custom to South America in the 1600s—and here it underwent a fantastic metamorphosis.

The African slave culture and native Indian influ-ences transformed the staid pageantry of Europe into violent celebrations pulsing with the samba's sexual rhythm. Shocked colonial governments tried to outlaw the samba, but their laws capitulated to the samba hi a preview of how the entire European colonial rule would eventually be battered down.

Brazil celebrated its first year of independence in 1823 by founding the Knights of Fun, a group dedi-cated to cultivating the Mardi Gras. Many *escolas de samba* (schools of samba) were established. Each school developed its own unique twist to the basic samba beat. Annual competitions arose to judge which school's beat was best and whose dancers most dazzling. The competitions evolved into today's incredible Mardi Gras parades.

Britt's room overlooks the plaza site where judg-ing will take place this yf ar in Brasilia. Grandstands have been set up for the judges and for those who want to see rather than participate in the general riot of acting out sexual fantasies, which is already swirling everywhere in the torchlit plaza. The hu-

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man sea of debauchery, however, parts each time a different samba school group parades into the plaza. Beside the grandstands is a roped area where the musical band of each school can play as their dance corps' turn to perform comes up. The exuberant bandsmen play on their way in and on their way out; they play for their group and then melt into the anthill scene of writhing bodies and play on and on until they collapse either onto the ground or onto the body of an eager woman. The cacophony of sound is incredible,

but the infectious samba beat prevails through it all.

"Here comes the last group now," says Britt. He nods toward a place to the right of the Senate building where the glistening waves of nearly naked human bodies are parting again.

The band beside the grandstands increases the force of its irresistible samba rhythm which is the in-sistent heartbeat of the frenzied dancers who are whirling their way through the parting revelers. "God," says Britt, "these guys are really good! No wonder they saved them for last!"

The pulse of the music pounds in his head, and even though he has had no liquor tonight, unlike the mobs below, Britt can feel his heart begin to pound and his penis begin to pulse and swell at the sight of the lead dancers in this last school display. The lead dancers are Cariocan women, scantily clad beauties gyrating beneath giant headdresses, their bare breasts flashing with sequins pasted on their nipples, their thighs glistening with aromatic oils rubbed on in the staging area by friends and lovers even while their lovely hips moved with the first fast, choppy beats of the sexual rhythm. Behind these beauties comes the school's main dance corps: a dizzying display of dancing Indians, naked gladiators, warriors, and nude, nubile girls all grinding their bodies in time with the samba's rapid rhythm. It is here and now that this night of Mardi Gras ceases all semblance of being a spectator event. As the last

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dancers pass the grandstands, the throngs watching on either side melt into the school group; raucous singing and spontaneous dancing surges upward through the seated spectators, and everyone and everything becomes the mad, uninhibited *essence* of *Mardi Gras*.

Britt glances at Karl. "It's time."

The giant German nods and turns away from the wild debauchery below.

"No one will be able to follow us in that madness down there."

"Ja," Karl agrees, and adds with a smile, "who would want to leave all that, anyway, for a crawl through the jungle at night?"

Britt smiles as he slips his sharp machete into its sheath on his belt. "What kind of vibes are you receiving tonight?" he asks the psychically gifted mechanic.

"The same. Hatred, anger, revenge. Yet it seems unlike any kind I have felt before ... almost inhuman ... yes, that is a good word for it ... *inhuman*"

"What puzzles me, Karl, is that you say the feeling is almost omnidirectional."

"*Jawohl*, Britt. I can find no one direction from which it seems to originate. It is equally strong from all points of the compass."

Britt checks the delicate psychic energy detector he has picked up from the concealed compartment in his suitcase. "Well, this instrument shows no reading at all right now." The device is constructed to resemble a hand-held light meter of the type photographers use. He aims it at Karl; the needle jumps slightly into the green zone. "The darned thing is working OK, too."

Karl nods. "But consider this, *mein Freund*. Dr. Webster designed this instrument to tune in on the electrochemical output of a human body or bodiless human spirit after death. Perhaps what I am sensing

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around us is not a genuinely human or animal life-force."

Britt folds his arms across his chest and focuses a thoughtful expression on his teammate. "John and I have considered that, Karl. If you rule out people and animals, that leaves only plants and insects. There are plenty of both surrounding us here, but we have no reason to suspect these life-forms are any threat to us." Britt lifts his right wrist and looks at his watch.

"It's almost midnight. We can slip down the service stairs and out that way." He reaches out and flips down the wall switch. Darkness crashes in from all sides, but is instantly replaced by a ceiling scene aswirl with shadows from the torches in the plaza below. "If our informants are correct, Karl, we can expect to find the hidden trail to Tapajos' temple marked by a *gmelina* grove just south of the city." Britt puts the detector into the breast pocket of the camouflage fatigues he wears. "Ready, Karl?"

"Ja," nods the similarly clad Mero operative.

The sounds of celebration from the receding city are faintly filtering through the thick midnight-black jungle. Nocturnal insects chirp in the underbrush and hum around Britt's ears.

Thock! His machete chops into the thick stem of the omnipresent vines which thread through this dark *gmelina* grove and sew the trees into a net of grasping, tripping plants. Each step takes half a minute of hard hacking with the machete.

"Karl, if we don't find that trail soon .. ." Britt pauses and wipes the sweat from his brow with a swipe of his left forearm. "Karl?" Britt suddenly becomes aware that his friend is not immediately behind him. A tiny dart of alarm shoots through Britt's brain. He turns quickly and sees the black shadow of Karl standing perfectly still in the darkness. "What's wrong?"

The shadow does not reply. For nearly a minute, Britt waits patiently. He knows that the giant German is listening to sounds which Britt can hear only when his own uncertain psychic powers are active.

Plant stems and leaves crunch under Karl's feet as he catches up to Britt.

Closer now, Britt can see that the perspiration soaking Karl's shirt and glistening on his forehead is even more profuse than his own. "Here," says Britt and opens his canteen, handing it to Karl. "Take a couple of slow sips."

Karl's huge hand almost hides the canteen. He lifts it to his parched lips and tilts his head back 24

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slightly. Britt can hear the sound of the water and can dimly see Karl's large Adam's apple moving up and down as he swallows.

"*Danke schon!*" Karl says and hands back the canteen.

"Britt—" Karl has difficulty speaking; his head shakes slowly as if he is trying to clear his mind of something. "The *feeling*, Britt ... is everywhere here—and stronger—filling my head almost to bursting!" The big man's voice is a strained whisper, his mighty arms hang like sinewy steel at his sides.

"Karl," Britt says firmly, "I want you to go back." Britt raises his hand to silence the protest before it can leave Karl's lips. "No argument. That's an *order*."

Karl nods. "*Ach so*. But there is something else I must try to explain before I leave. The feeling out here ... it is not only much stronger, it is almost *words*."

"Do you have any idea what the words are?"

Karl shakes his head.

"OK, my friend," nods Britt. He gives Karl a firm, friendly slap on the shoulder. "Go back now. I should return before dawn."

Britt watches Karl melt away into the jungle, heading toward the city they had left together an hour earlier. Britt watches until he can no longer hear Karl's quiet movement.

Well ... well ... well ... where do I go from here? Britt turns slowly and stands facing the almost solid wall of leafy plants. He shifts the shoulder straps of the backpack he carries containing the communicator.

What's that?

Britt's sensitive hearing has picked up a sudden sound. The darkness is thick, like black smoke. His eyes catch a speck of light flickering through the shadowy jungle. *Torches! They're moving fast, almost at a run, so they must be on the trail that Karl*

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and I couldn't find ... probably heading for the temple.

The torch flames bob quickly as the intruders jog toward Britt. He can hear their footfalls louder on the dry leaves, and finally he sees the naked bodies flash past only a few feet from where he stands hidden in the dense growth. There are about twenty light-skinned Cariocans, evenly divided between men and women. Britt can recognize from the way they run that all are drunk from the Mardi Gras revelry they have left. Their bodies glisten with sweat, their eyes are wide and happy grins frame their white teeth as they run past.

Britt waits several seconds after the last person has passed. *That's the last ... I'll follow them.* He swings his machete madly, slashing the strange tropic plants and pushing forward quickly until he reaches the trail.

Cautiously Britt glances in the direction from which the revelers have come. *All clear ... good.* Machete at the ready, Britt becomes a jungle shadow pursuing the torches which dance like fire-flies down

the dark trail.

Tense moments pass quickly as the trail twists
and turns through the maze of jungle -

They've stopped. There might be a lookout posted. I'd better slip into the undergrowth here and try to get closer without being seen.

One careful step at a time, lifting leaves and bending branches that he could have cut in an in-stant with his sharp machete, Britt inches through the foliage and toward "the torchlights. Now, one fraction of an inch after another, Britt lifts a large leaf that is the only barrier between himself and the scene he seeks. Slowly, the flickering light from the flames falls on his right eyeball and feeds into Britt's brain a sight from a forbidden world: the *macumba* temple of Tapajos!

The stone structure is pyramidal in shape, resem-bling the temples of the ancient Aztecs and Incas
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with whom the Amazon jungle Indians share a com-mon ancestry. The great stones are huge, like those in the pyramids of Egypt. Britt nods, recognizing the architecture and the puzzle such structures present to archaeologists who are only today learning to ac-cept why ancient pyramids of similar construction are found throughout the world.

Britt estimates the height of the pyramid at about a hundred feet, since the column-supported roof of the small temple structure on top reaches into the upper branches of the canopy formed by the *ma-capu* trees that shield it from discovery by air. The stones of the structure are black with the encrust-ment of ages. The great age of the pyramid is indi-cated by the thickness of the jungle vines which stitch the stones together and which threaten to crack even this immense monument of man. A steep, straight line of steps leads up to the small temple enclosure that sits atop the flat summit of the structure.

I wonder what that depression is at the base of the steps ... looks like a sunken grave hole. But Britt's eyes walk up the steps from the puzzling shadow depression and focus on the familiar gran-ite gargoyles which guard the perimeter of the temple roof. "Winged wolves"—yes, that's what the Indians here call them ... the same name that the Aztecs gave to this ferocious bird, the harpy eagle.

A sudden squeal brings Britt's eyes snapping down again to the group of men and women at the base of the pyramid. A huge black pig, the tradi-tional sacrificial feast of the Amazon Indians, is being led into the clearing at the foot of the steps. A huge bonfire has been lighted and the sweaty bodies of the men and women glisten in its dancing light as they arrange a feast of large banana leaves filled with fresh fruits from the surrounding bounty, and hollow gourds which Britt recognizes as the type used to contain the traditional intoxicant that is brewed from the narcotic sap of the *ayawasca* vine.

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Several of the men erect a simple frame over the pit by sliding two parallel poles into holes on either side of the shallow, grave-shaped depression, and fastening a crossbar between the poles at about six feet above the ground. The pig is wrestled to the ground by several men while others grab its rear legs and push pointed stakes through its tough ten-dons. The animal squeals and kicks, throwing blood from its wounds onto the men. But they quickly re-capture the limbs and thread a thick vine through the bleeding wounds. The end of the strong vine is tossed over the crossbar of the frame and the loose end is caught and pulled taut by others of the men. Those holding the pig suddenly release it. The hobbled animal vainly tries to pull itself away with its front feet, but is drawn backward and up. The ani-mal hangs head-down by its haunches, its squealing snout about a foot above the shallow pit. All the men and women crowd close now. The animal's eyes bulge in terror as it kicks and convulses, trying to reach the ground and escape its fate. One of the men steps forward; the machete in his hand gleams in the flames of the fire. The blade flashes, and the pig's sudden squeal is high-pitched, loud and long as the razor edge slices into the side of its throat and severs the jugular vein.

In an eyeblink the blade is withdrawn from the cascade of thick blood which floods from the wound. In a death panic the animal squeals again and again, clawing the air even as its life pours from its body, quart after quart, splotching loudly in the deepening dark red pool that quickly fills the shal-low grave.

Spontaneously, the revelers begin to wave their arms and sing and dance with wild abandon.

Tonight it's a pig, thinks Britt as he watches the bodies of the macumba worshipers begin their sacri-ficial frenzy. I wonder how many times a man—per-haps a Brazilian senator—has hung from that pole....

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The beat of the dance is unmistakably the same as that being danced even now in the streets of Brasilia, Rio and cities throughout South America: the samba! The drug of the *ayawasca* brew is al-ready affecting the dancers as they pass the gourds among themselves. Their gyrations are becoming wilder, along with the looks in their eyes. Couples have stopped their dancing here and there and are painting each other's bodies

with *macumba* symbols. Bowls of red dye crushed from the *uruci* plant are applied on the upper portions of the bodies; black stain from the unripe genipap fruit is rubbed on below the waist. There stands a statuesque Cariocan beauty, her body writhing in narcotic pleasure to the samba beat as her partner's hot hands, slick with *urucu* juice, rub the dye on her breasts, his palms pressing, massaging as his eager fingers dig deeply into the firm, smooth flesh. Britt watches a woman, near the moaning bonfire flames, on her knees before her man, her fingers black and slick with thick dye and squeezing and pulling his penis while his glistening thighs pulse with the pounding, insistent surge of the samba. She leans forward and slips her moist lips over his hardening organ to elicit a convulsive pelvic thrust from the ecstatic male.

Several men suddenly throw more logs on the fire. Ten thousand sparks erupt from the flames and scatter up into the black. The long logs have been freshly cut and still have wrapped around them green sections of the ever-present *ayawasca* vine which begin to smoke and fill the clearing with a hallucinogenic cloud. The frenzy of the dancing increases. The flames of the fire lick higher and higher—and suddenly, as if on a secret signal, the dancing couples come together to form a classic samba line. The most beautiful of the women leads the line, her bare breasts bouncing to the beat and behind her the hands of her man hold on to her curvaceous hips. Woman-man, woman-man—the line of alternating sexes moves madly to the heart-pound-

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ing beat of the samba! Legs flashing in unison, breasts and penises swaying, brushing against the body in front, the pulse of the samba builds and builds until Britt feels his head bursting, dizzy with narcotic strangeness. He feels his own sexual appetite awakening, his own penis rising, firming, pulsing with the music even as the penises of the dancing men rise, to brush the sweat-slick buttocks of the women whose inner thighs already aglisten with thick, slick fluid 'oozing from their eager and swollen vaginal lips which have blossomed like dark pink petals against the firm brown flesh of their inner thighs.

Abruptly the dancing stops. The line, like a living thing, contracts. The rod-hard organs of the men slip slickly and deeply into the sexual lips of the waiting women! Each man's hands swiftly encircle and fiercely knead the breasts of the woman he enters.

Reeling from the narcotic, his own body out of conscious control, Britt feels his erect penis suddenly pulse and pulse and pulse, pushing his hot seminal fluid out in an electric rush that tingles through his tense body. *Jeez!* Britt staggers a step backward. His body feels incredibly spent, weak.

Wha . . . what . . . is . . . Somehow aware of another presence with him here in the night blackness of the underbrush, Britt struggles to peer into the leafy shadows to his right. He sways, struggling for balance against the influence of the *ayawasca* smoke. Specks of orange light from the flames randomly pierce the foliage and dance like glowing insects on a vague human form. Britt's numbed brain struggles to complete the picture being fed to it in fragments by his swimming vision: *White skin . long, golden hair ... the eyes! ... blue! My God! Those eyes!... my God ...*

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"Ah, Dr. St. Vincent."

The soft, foreign voice sounds to Britt as if it's drifting into his ears from a source a million miles away. Britt's head is still swimming and he doesn't want to open his eyes because they hurt so badly. He lies unmoving for a moment as his conscious self steadies itself amid the mental swirl and makes some preliminary determinations about his surroundings and conditions. The cool, unfettered feel all over his body tells him that he is naked; the palms of his hands, which are bound at the wrists beneath his back, tell him that he is lying on hard dirt. His mind is steadier now, and the pain in his head, although still strong, is rapidly being displaced by normal mental activity that has begun again.

Britt's eyes flutter open.

The scene above him spins slowly for several seconds before settling into clear perspective.

"Who are—" Britt attempts to sit up as he asks the question, but his move immediately triggers one of the naked, blonde-haired white women to place her foot firmly on his chest, pinning him to the dirt floor of this large grass hut. Looking up her beautiful, bare leg and beyond her perfect pink-nippled breasts, Britt focuses on the fierceness in her blue eyes.

Is this really one of the Amazons of legend? Britt asks himself as his eyes search for a clue that will

tell him this is some kind of deception. The young woman's arms and thighs are slender and

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feminine, but superbly firm, indicating that the tone of her muscles is high and strong. Britt turns his head slightly and glances at the three other women standing around him where he lies in the center of this hut. Each woman is an almost exact duplicate of the others. *Legs, hips, buttocks and breasts*, Britt notes, *even the details of their facial bones are all the same, as if they had all come from some kind of mold*. Britt's brain knows, however, based on its past experience with the cyborgs and similar creations in the military labs, that these women are real flesh and blood. *Christ ... they're even all natural blonds*, he thinks with ironic humor as he notes the exactness of the match between the smooth, long locks which tumble down around their beautiful faces and the wirey, gold curls of pubic hair between each pair of luscious thighs.

"Yes, Mr. St. Vincent," that voice says again, "these *are* the Amazons of legend. And they are very *real* women ... very superior women in every way to any females you have ever known. Let him sit up," the voice commands.

The woman warrior removes her foot from Britt's chest. His hard stomach muscles tighten as he rises to a sitting position. Now he can see the source of the soft, Asian accented voice. *He must be Dr. Sin*.

A thin eyebrow arches swiftly over the slanted left eye of the Oriental person who sits on a throne-like chair about ten feet from Britt. "So, you know of me, my friend?"

Instantly Britt realizes that the electrochemical waves which are generated by his and every human brain are somehow being picked up by this strange figure. With a conscious protective effort, Britt's dis-ciplined upper level of conscious self squeezes all thinking related to this situation and his own true past down into the lower-output, subconscious circuitry of the brain.

The Asian nods. "Do not struggle so, young man, to hide from me what I want to know. You—

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and your friend will reveal all to me soon enough. I already know enough to draw needed conclusions."

My friend? Britt puzzles deep in the protective shelter of his near-subconscious brain. *Did they capture Karl, too, before he made it back to the-city?*

"Very good, Mr. St. Vincent—or, more properly—Dr. St. Vincent," the scientist smiles. "You realize, of course, that even your awareness of the need to block my extrasensory probing is itself another fact that points to your being part of the CIA's psychic effort here in Brasilia."

Britt's face gives no indication of emotion. *So, he thinks I'm part of some CIA effort ... well, good....*

"This device," Dr. Sin says with a sweep of his robed arm toward Britt's communication equipment which sits on a small bamboo table in the corner of the hut, "is evidence enough of your CIA role. You will, of course, explain to me how it operates." Sin again slowly folds his arms beneath the long, black silk sleeves of his flowing robe. "I must congratulate you, however, Dr. St. Vincent. Until last night, we had not suspected you of being part of the Pen-tagon-CIA psychic program. Your split with that program after the death of your fiancée in the Harry Hammond Labs in Washington seemed quite genuine. And we have paid little attention to the fact that you have been at several spots around the world where strategic psychic field operations have been thwarted. Your cover identity as a racing driver worked well, providing you with a most functional and legitimate reason to travel the world."

"Where's my friend?" Britt asks sullenly.

Dr. Sin nods to one of the women, who in turn nods to someone outside, the opened door of the hut.

Another naked man, about Britt's age and size, is shoved, staggering, through the doorway. His hands, too, are bound behind his back. His head is bowed and he seems unsteady, as if drugged.

Britt exercises strong control over his mind and

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body, careful not to display any emotion or reveal any thought. *Good, it's not Karl ... must be a CIA, operative. I wonder what the CIA 'has going on down here.*

"Take him away," commands Sin in his soft, fem-inine tone. The unlucky agent is roughly pushed outside again and out of sight. Shi's eyes slowly re-turn to Britt. "He does not know you, Dr. St. Vincent. Perhaps you are far higher up in their organization than I suspected. Good"—he nods with a thin smile on his lips—"we will know soon enough all we want to know, but for now," says Sin, rising from his regal chair, "I will show you something of our life here. As a scientist yourself, you should find this most interesting."

Britt squints at first as he steps from the darker interior of Sin's hut out into the bright light of the mid-morning sun. Transparent yellow shafts of sun-light filter down through the high canopy of hundred-foot *mapacu* trees which hide this camp from aerial discovery. The green jungle plants crowd to the very edge of the circular-shaped village.

Sin explains as they walk slowly: "You notice that this village is laid out like the design of a wheel. The huts are situated on the 'rim,' facing inward. A path from each hut runs toward the central clearing, like spokes running from rim to hub."

Britt's eyes do not give away the intensity with which he is observing and absorbing all the details around him. Few of the white warrior women can be seen at this time of the morning. Mostly brown-skinned naked children squeal and shout as they run and play; they are all girls.

The girls play male games of mock battle with small spears and clubs. About one in five of "the fe-male children is white-skinned and blonde.

Sin notes Britt's interest. "The genes which cause the whiteness of the skin, blonde hair and other physical characteristics are recessive. Only about twenty percent of the female children born here possess the physical and psychic characteristics of the true Amazon."

A brown-skinned boy of about ten years of age appears from out of the jungle. He is carrying in each hand a woven hemp sack filled with heavy,

ripe melons. A group of girls nearby see him and immediately surround him. They dance around him, shouting and singing taunts as he struggles with his heavy load. Suddenly one of the girls uses her spear as a whip and slaps him across his bare buttocks with such force that the blow instantly raises red welts. He cries in pain and staggers, dropping one of the yellow melons onto the ground, where it breaks and 'spills its juicy pink pulp. The lad stops and stands, cringing, crying loudly as large tears roll down his cheeks. His submissiveness seems to trigger instant ferocity in the white female child: she viciously kicks the boy in his testicles. Stunned, he crumples to his knees, allowing the melons to fall and roll in all directions.

At this moment, a male in his mid-thirties appears in the doorway of a nearby hut and runs toward the scene. The man is fair-skinned, almost white. The children step back as the man consoles the small boy, but the girls keep up their taunting until the man lashes out with a slap aimed at the closest of the girls. Even as his hand flashes through the air, an Amazon materializes from the shadows inside the hut. In a flash she scoops up a small section of twine near her feet, yanking the thin cord suddenly taut so that it snaps up from the ground, tossing a line of dust into the air.

"Aughh!" cries the man, stopping his slap in mid-air and painfully reaching for his groin where the twine is tied tightly around his scrotum.

Sin smiles.

"You see, Dr. St. Vincent, this is a reversed world here. *Women* rule this remote section of the Mato Grosso Plateau. Someday soon, however, we will rule all of Brazil."

We? Britt's mind records, puzzled at the use of that pronoun by this male scientist.

"Right now," Sin continues as he and Britt resume their walk around the circular path that passes in front of each hut, "most of the worker

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males are out in the fields weeding the crops. The breeders, like the one you saw back there, are in the huts preparing breakfast for their mates . . . and sat-isfying them in whatever other ways they demand."

As they walk, Britt has been watching the huts. An elegant, naked Amazon stands in the doorway of the one they are passing. She stares sullenly at Britt, her eyes sizing up his exposed physical attributes as he walks with his hands bound behind him. "Tell me," Britt says. "What is the difference between a 'worker' and a 'breeder'?"

Sin fastidiously flicks a small winged insect off his black silk sleeve. Britt, too, is registering annoyance at the insects that have landed on his naked body and about which he can do nothing. Several stinging flies are clinging to Ms swinging penis. Sin grins as he notices them. He reaches down and slowly brushes them away with his right hand. Britt feels instant re-pulsion at the touch, but is also puzzled at the unexpected softness of Sin's palm.

" 'Breeders,' Dr. St. Vincent, are selected males who display the desired characteristics, such as fair skin, which indicates the presence of the recessive genes. 'Workers' are males who are judged not to be of breeding quality and have been castrated. That boy you saw back there, for instance, has not exhibited the aggressive tendencies that the Amazons prize so highly. He is being treated for menial tasks, such as gathering fruit—tasks which male-dominated cultures relegate to women. On his thirteenth birthday, after his testicles have put enough male hormones into his body to assure that he will have the right amount of male strength to perform hard work, he, and other boys his age, will be castrated in a fascinating ritual."

"I'll bet it's fascinating," Britt observes dryly. "Can't wait to see one."

Sin's yellow teeth flashed between his thin lips as he smiles and says, "Oh, you *will*, my friend, you will."

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The impact of that statement brings Britt's mind out of the last vestige of stupor that has clouded it since last night. *Damn! I've got to come up with some kind of escape plan, but it has to be timed right. Too many of these Amazons around to risk an escape that is not timed right...*

"Ah, Doctor," Sin sighs and clasps his hands behind his back as he and Britt continue around the circle. "Do not even *think* about escape. The jungles here are not friendly to humans of any kind, but are especially deadly to those who do not know it at all. The Amazons would recapture you before you got a hundred yards."

Britt realizes instantly that he has let his mental guard down and that the obviously psychic Dr. Sin has received his thoughts again. Britt now becomes completely on guard. He forces down all thoughts of his colleagues, of Mero, and of escape deep into his lowest, most remote levels of consciousness where a plan can be processed safe from Sin's psychic probes.

"Your fate need not be so bad if you cooperate. As you well know, from the way I've been addressing you as 'Doctor,' I know a great deal about you. Our intelligence operatives, who penetrated the Pentagon psychic research organization at the Harry Hammond Labs when you were there, sent us profiles on everyone in the program. Yours was one of the more interesting, as I recall. You returned from Vietnam with some rudimentary psychic powers that appeared after you received a headwound."

Sin falls silent as they walk for several steps. Now he adds: "If you cooperate and tell me all that you know about your CIA operations down here, I will advise the Amazons of the psychic powers that you once displayed. That information, plus the fact that you have the desired white skin, should assure that you are not castrated. You would become a breeder and would have only light housework to do while

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being made love to by these, the most beautiful women in the world."

"Yeah"—Britt nods with disdain—"and walk around with a leash around my balls, to be yanked into line whenever I do something the women don't like. Some prospect."

Sin arches an eyebrow. "Male-dominated cultures have similar strings on their women." He shrugs. "You needn't concern yourself that your cooperation in telling me of your agency's plans will be the cause of any grief. You see, Furtado's Senate supporters, whom we have kidnapped over the past few weeks, were 'persuaded' to reveal most of the program which your government and the oil and energy companies are plotting. We know that Furtado is a CIA puppet, elected because of the millions of dollars the CIA poured in here to buy the votes of the poor; the same plan that the CIA persuaded Eisenhower to follow in establishing the Diem regime in South Vietnam during the late Fifties so that the oil companies could exploit the petroleum that lay in the coastal waters off South Vietnam." Sin smiles wryly and remarks, "Why, when I read in your Congressional Record back then that a congressman from Tennessee said that American soldiers were 'dying in Vietnam to pacify that region in order that our U.S. oil companies can reap the billions of dollars that are projected to result from the exploitation in that area of what could be the greatest oil field of all,' I thought that the American people would rise in revolt. Instead, the war dragged on for years until our allies in North Vietnam gained victory."

"We know that the CIA game plan here is only slightly different. We know that the oil companies want the vast petroleum deposits beneath our feet in this very jungle. We know, too, that you and your fellow agents are here to help finance and lead 'extremist' groups in 'overthrow' attempts on the 'democratically elected' Furtado government."

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is intended to become the Vietnam of South America. Passionate appeals for aid will be made to the U.S. by Furtado. Equally passionate speeches will be made by U.S. politicians, telling your people that they have a 'moral' obligation to come to the aid of this 'democracy.'"

Sin stops and looks directly into Britt's eyes. "It won't work this time, St. Vincent. The Far Eastern Axis wants this nation, too, as a foothold in this hemisphere. And we have a more effective plan to accomplish our objectives. But we need to know the exact CIA time schedule. Your comrade, whom we also captured

last night, does not seem to have been privileged to that information. But I'm certain *you* have. If you simply confirm for me the timetable for the CIA program, not only will you be saving at least your own masculinity, but you will also be pre-venting the useless deaths of thousands of lives of U.S. soldiers. Take your time to make up your mind ... the next ritual castrations do not take place until tonight."

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"You seem hesitant, Dr. St. Vincent," says Sin. "Perhaps if I share some of *my* secrets with you, you will reciprocate." Without another word Sin suddenly slips open the front of his robe. The pallor of his naked body is starkly outlined against the black silk garment that he holds wide open.

"Jesus," breathes Britt aloud while his startled consciousness slips for an instant into unguarded thought. *The guy's a hermaphrodite! No wonder he used "we" when talking about the Amazons,*

Sin plants his hands on his hips, while his robe is held back and open by his feminine forearms. "Cor-rect, Doctor. I am a hermaphrodite, but not by an accident of nature."

Britt is looking at Sin's body. The skin is hairless and very smooth. His hips are rounded like a woman's and his thighs flow gently, unmistakably feminine, although with a certain masculine firmness. Between Sin's thighs are the folds of 'a well-formed, tight vagina.

"Even my breasts, dear Britt, though not pendulous enough for *Playboy*, are functional, and can suckle life into human babies."

"Uh!" Britt is suddenly staggered by a mighty blow across his back and sags to his knees in the dust, Ms mouth momentarily pressing against Sin's soft, smooth groin. Pain radiates from a stinging welt across Britt's shoulder blades as he slumps back onto Ms calves. He sits slightly dazed and

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looking up past the mutant lips in Sin's groin to those which smile evilly on the creature's face.

"You are now in the proper pose that a male must assume in front of an Amazon, Dr. St. Vincent. Txuka there behind you has helped you learn this lesson."

Slowly Britt turns his head and sees an incredibly beautiful woman standing close beside him. Her lovely face wears a hard expression; in her right hand she holds a thick wooden rod of about a yard in length which at one end is carved to resemble the head of an erect penis. It is worn shiny and smooth.

"Txuka is chieftess of the tribe," Sin explains, "although she and the others now accept me as their overall leader. You see, Doctor, I am not an accident of nature. I am the result of thousands of years of selective breeding by genetic scientists. My body incorporates the qualities which these Amazons idolize: masculine strength and feminine physique.

"My breeding has also resulted in my having the power of extrasensory perception—another attribute which these remarkable women both possess themselves and idolize." Sin's head suddenly tosses back and a laugh erupts from the open mouth: "Ha! Ha! Margaret Mead would have loved to see these magnificent women!" Sin's eyes again descend on Britt. "You know, of course, St. Vincent, do you not, of the great woman anthropologist Margaret Mead and her work with primitive peoples around the world?"

Although the pain from the blow still throbs through Britt's brain, he nods his head. "Yes. Yes, I know, too, of her long-time membership in the American Society for Psychical Research."

Sin is exultant. "Correct! Correct! And do you know of how it was shown that, even today, primitive humans like the aboriginal tribes of the Australian Outback rely on extrasensory perception to hunt and survive?"

"I know it well, Dr. Sin," says Britt as he tries to

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rise. A firm touch of the phallic rod on his head tells him to stay down. He glances at the stern beauty of the chieftess as he says to Sin, "The accepted theory among you modern anthropologists is that psychic powers—especially extrasensory perception and psychokinetic ability—are natural survival powers in-born in all humans from the beginning of our species. The powers have atrophied as civilization developed because the pressures of rigid societies and the tools of technologies have either frowned upon

or replaced the use of these talents."

"Yes," agrees Sin, "the powers are still there, buried beneath thousands of years of learned inhibitions. They lie deep in our primitive subconscious minds just waiting to be released by an accident of birth or an accident such as your war wound. It is too bad that with the healing of your wound, your powers seem to have faded again, St. Vincent. Perhaps if they had not, you would not be here."

Britt guards his thoughts carefully to avoid re-vealing his psychic secret now. He asks a question to distract Sin from pursuing the subject of psychic powers. "If you are so certain that I cannot escape here, then tell me what *your* plans are. How do you and this small group of women intend to successfully offset the actions of the entire Brazilian military and our CIA?"

Sin reflects for several seconds. "Yes ... yes, there is no reason why you cannot know." He pauses and thinks again, and while doing so he absently moves his right hand from his hip and down to his feminine groin where his delicate index finger slips into the fleshy folds of his incongruous organ and slowly massages the inner softness there.

"These magnificent women have retained not only their primitive culture by being so long isolated; they have also retained the primitive psychic powers which helped them survive the attacks of male-dominated tribes in these remote jungles. Those powers are now being used during forays into Brasilia to

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seduce the Senate supporters of Furtado and bring them here to meet their end. Especially now, these Amazons blend easily with the naked debauchery flowing through the streets. By preying on the population's fear of black *macumba* magic, we can make the people believe that Tapajos has cursed Furtado for killing him. We can incite a popular revolution of such scope that even the United States cannot contain it. Remember that this nation is several times the size of the entire United States ... much larger than little Vietnam."

Sin ceases his self-manipulation and slips his right hand into the pocket of his flowing robe. He withdraws a loop of silky twine like the string which Britt had seen binding the scrotum of the adult male back at the hut where the children's fight had occurred. "This unique twine," says Sin with a sinister grin, "is woven from a flaxen water reed that grows in the nearby swamps. The string is very, very much like steel wire: it will cut like a razor if you pull too hard against it."

Sin tosses the twine to the waiting Amazon. Deftly, she catches it and squats down beside Britt.

Britt flinches as she seizes his scrotum and binds the twine tightly around it above his testicles. Expertly, she ties a slipknot with a small knot above it that prevents the loop around Britt's scrotum from loosening, but which permits the cutting twine to tighten instantly if he should pull against this primitive leash.

The woman stands and plays out a length of the twine. She holds the end firmly and moderately tight. Britt can feel the threatening pressure.

"You had better stand and go with Txuka, Dr. St. Vincent, or you might not have to wait till the ceremony tonight to make up your mind about whether or not you will risk castration."

Slowly Britt rises to his feet.

Sin nods toward the woman who holds the deadly leash. "Txuka is also the one who will do the honors

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tonight if you decide not to cooperate. The ceremony should be impressive ... the rod she holds in her hand will be used to deflower the young female virgins so that no male can ever have that pleasure. After that, you and your fellow agent will become the focus of Txuka's attention."

Suddenly Britt experiences a sharp stab of pain that rockets like an electric shock from his groin to his throat!

Sin smiles as Britt grimaces. "Txuka's tug on your leash, St. Vincent, indicates her impatience to try you. Go with her now, and I warn you: satisfy her demands, or ... it only takes a single tug on that line."

Britt glares at Sin, but the firm pull on the line forces him to turn and follow Txuka. The naked Amazon chieftess is leading him toward the door of her thatch hut. The beautifully shaped firm buttocks move smoothly with her every step, but Britt's eyes are ignoring her beauty. His attention is focused on what he can see dimly through the door of the dark hut ahead: a soft, woven sleeping mat waiting on the floor.

"I was ordered here by Dr. Webster just as soon as he decoded your message that Britt was missing," Kelly explains. She is standing, but leaning back against the low concrete pit wall which pushes up-ward on her round backside so that even more of her tender tanned bottom bulges above the waistband of her white, tight, low-cut hip-hugger slacks. The sight delights the Brazilian males who are strolling through the area with colorful paper pit passes flut-tering from strings attached to their shirt buttons.

"Watching the pit bunnies is as much sport as watching the action on the track," comments John to Kelly as he nods toward a group of young men who have stopped by the chain link fence that sep-arates the observer area from the working pits.

"At least"—she smiles at him—"we know that my cover as a groupie is a valid one."

"At *least*," John agrees, unable himself to resist a quick glance at the firm mounds of Kelly's ample breasts which are exposed by her skimpy blue halter top.

Greg Leland, Dr. Webster's son and the main driver for this cover team, has just been buckled into his machine by Karl.

Bb-bb-BRAM—BRAM—BRAM! The racer's engine fires to life. Karl steps back and waits while Greg checks the gauges. The young man turns and signals thumbs-up as the car begins to roll down the pit apron and toward the entry onto the track.

Karl turns and walks toward Kelly and John. The 46

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towering mechanic wipes grease from Ms hands with a stained red shop towel. "Greg seems assured of fourth place on the grid for the race," the German says in heavily accented English.

"Yes," says John, "I don't think any of the re-maining qualifiers are going to beat his lap time." John stoops and picks up his toolbox. "I think we can go now."

Kelly rises from the wall. She cocks her head, a puzzled expression on her face. "Don't you have to stay here in the pits in case something goes wrong with Greg's car?"

"Ah, women." John smiles and looks at Karl, wearing a mock mask of tolerant amusement. "No, Kelly," he explains as he turns to her again, "his car is set up just the way we want it for race day. He's only going to drive some slow laps now to scrub the newness off the tires so they hold better in the early laps of the race. He can go faster right away on race day while others are still waiting for their tires to get the slickness worn off. Having the time to do this is one advantage of getting a good starting spot early in the practice sessions."

Kelly isn't certain that the condescending tone of John's voice applies to her knowledge of racing only. "You're probably wondering," she offers, "why Dr. Webster sent the newest member of his Mero staff—and a *woman* besides—to assist on this assignment."

John rolls his eyes. "C'mon, Kelly ... *you* put the emphasis just now on the *woman* aspect." He turns and walks ahead of her toward the exit.

Karl hesitates in deference to Kelly. She smiles and nods as she walks past him to follow the irri-tated physicist to the parking area where their rented Ford Taunus waits.

With several quick steps, Kelly catches up to John. She paces him now along the gravel-covered asphalt walkway.

"You're going to be great in the jungle," remarks

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John, noticing how Kelly walks carefully to prevent the small stones from being picked up into her deli-cate sandals.

Kelly ignores the remark and digs into her large canvas purse. "Have you read this report?" She holds out a bound booklet of papers toward John.

He's walking fast, faster than Kelly would like to on this gravel. He glances at the report. "No ... no I haven't." His eyes flick up to hers and show a spark of anger, an emotion which John is himself surprised to feel. Although one of the world's top physicists, he has never felt comfortable around women. His eyes search for their small gray car among the mass of irregularly parked machines that gleam in the searing sun out here in the huge dirt field which has been cleared for parking. "Miss Dale—or 'Ms,' whatever you want—do you know how much work is involved in keeping this field op-eration functioning while we're on

assignment? I simply don't have time to read every single report that comes out of headquarters."

Kelly rolls the report tightly and stuffs it back into her bag. "*This* one you should have read."

"So tell me about it," snaps John. Perspiration beads on his forehead and is beginning to dampen his shirt in the small of his back as the cosmic rays from earth's life-giving star rain down from today's crystal, cloudless sky.

"You recall," begins Kelly, "that March 31, 1974, article in the *Los Angeles Times* that you told me to read after your last assignment at the Stone-henge ruins in England?" She watches John nod, although he neither looks at her nor speaks. "Well," she continues, "I made a copy of it at the London Library before I flew to California. By the time I landed there, I had a brainstorm of an idea about researching the 'emotional brain' that was discussed in the *Times* article."

"The 'emotional brain'?" asks Karl. "I'm sorry, but I'm not certain that I remember what that is."

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Kelly tosses Mm a quick smiling glance. "Karl, the 'emotional brain' is at the top of the brain stem in the lower back part of the skull. It includes the hypothalamus and the pituitary gland. This is the part of the human brain where man's primordial an-imal-like lower brain stem and nervous system inter-face with his more recently evolved and more civ-ilized cerebrum and cerebellum."

"There's the car," John interrupts.

Kelly's eyes look in the direction toward which he points. "Does it have air conditioning?"

"No, and neither does the jungle, ma'am," answers John. He shakes his head slightly and reaches into his pocket for the keys. "Ow! Wow! Those door handles are hot!" he exclaims and blows on the fin-gertips of Ms right hand with which he had grabbed the chrome handle. "Karl ... I'll open the doors. You roll down the windows and let the interior cool off while I get Kelly a towel to sit on."

"Don't bother yourself for me," comments Kelly.

John is already hidden behind the opening trunk lid, but says, anyway, "Look, Kelly, if you sit down on those seats in that skimpy outfit you have on, you'll become part of the vinyl. Here," he says and tosses her a grimy towel. He slams the trunk lid shut.

Kelly flinches and catches the towel at arm's length. Karl, who has already squeezed his tall frame into the small back seat, helps her spread the cloth over the hot vinyl bucket seat in front. "Please go on," he requests as she pulls the door shut.

Kelly half turns in her seat, adjusting the towel and looking at John as he jabs the key into the igni-tion. "You see, Karl, deep in this 'emotional brain' are the hormone-producing primitive glands, like the pituitary, that manufacture the chemical hormones which turn on and turn off our base human emo-tions, such as sex and aggression."

Karl is nodding, indicating that he recalls the briefing which occurred just before the Stonehenge

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encounter. "Yes," he says, "now I remember. That's the reason for the appearance of Britt's psychic powers only at times when he is threatened with some grave danger. The primitive hormones associ-ated with self-preservation that are triggered under such circumstances are not checked by his civilized brain, because some of the nerve connections that control the emotional section of his brain were dam-aged by the headwound he received in Vietnam."

"Right," Kelly answers while she digs into her purse. "And do you recall, too, the hormone pills which Dr. Webster sent to Britt, to test the theory that psychic powers are triggered by hormone out-puts of the emotional brain?"

"Ja," Karl affirms solemnly. He remembers well. He remembers the incredible fury that boiled from Britt's eyes and the wake of destruction and death which that primitive power blasted through the buildings and bodies of the psychic military team that had plotted to kill Britt during his investigation of the Stonehenge haunting. Karl had hoped that the Mero experiments with hormone generation of psy- chic powers had ended when they closed the file on Stonehenge and the secret of "The Door."

John glances at the small clear plastic vial of white pills which Kelly now brings out of her purse. His face reflects his displeasure. "It was my recom-mendation that the work with hormones be put on a back burner," he snaps. "Doesn't anyone back there listen to me anymore?" John looks forward again and downshifts, slowing the car as they encounter traffic now while entering the city. The sun is set-ting, casting a final golden glow on the tall buildings. "Britt's power was uncontrollable . . . and we still don't know what effect such massive doses of hor-mones have on the human body."

"Right," Kelly agrees. "But that's where I come in." She notices John's hand tighten on the thin black steering wheel. "John, it was / who suggested that your recommendation about the hormone work

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be Ignored." *She* pauses. "I learned back there at Stonehenge just what you, Karl, Greg and Britt are fighting against. I owe my life to you ... and I made up my mind while on my way to Mero Institute that since the work there had given me the rest of my life, I could reciprocate by allowing myself to be the guinea pig to test the effects and control problems of these hormone pills."

John seems to relax slightly. He sighs. "Kelly, please excuse my attitude. I appreciate what you're doing for us. But right at the moment, I'm very concerned about Britt. This Mardi Gras madness down here is getting to me. And Karl says that those vague perceptions of hostility which seem to surround us here are growing slightly stronger each day,"

Kelly purses her lips and thinks a moment, absently watching ahead as John deftly threads the car through the crowded streets of the teeming city. "Do you suppose that those perceptions could be caused by the psychological set of the people during this Mardi Gras season? I mean, this is considered to be the time of year to let loose one's inhibitions ... so maybe Karl is perceiving merely the population's normal animal hostility which is usually suppressed deep in the emotional brain."

"*Nein*," says Karl quietly but firmly. "I have always had the ability to know whether the source of my perceptions are human or inanimate objects." He looks down at the large, gnarled knuckles of his hands folded in his lap. "But these perceptions I feel here—they seem *not* to be either."

Kelly looks up at Karl's head-bowed reflection in the rearview mirror. "But what else is there?"

John shrugs. "It's a puzzle all right." He slows the car almost to a stop and begins a right turn. He pulls the switch to turn on the headlights and begins inching the Taunus through a steady stream of early evening strollers who are crossing the street. "The central plaza is just ahead. The bloodstain from the

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last senator who was castrated is still on the stones. I hope you can get some sort of perception from it that will give us a clue about what happened to Britt." The white plastic lid of the bottle pops softly as Kelly pries it off. She shakes two of the small flat pills into her palm. "Two milligrams should put my perception a couple of notches above Karl's. Let's see what I can receive."

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"Oh, my God!"

"Kelly! What is it?" John asks quickly. His hand flashes out for her elbow, steadying her after her sudden stumble. Few of the passersby hurrying home to prepare for tonight's revelry pay any attention to the Mero group on the plaza.

Kelly's fingers knead hard at the skin of her forehead. "My God! Now I know what Karl was trying to explain!" She shakes her head and withdraws her elbow from John's grip. "Thanks, John. I'm all right now." She stands steady. Her alert eyes scan the perimeters of the plaza. "It's incredible! I can hear a million and more angry 'voices' shouting hate at us ... yet I know that they're not 'voices,' not even human."

"Hate? At us?" John asks. "Do you mean that someone knows our purpose here and wants to eliminate us?"

Kelly shakes her head strongly. "No, not that at all. Not just us ... not just this Mero team. Something out there." She nods toward the low dark hills just beyond this gleaming city of man. There the black silhouette of the jungle trees are fading into the deep purple of this dying day. "Something in that jungle is projecting terrible hostility toward every human being in this city."

Karl's eyes narrow as he, too, looks toward the distant domain of that green plant world.

John scratches his beard. "But can't you recognize just what the source of the projection is?"

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"No," Kelly replies softly. She continues to stare hypnotically toward the mysterious primeval forest. "There are so many voices ... so many... ."

"Kelly," John says sharply to interrupt her seeming reverie. "The bloodstain is just a few yards farther toward the center of the plaza. Let's see if you can get a clue there about Britt. If that Senator was killed by the same people who might have Britt, perhaps the senator's spirit still lingers and can be contacted."

With John leading, the three investigators move quickly to the spot.

"Damn! Look at that," whispers John. He squats down beside the bloodstain on one of the huge white stone slabs with which this former jungle clearing has been paved. Slowly, he extends his hand toward the spot and gingerly touches the stain. Now John lifts and turns his hand over so that the others can see his fingertips. "It's still sticky."

Kelly and Karl squat down beside John. Their foreheads creased in indication of the incomprehension racing through their minds.

Kelly flicks her eyes to John. "This has been here since yesterday morning, hasn't it?"

John nods affirmation.

"Incredible," she says as she looks again at the stain on the pavement. Dozens of footsteps made both

by shoes and bare feet lead away in all directions from the dark red stain where last night's mob unknowingly danced on the blood of the murdered man.

"It's impossible," John says, stating what they each know well, "for blood to stay fluid this long in the open."

Kelly's eyes suddenly focus on a small plant which is poking through a tiny crack in the massive, bloodstained stone. Her hand slowly reaches out toward the thin, green shoot; several dark drops of blood have fallen on the small leaves. Kelly's fingers stop only a fraction of an inch short of touching the

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tip of the plant, John and Karl watch closely, but are puzzled.

"Karl," whispers Kelly, "Karl, I think this is the source of what we have been hearing."

Karl's face reflects his puzzlement. He glances at John. Kelly continues to stare at the tiny shoot. Her hand still hovers above it, almost touching. "Yes," she breathes. "Yes . . ."

John is impatient. Small groups of revelers in scanty costumes are already beginning to drift in from the many streets and walkways that lead to this huge plaza. "Yes—what?" he insists.

Kelly withdraws her hand. She looks into John's eyes, and now to Karl.

"Are either of you familiar with the work of Cleve Backster?"

John nods. "Yes, of course, he's the New York polygraph expert who discovered that plants have polygraph reaction patterns similar to human patterns." He pauses and arches a skeptical eyebrow. "Are you trying to tell us this plant is 'communicat-ing' something to you?"

The set of Kelly's lovely mouth shows her annoyance with John's skepticism. "You might be surprised, John, when you next get back to headquarters, to find that Dr. Webster is *personally* heading a new task force in researching plant intelligence and psychic power. He has been telling everyone at Mero to be certain to read John Whitman's new book, *The Psychic Power of Plants*, and to be prepared to offer whatever input they can from their own research assignments." Kelly tosses a quick glance at the blood-marked plant. "I'm almost certain there's some kind of emanation coming at us right now from that infant plant."

Karl looks at the plant, then to Kelly, and comments: "Didn't Charles Darwin say that the root tip of a plant functioned in the same manner as the 'primitive brain' that is found in lower animals?"

"Right, Karl," Kelly affirms quickly. "Darwin

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pointed out that plants move with a definite purpose. He attributed their ability to seek out water and nourishment over large distances to a 'sixth sense.' One of the things that has spurred Dr. Webster to launch Mero's plant research effort is the work that has been done in the Los Angeles Mind Research Foundation. Dr. Willard Mann heads that program, and the owner of McGreggar Oil Company funds it."

Suddenly John's right hand darts out, swiftly seizing the tender shoot and pulling it from the crack. "There," he says, tossing the hapless plant away into the gathering gloom of night. "Enough of this! Let's get to focusing on this stain for a clue."

Kelly shudders, her body shaking as if suddenly chilled. "John," she says softly, "don't you know that you've just killed a *living* thing?"

John sighs. He seems tired. "Yes," he acknowledges in mild tones. "I do know. But don't you also know that we are trying to save a human life—*Britt's* life?"

Kelly's eyelids flutter. Her gaze shifts from John's eyes down to the bloodstain.

The last trace of evening glow has just faded. The sky now is black. As if on that signal, a huge surge of nearly naked men and women wearing fantastic feathered headdresses swarm in from the surrounding streets. Their brown bodies glisten with perspiration worked up from dancing to the throbbing samba beat that follows them into the plaza. The frantic, pounding beat, the hissing cymbals and the singing and shouting of the crowds roll through the air and echo everywhere. The plaza is filling rapidly.

"OK, Kelly," John urges. "Before this mob gets too bad, try concentrating on the bloodstain."

Kelly nods. She inhales . . . and now she slowly exhales while intensely focusing on the dark blood. Gradually, her conscious, cerebral self relinquishes control to the hormone-motivated primordial sub-

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conscious deep in her human intellect. She stares without blinking for several minutes until she is jostled out of her concentration by a drunken dancer who nearly falls on her.

"The man must not have actually been killed on this spot, because I can't detect any residual spirit activity from his life energy, as there would be if he were killed right here."

Karl's gaunt face reflects his consternation. "But now we have absolutely no clue about Britt."

"Wait!" John says suddenly.

A glazed look again clouds Kelly's eyes. She stands swiftly. John and Karl rise, too. Her eyes are rapidly scanning

the rolling sea of boisterous hu-manity which is ebbing and flowing around them as tonight's Mardi Gras madness builds.

"John," she says slowly, "I see this picture: a jungle village . . . huts . . . someone dressed in black . . . a huge fire . . . bamboo altar . . . young girls..."

Kelly's gaze instantly freezes, like a computerized searchlight locking onto a target.

"What is it, Kelly?" John asks quickly. "What do you see?" He and Karl turn to look in the direction of her line of sight. Among the bobbing mob of hu-man heads they catch a fleeting glimpse of flowing blonde hair.

"Is tha— Kelly!" John looks around quickly. "Karl, did you see which way Kelly went?"

"*Gott in Himmel!*" the giant German exclaims. "I didn't see her leave!" Using all his great height, Karl strains to spot Kelly in this incredible crowd.

"I can't locate her, John," he says as the mob surges closer, tighter around them like a living ava-lanche.

Bare, brown dancing feet slap and slip in the slick bloodstain and it disappears from view, lost in the flood of bodies whose flow now carries the strug-gling Mero men away in its irresistible tow.

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The bonfire's flames dance like spirit snakes and cast hellish highlights on the huts around the perim-eter of this circular village. Above, in the blackness of the night, firelit crowns of giant *mapacu* trees tower like tall dinosaurs over this enclave that hu-mans have carved out of nature's jungle.

Britt's wrists throb with pain from the bindings which imprison his hands behind his back. But the pain is being noted only by the monitor circuits of his brain. His primary conscious circuits are focused on the scene occurring out in the clearing that con-stitutes the center hub of this Amazon village. Nar-row trails lead from each hut toward the central hub, but the paths which cut the north-south diame-ter of the village circle are much wider and link in a straight line Dr. Sin's hut here on the south rim of the village 'with that of the queen Txuka to whom Britt had been a sexual servant all this day. A bam-boo platform, an altar, has been constructed in the center of the dusty clearing. Britt is standing in the doorway of Sin's hut. The fire is hidden behind the altar, but illuminates it like a living skeleton. The al-tar is a simple platform; bamboo ladder rungs lead up each side, and in the center is a small chairlike structure which resembles a reclining patio lounge.

The smoke from the fire roils up into the night sky ... the pounding of the drums grows louder ... small groups of Amazons move in rhythmic, cere-monial manner, chanting, their oiled bare bodies re-flecting the flames, and their bountiful breasts hang-
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ing down, swaying as the women stoop while they carpet the grassless ground in front of the altar with smooth, wide banana leaves. Large clay pots of cocoa oil are also placed at precise intervals on the leaf-covered area.

Suddenly Britt flinches at the caress of a soft hand on his naked buttock.

"Soon, my friend," Sin says, "you will see what no male has ever seen—the ritual indoctrination of adolescent virgins into Amazon adulthood." The strange hermaphrodite stands just behind and beside Britt, and as he speaks, his right hand slides across Britt's hip and into Britt's groin where Ms fingers wrap around Britt's testicles.

Britt jerks away from the touch. Veins stand out angrily on his forehead and his strong, hard pectoral muscles striate as they strain to break the tough vines which bind his wrists.

Sin sneers. "Ironic, is it not," he hisses, "how you men despise such fondling, yet expect a woman to enjoy *your* touch. Tell me," he taunts, "how did you like being with Txuka today? She demands that the men she has perform well for her pleasure. Since you still have your 'balls,' I assume you did what she wanted."

Got to cool it ... got to cool it, Britt tells himself in guarded thoughts. *If help doesn't arrive soon, I know I'm going to end up being the feature attrac-tion of tonight's ceremony,... John and Karl should be out looking for me. .., I hope that Karl's own psychic talents are enough to locate me. If not, 'maybe I can continue to stall for time by dribbling out information little by little.*

Dr. Sin folds his arms and they disappear into the flowing back silk of Ms robe. "So, Dr. St. Vincent," the creature says and steps farther back into the dimly lit interior of his hut. "You have told me how you supposedly came to split with the Pentagon psy-chic research program and linked up with this place

called Mero Institute." He pauses. "Mero," he re-peats, "that is an ancient word for 'man,' is it not?"

Britt's eyes are baleful. He nods just once.

"And," Sin continues, "this Mero Institute is, you say, dedicated to thwarting the psychic population control programs of the Pentagon and their counter-parts in other nations."

Sin slowly turns toward the bamboo table on which rests the communication equipment that was taken from Britt's shoulder pack when he was cap-tured. The device, as Mero designers intended, resembles a double-screened oscilloscope of the type used for tuning racing engine ignition systems. It is about the size of a small tape recorder that can handle seven-inch reels, but in place of tape reels, there are two green glass screens side by side. Two yard-long wires, one red and one black, sprout from the left side of the unit. Flat metal electrodes are soldered to the loose ends of each wire. An ear-phone microphone set like those worn by telephone operators lies on the table beside the communicator unit; two wires connect it to the right side of the communicator.

"If you expect me to believe your story, Doctor, explain to me what you are doing here—and how this equipment operates."

"And," observes Britt, "after I tell you all this, what then? Out onto the altar?"

Sin smiles. His slanted eyeslits narrow into shadowed crevasses from which his black eyeballs reflect the flames beyond Britt. "Remember that with my recommendation, Doctor, you will be spared castration and kept as a breeder."

Britt stares hard into Shi's black eyes. *At this mo-ment, I don't have much choice*, he decides finally. "OK." Britt nods. "OK, I'll tell you."

Britt steps toward the table and stops in front of his equipment. He looks up at Sin. "Do you know the latest psychic research at Stanford Research Institute in Northern California?"

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Sin nods slightly. "Yes. You see, Dr. St. Vincent, another of the superior characteristics that have been bred into me is idetic memory, so-called 'pho-tographic' memory. I can 'see' the news of the Stan-ford work in the My 1, 1974, edition of your U.S. *Time* magazine. They were developing the first of the mind-reading computer systems."

"Good," says Britt. "Then you are familiar with the basics of how this equipment of mine operates. We know that the brain, as well as the entire human body, operates on electrochemical energy: electrical energy generated by the chemical process of digest-ing and burning food sugars. Stanford's machine worked somewhat like the electrocardiographs and electroencephalographs which have been around in doctor's offices and hospitals for so many years for recording heartbeats and brain waves. They simply programmed their computer to recognize which elec-trical impulses in the brain relate to what words and activities, and then used ordinary skin-surface electrodes to connect the computer to the scalp. Whenever any of the volunteer subjects first *thought* of doing or saying something, the computer immedi-ately knew."

The look on Sin's face indicates his impatience for Britt to get into the details of how his own com-municator functions.

"Now, too," Britt continues, "we know that once a person begins to use words to communicate, then all his or her thoughts thereafter are expressed in terms of *words* or in pictures that are translated into words, even though they are unspoken. The spiritual intellect that moves the brain is programmed to think using words, and, except for mathematical cal-culations, can thereafter think only by using words to express its ideas. Even after the physical body dies, the spiritual intellect which lives on employs *words* both to think and to communicate, because it has no other satisfactory symbols for expressing its ideas and its will. So the spirit intellect that was the

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source energy for the physical brain continues to emit this source energy when trying to communi-cate."

Sin glances at the unit. "It is heavier than it looks." His eyes dart again to Britt's. "Why?"

"That's because we use a sensitive maser tuner, similar to the type that NASA and the U.S. Air Force use to tune in on satellite probes in deep space. But ours is more sensitive because we keep the maser ruby at about four degrees Kelvin ... al-most absolute zero. That requires considerable amounts of even the super-insulation that Mero has developed. That's why the unit is heavy.

"In any case," Britt adds, "as you know, almost all human languages are composed of about forty basic sounds, called phonemes. When we reach the heart of a haunting site, we connect the loose ends of the electrodes on the left of the communicator to the source object, and I put on the headset. We have a computer-generated list of phoneme sounds that I begin speaking into the microphone. The pat-tern of my sounds appears on the right-hand screen while the patterns being picked up from the spirit appear on the left. I then begin to adjust the tuner until both patterns match. When they do, then both the spirit and I are on the same wavelength. I have a basic working knowledge of most Western lan-guages and can communicate well enough to be understood. Even if I miss a few things, a small cassette recorder in this

unit preserves the communication for shipment back to Mero headquarters for computer analysis."

Sin's thin lips form a slight smile. "How simple! How clever! My admiration for Mero's Dr. Webster. This concept embodies the straightforward thinking of a da Vinci invention! But," he immediately adds, "your explanation creates a few more questions. . . ."

"Hyaiiii!" The sudden shriek stops Sin's sentence short. Britt whirls quickly in time to see a female figure flash through the flames of the fire.

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The figure lands catlike on the altar platform and instantly the drumming stops.

Txuka, Britt recognizes the flame-framed black silhouette which now stands statue-still on the altar. He knows her by the phallic rod she holds high over her head.

Kneeling down below her on the ground are the twenty warrior women whom Britt had earlier watched laying the carpet of banana leaves and placing the pots of sweetly scented cocoa oil in front of the altar. Now their own oiled naked bodies re-reflect the highlights of energy from the hot fire, and their long blonde hair falls like flames over their strong, yet slender shoulders.

Thum ... thum ... softly the drums begin again like a slowly awakening human pulse. Two lines of adolescent girls appear, one line advancing in measured ceremonial dance steps around each side of the altar. In sensuous rhythm with the gradually intensifying drumbeats, the nude nubile virgins file forward. Their budding young breasts bounce firmly with each cadenced step as they approach the kneeling warriors. Each girl's wrists are bound together by vines decorated with the gray crown feathers of the jungle's "winged wolves," the ferocious harpy eagle. Across each young virgin's back is a thick three-foot bamboo pole that fits in the bend of each elbow and restrains the arms from any movement. One by one, the twenty adolescents stop,

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each standing before and facing one of the kneeling adult warriors.

Fascinated by the unfolding ceremony, Britt is astounded by another fact that he just noticed. *I'll be damned ... I had focused before on how closely each of the adult warriors resemble each other, but now I see that these selected virgins also resemble each other, as well as resembling the adult women. . . . All of them are incredibly beautiful and incredibly alike. The genetic RNA chain responsible for this would be astounding to see under an electron microscope.*

Britt's thoughts are interrupted by *Txuka's* sudden wave of the rod—immediately the beat of the drums becomes slightly louder, slightly faster. With the first beat of this new tempo, the adult women, who are kneeling with their lips only inches from the golden pubic hair of the girls, move in unison, twisting and bending to dip their right hands into the ceremonial oil pots. Like a chorus in an ancient Greek play, in unison the women raise their glistening fingers to touch the soft cheeks of the girls. The beat of the drums is subtly increasing in loudness and tempo as their hands slide slickly down around the slender throats of the youngsters ... down across smooth virgin shoulders, leaving a shining trail of scented oil as their warm palms pass over the pert nipples of the young breasts. The adult women's strong, feminine fingers now begin kneading the firm flesh of the girls' breasts, and the young women respond with closing eyes and soft moans that blend with the thrum of the drums.

Like young trees moved by a gentle summer breeze, the bodies of the teen-age virgins sway beneath the caress of the warrior women. Several girls shiver, the muscles of their flat stomachs twitching involuntarily with the tingle of awakening sexual hunger. The hands of the adult women open slightly to allow the aroused and erect nipples of the girls to protrude between their encircling thumbs

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and forefingers ... the drums again increase ... and again Britt feels his heart pound slightly faster, harder, his penis hanging heavy with hot blood pulsing into it as the organ begins to rise from between his naked thighs.

The ceremony which is arousing Britt continues to unfold in the center of this firelit village. The enraptured teen-agers slowly sag until they are kneeling. The adult warrior women bend forward, parting their lovely moist lips and exhaling hot breath on the erect nipples bulging between their fingers. Sensuously, those lips cover that tender flesh and Britt can see the adults' cheeks pull inward as the women suckle hard the youngsters' virgin breasts. The young girls writhe with waves of pleasure and pain that wash through their bodies and brains.

The drums grow louder and the flame-thrown shadows leap and dodge and dance against the surrounding huts like black spirits from hell! Slowly, like wilting plants, the young girls begin to fall back from the devouring lips of their elders. Britt can see the girls' lean stomach muscles become taut. The smooth muscles of their thighs strain beneath the glistening oil-anointed skin as the girls gradually lower their bodies backward until they lie on the shiny leaves, their legs folded at the knees back beneath their thighs. The soft mounds of their breasts tremble in the firelight from the pounding of their hearts at the anticipation of what is to come.

Britt watches them lying there, legs folded beneath, thighs stretched tight, spread open and defenseless.

The strong hands of the warriors reach out and begin to massage forcefully the taut thighs of the virgins lying helpless before them. Battle-strong adults thumbs dig deeply into the tender in-ner flesh of the thighs of the virgins as they work their way up toward and into the blonde pubic hair. The girls react to this touch with deep breaths and straining thigh muscles. Moans of hungry pleasure

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blend with the drums, and each lovely warrior slowly leans forward. Britt can see their tongues smoothing saliva across their opening lips, their hands slipping beneath the buttocks of the girls and lifting these initiates slightly so that their glistening vaginal lips rise to meet softly the hungry lips that descend to devour them. And the drums grow louder!

Louder and louder they pound! The thrumming fills Britt's head and speeds up the pace of his heart. His penis stands erect, pulsing hot and hard against his abdomen with each throb in his head.

Suddenly Txuka leaps down from the altar. Her shadow flashes in front of the flames like a black panther. Rod in hand, she lands beside the first war-rior-virgin couple and crouches behind the adult, who quickly sits back on her haunches. Still support-ing the young girl's buttocks in her hands, the war-rior woman leans aside for Txuka, who swiftly plunges the phallic rod deep into the virgin young-ster. Every muscle in the young girl's body snaps tight. In the yellow glare of the firelight Britt can see the upper, inner muscles of her thighs tighten around the rod, squeezing and squeezing again and again in a powerful passion of pain and pleasure.

"It hurts, Dr. St. Vincent," says Sin. "But there is pleasure, too, in the pain," he adds as he seizes Britt's erection in his hand and presses the points of his feminine fingernails into the aching organ. A wave of electric pain throbs hotly through Britt's body and triggers a simultaneous explosion of ejacu-latory ecstasy which propels pulsing streams of white syrupy fluid from the mouthlike slit in the tip of his swollen penis.

Sin sneers as he watches the fluid splatter on the dirt floor of the hut. He releases his hold on Britt and turns away from the scene outside. "Txuka will deflower each of the virgins in that manner, depriv-ing any man of that prized pleasure. The pain caused by the stab of that carved penis will brand

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into the brains of those girls the ruthless violation that accompanies intercourse with a male."

Britt is leaning back against the large bamboo pole that forms the door support. His body feels spent, but his intellect is wary, alert and disdainful of this creature. "Women with women ... is that the way you think it should be?"

Sin pauses before answering. For several silent seconds he traces an invisible pattern on the com-municator with the long fingernails of his left hand. "Men," Sin hisses. "What use are they but to *breed*? Look at these Amazons I have discovered; what need have they of men except for impregnation?"

Britt arches an eyebrow and his lips form a bitter grin. "You might ask Txuka that question, Sin. She seemed to enjoy her time with me this afternoon."

The hermaphrodite's slender jawbones seem to bulge as the muscles over them harden. "No, no, you pig! Txuka is *my* lover! The pleasure you may have heard coming from her originated from her mastery of your encounter. *She* had *you*!"

Swiftly, Sin turns and points toward the commu-nicator. "Come, Dr. St. Vincent, the ceremony is proceeding out there, and the time is drawing near for me to make the decision as to what your fate will be. Tell me now the details and purpose of this Mero mission which you profess to be on."

Damn! I was certain that help would be here by now! What could be delaying Karl and John?

"And don't wait for your friends," Sin adds. "I have already seen to it that they will meet some of your old cohorts from the Pentagon psychic warfare program."

1

"Karl!—Karl!"

John's cry carries only a short distance before it is completely lost in the sea of sounds of sambas and singing that swirl around him in this mad crush of bobbing heads. But Karl's supersensitive senses dis-cern John's call from the cacophony. The German's giant size enables him to pinpoint John's bearded face about ten yards away among the mob of Mardi Gras revelers moving through this jam-packed plaza. John is being swept along with the swirl of sweaty, naked masked men and women, yet Karl's great height and strength enables him to force his way toward the short, bearded scientist.

"Uhn!" John grunts at the impact of a whirling dancer's elbow against his ribs. "Did you see her?" he

cries out as Karl nears.

The German shakes his head. "*Nein*. I could catch no sight of her."

"What do you have there?" John asks as Karl suddenly raises his arms to catch an incredibly beautiful but inebriated naked woman who stumbles backward against his chest. Karl's forearms catch her beneath her armpits. She hangs there and laughs, her bare breasts bouncing. John glimpses the purse held in Karl's right hand.

Karl steadies the young woman as much as possible in the surging crowd of drunken dancers and lets her loose. He forces his way the final two yards to where John has anchored himself in the eddy of a lamppost. "I stumbled on this a few feet from where

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we had been standing when she vanished," he explains, almost shouting to be heard above the increasing din.

"Jesus!" John exclaims. "Where the hell could she have gone?" Putting his foot on the narrow ledge around the base of the streetlamp, John hoists himself up and scans over the waving sea of feathered headdresses and glistening bodies. The madness of Mardi Gras continues to grow rapidly, irresistibly. The trickle of dancers that had begun only moments earlier when John, Kelly and Karl had entered this huge plaza is already a frantic flood with a mighty current of its own washing the revelers into every section of the city. The assault of sound is tremendous: a hundred bands, ten thousand musicians fill the air with sweeping samba beats that blend together with the laughter, songs and shouts from a million uninhibited human throats.

"Damn! Damn! *Damn!* Karl, do you feel anything? Any kind of perception about her?"

Although Karl is standing on the ground, he is now at eye level with John, who is up on the lamppost base. Karl looks at John and shakes his head. "Nothing."

Suddenly, Karl's eyes narrow . . . his body tenses for an instant. "There's something now."

John drops to the ground. "What is it?"

Karl closes his eyes. "I—I can't clearly make it out. It is not Kelly "

"Is it Britt?"

"*Nein*. It is neither...." As he speaks, Karl opens his eyes; his head slowly begins to turn. His eyes are moving toward a target which his psychic senses are trying to tune in.

John waits for the three seconds that are required for Karl to visually lock onto his target. "What do you see?" Impatiently, John hoists himself again onto the lamppost perch and looks in the direction

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of Karl's line of sight over the heads of the shoulder-to-shoulder crowd.

"Christ, Karl! Is that the guy I think it is?"

"*Ja*. I'm almost certain it is the same figure we saw briefly at the Targa Florio race in Sicily on our first investigation for Mero."

"Looks like he's got some friends with him tonight," John remarks as he notices two other men about ten feet away from the first man. The three agents stand out in the crowd, dressed as they are in colorful sport shirts that contrast to the bare flesh of everyone else, except for the equally out-of-place men of the Mero team. "Do you see what I see on those other two?"

Karl does indeed see the small white scars on the foreheads of the men—and he remembers well his Sicilian encounter with these surgically made psychic cyborgs from the Pentagon labs.

Suddenly, instinctively, John lets loose of the lamppost. Just before his line of sight drops below the level of the crowd around him, John sees the eyes of the agent on the left flash ruby red, like living lasers.

"Wow!" he shouts as the overpressure like that of a silent sonic boom presses heavily on his head and body.

"*Aaiiieee!*" The sudden shouts of the frightened crowd drown out the deep crunching sound of the concrete lamppost snapping like a matchstick under the impact of the unseen psychokinetic shock wave. It thunders silently on to slam against the side of the modern marble office building a few feet away; shards of glass and chunks of marble crash into the crowd along with the falling top half of the towering lamppost.

"Look out!" John hears Karl shout at the same time as the man's huge hand hits him like a paddle and knocks him back into a tumbling tangle of bodies. As John goes down with the others, he glimpses through the mass of frantically flailing arms

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and legs the sight of several less lucky men being struck by the crushing concrete post. The full force of the pole strikes one of the men on the head. John's mind is moving so fast that it perceives the blow in surreal slow motion and sees the man's skull shatter like an egg with thick red blood spurting out around gray hunks of broken brain.

Forearms, elbows, knees and feet all pummel John as the group he has fallen with scramble to their feet to flee the frightening scene. Numbed by his own fear, John doesn't feel the blows and is him-self dealing them out in his struggle to rise and to run. His mind is freezing still pictures of terror-struck faces of men and women being trampled by naked legs propelled by panic.

John suddenly feels a powerful tightness around his upper arm, a grasp of steel that pulls him to his feet.

"Thanks, Karl. Looks like you just saved my life twice in the space of a few seconds."

Karl's fingers remain firmly locked around John's arm as the two men take advantage of the panic to flee with the wild flow of screaming, fear-stricken people. The wild mob is moving quickly, almost too quickly for John. He catches a glimpse of hopeless terror in the eyes of the men and women around him as they stumble and sink into the grinding sea of pounding feet. Karl's strong hand again and again saves John from a similar fate.

"We've got to get out of this, Karl!" John shouts over the screams of the onrushing river of humanity in which they are immersed. He sees the German man nod. Yet on and on they run. The pressure of his pounding pulse is exploding in John's eardrums and the thud of his heels on the pavement jars up through his spinal column and into his dizzy brain. John's thighs are on fire with fatigue, his chest aching and almost unable to breathe, and thick saliva is welling up from under his tongue and drooling out of his gasping mouth. As they approach

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a corner near the dark slum section on the edge of the city, he is jerked violently to his left.

"Uh!" The sound is pushed from his flaming lungs by the force of his back smacking into the cold concrete of a silent warehouse. John's thighs are like jelly ... his knees buckle and he sags to a limp squat. The cool concrete feels good against his burning back. He feels so hot that he must explode. He can feel the individual drops of sweat swelling out of the pores on his pounding forehead. His wet shirt and pants stick to his chest and legs.

"Je ... Jeezuz!" he exhales between gasps. The throngs seem to have disappeared. The sound of their pounding feet and their screams is fading into the darkness. Low moans seep from the trampled bodies that lie scattered in the desolate wake of the phantom mob.

"Komm, mein Freund," commands Karl. "Schnell! We must warn Greg. He is alone at the track."

John struggles unsteadily to his feet. "First Britt," he pants. "Now Kelly ... and almost us!" He swallows hard and leans forward with his hands on his knees. "If they've got to Greg and the equipment al-ready, we won't have any way of contacting Dr. Webster at Mero to let him know what's happen-ing."

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"You see, Dr. St. Vincent," the hermaphrodite states, "I let word leak to the CIA informants that your group was responsible for the castrations of the senators."

Britt stiffens, his jaw muscles tighten.

"I'm certain you know what that means," Sin continues. "Not only will the Mero interference here be eliminated, but I suspect that many of the CIA task force will also be removed from hindering me. Your country's psychic warfare program, as you probably know, continues to rely heavily on the use of surgically made cyborgs. I don't know what kind of fanaticism inspires U.S. agents to submit to that. At least in our Eastern cultures there is some reli-gious basis for suicide work. But for an American to become a psychic kamikaze ... that is hard to un-derstand."

"It's not hard for me to understand," Britt states. "I was still with the Pentagon program when that surgical technique began at the Harry Hammond Labs. The initial agents who were converted to psy-borgs had no choice. I assume it still is that way."

"The principle has always intrigued me, St. Vincent. We in the East have concentrated on genet-ic selection to breed natural psychic powers into the growing ranks of our psychic armies. But in typ-ical fashion, you Americans have turned to technol-ogy to tap these powers. In deciding what your fate will be, I will consider what you can tell me about this particular technology, in addition to how well

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you cooperate in furnishing general intelligence re-garding the Mero operations." Britt concentrates to shield his thoughts from Sin while his mind works at nanosecond speed. *I've got to hope that Karl and the others have somehow managed to avoid death or capture. I know that they're capable of it. I'll keep*

talking as long as pos-sible and see what happens....

"OK, Sin." Britt shrugs. He walks to the table and, moving awkwardly because of his bound hands, sits down on the low bamboo stool. "The cyborg technology is simple. The crystal implanted in the brain is essentially similar to a laser crystal. It tunes in on and amplifies the wavelength of cosmic energy. It is implanted in the forebrain and microwired into the circuitry of the ocular nerves. This gives the im-plantee both conscious control over triggering the device and allows the amplified energy to be aimed and emitted through the eyes. The problem, of course, is that it doesn't go through the natural am-plification and transformer circuitry of the brain. The surgically created psychic cyborg literally fries his brain inside his head from the overload when he decides to—or is *ordered* to—use his psychokinetic power."

Sin is thoughtful, stroking his hairless chin. "In our dissection of the brains of the natural psychics whom we have been breeding in North Korea, we have been able to trace part of the psychic circuitry from the emotional brain area of the hypothalamus to the pyramidal structures in the very primitive brain stem at the top of the spinal column. We feel the unique nerve structures of the pyramidal area are the 'antennae' that are tuned into this cosmic en-ergy. The transformer and amplification circuitry seem to be located in the hippocampus and the amygdala. Our scientists are still searching for the natural 'trigger' which permits the born psychic to utilize the power. Our research is focusing on the

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hormones secreted by the hypothalamus as being that trigger."

Damn! Britt thinks. *Sounds like they, too, are getting close to what we tested during our last as-signment in Britain.... I wonder if Dr. Webster or anyone at Mero has yet confirmed the hormone con-trol theory.* "Why are you centering your search there?" he asks aloud.

Sin folds his arms into the large sleeves of the black silk robe. "We have observed during our in-vestigations of poltergeist phenomena in North Korea that manifestations seem to occur more fre-quently in homes in which there is a teen-ager. We are working on the speculation that the almost out-of-control hormone production which occurs during puberty somehow triggers the subconscious release of psychokinetic energy that moves objects and creates other displays associated with poltergeists. This happens especially following some emotional occurrence, such as disagreements with parents."

"Sounds possible," Britt comments, knowing well that this theory has already been confirmed in U.S. research.

Sin's eyes narrow. "It's more than *possible*, my friend. I believe that this is what gives these Amazons their psychic powers of ESP and hypnosis. They live in a primitive societal framework that puts few restrictions on emotional expression, unlike more advanced cultures of today's world which frown on public display of primitive emotions. Here, in this tribe, there is no cultural inhibition to sub-consciously block the use and release of emotions related with psychic power."

Sin pauses and stares for several seconds out the door of the hut. The fire is reflected in the black orbs of his eyes. "Someday . . . someday soon per-haps . . . we will truly understand the power that flows around us and through the universe."

"There is nothing to *understand*," snaps Britt.

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Sin's eyes flick quickly to him. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that we already *know* what the power is—you know it, and so do I, deep in our primordial consciousness. It is something everyone simply *knows* deep within his or her own secret self. But it is something which very, very few can admit to. For to admit to- it is to admit that we are all children of the universe—the brothers and sisters of the stars, of every animal and every plant ... every life-form. Primitive humans could open their minds to the uni-versal life-force and draw in its all-encompassing en-ergy in the same manner that the leaves of the plants unfold to draw in the cosmic energy of sun-light."

Sin nods. "And do you agree that cultural inhibi-tions accumulated and bred into most societies for many thousands of generations form the primary mental barrier that today prevents humans from uti-lizing this power?"

"Yes," Britt replies. "But those inhibitions are themselves founded on something far more insidious that has grown like a cancer within the human psyche: *arrogance*. Humans became so infatuated with what their intellects could do that they grew ar-rogant and forgot that their intellect is itself a *gift*—a sharing in the intellect behind the universal life-force. Human arrogance has become the shell separating us from the other creations which share the life-force with us. Humankind decided that *itself* was the whole purpose of creation and that it had to subdue not only plants and animals, but even those of its own species which were somehow judged in-ferior by the majority. 'Inferior' became a con-venient label that the majority applied in its pro-gram to stamp out individuals and cultures that were different merely by the color of their skin or by their speech."

"My, my, St. Vincent," the feminine Sin says with an evil grin, "such strong convictions coming from

an agent such as yourself. You sound positively *phil-osophical*. Tell me: what do *you* think is the pur-pose of humankind?"

"It's certainly not to *subdue*, as you might be-lieve, Sin—but to *understand*. To use our intellects to look at the plants and planets, insects and stars, and to see in them the incredible modulation, creativity, diversity and beauty of the life-force. And to see ourselves as part of it all."

"Interesting, Dr. St. Vincent ... very interesting. But don't you think that you're being arrogant to as-sume that on this small planet only, out of all the millions of planets, humans are the main intelligent life-forms?"

Britt is listening to the drums outside, trying to estimate how much of the ceremony remains before Sin's decision will be made. "No, Sin. You are read-ing something into my words that is not there. Logic alone says that there must be other similar intellec-tual life on thousands of other planets. Some of this human-type intellectual life may be in the external form of things that we would call plants, insects or animals. We are all sharing in the same life-force, but the rate of intellectual development on these other planets may be far in advance of ours, or far behind ours. Most likely there are planets and life-forms that represent both extremes. Each universe is one world. Each planet is a *tribe*. More advanced tribes from other universes have been visiting us, observing us in the same manner that we of the more advanced subtribes here on each observe our less advanced brothers and sisters."

Britt pauses a few seconds before adding, "This brings us to a moral problem which we here on earth are only now beginning to suspect. What if the plants, insects and animals sharing this world with us have also been given the same share in the intel-lect of the life-force, but are merely at a lesser stage of development than we are? Are we guilty of mur-der when we harvest corn or slaughter a cow? Only

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in very recent days have some of *our* kind begun to make the first tentative steps toward communication with plants and animals.. .. Humans continue to have the need to kill each other: how long will it be before we recognize our brotherhood among *our-selves*? And how much longer, then, will it be before we can accept our brotherhood with *all* of crea-tion?"

"Creation! Creation!" Sin spits. "How can you claim that there is any purpose behind all of this! You look at everything around you and see *diver-sity*! But my eye looks at the same hard reality and sees only *confusion*. How can you even argue that there is a unity to all this? There is no purpose to us—we are each only cosmic accidents."

Even in this enemy of his, Britt now sees the brotherhood of which he himself has been speaking. To Britt, Sin's question conveys a feeling that is far deeper than scientific or philosophical curiosity on the part of this creature whose physical strangeness and subconscious fears must be partly responsible for the evil he displays.

"Because," Britt begins slowly, "during my medi-tations to open my mind to receive the cosmic en-ergy of the universe, my mind has received both from the depths of my own instincts and from the depths of eternity the realization that the *source in-tellect* behind the life-force and the rest of creation is all loving and all good. Within the source intellect is the understanding of all possible things, and within it all things *are* possible since it is the source of the very laws of creation.

"The source intellect *is* love—and love is the *giv-ing* of oneself, the sharing of oneself. *We* are the products of that overflowing love. All creation is a diverse trail of enlightenment which leads us to un-derstanding the source intellect and to realizing our birthright to be part of it. Each small part of nature—*creation*—that we succeed in understanding is another step toward the understanding of our ulti-

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mate source. This trail of understanding begins in the bowels of the earth, beneath the deepest seas, and it leads to the farthest galaxies.

"So far, we have not yet completed even the first step in this long trail. We continue to look at lowly insects not as life, but as nuisances. In our view, ani-mals are meant to be eliminated, plants to be plowed under and paved over. We are very adoles-cent in our intellectual evolution, self-centered and headstrong like a selfish teen-ager who knows it all. Our failure to comprehend the life around us leaves us unable to understand and value our own life. We war and murder, cheat and hate each other because we do not know yet what we are."

Sin cocks his head and inquires, "What then is the purpose of humankind? Simply to *understand*?"

"Yes." Britt nods emphatically. "The trail of un-derstanding and appreciation leads directly to the source intellect. When we have expanded our under-standing to the very limits of creation, then will we be ready

for the eternal and direct contemplation of the source intellect. This is the ultimate 'heaven,' where we re-enter the warm womb of the loving source intellect; we retain our given individuality while at the same time we come into our inheritance as an inseparable part of this love with all the other things that have ever been created."

"Frankly, Dr. St. Vincent, you greatly amaze me, This philosophy you are expressing to me is some-thing I would have never suspected from a man such as yourself. It reminds me in some ways of the Buddhist and Zen philosophies of the East ... and also of the basic Judaic and Christian teachings that originated in the Middle East. Except that, from what you've said so far, I fail to see how a person can be expected to accomplish in this life all the un-derstanding that would be required to move after death into direct contemplation of this source intel-lect."

"The answer to that," Britt says, "is revealed in

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one small aspect of the creation around us here on earth: the metamorphosis of the humble caterpillar. Like the caterpillar, we, too, leave this earthbound physical existence for a freer one, a more spiritual mode. Freed of these bodies and the physical concerns which go with them, our intellects are able to focus on the new, more intellectual spirit life arid on the beauty and order of the universe into which they have evolved. But even during this next life, while our intellects roam the galaxies like shooting stars, they are not completely free of all physical need and must depend on intellectual mastery of the energy of the universal life-force to propel them-selves. The human intellect may go through several metamorphoses—I couldn't even speculate how many—until it reaches that pure intellectual state where it has no need to roam; then the intellect will have expanded to encompass all that there is except for the source intellect itself."

Sin seems to be contemplating something. "This cosmic life energy . . . would it not be an incredible accomplishment to learn how in the next life the in-tellect is able to control it without the use of the body? Knowing that secret would permit a person to do away with laser crystal implants or even selective breeding. Whoever gained that secret would have the ultimate power—power that would make atom bombs insignificant!" Sin's eyes gleam as they snap sharply to Britt. "Why, with that power, I could win the battle that physical weapons and armies have never been able to win: the control of human minds here on earth! I could become the first of the *mind masters!*" Sin's voice rises simultaneously with the sudden intensity of the maddening drums outside.

Britt's head pivots toward the scene visible through the door of the hut. Blood streaks show blackly on the inner thighs of the young women, who now cut free from their bonds, rise and join the adults in forming two lines that face each other in front of the altar. They begin to chant and sway

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with the beat of the music, their oiled bodies glisten-ing and their breasts swinging.

"You would do well to keep talking, Dr. St. Vincent," says the black-robed figure beside Britt. "The CIA agent has foolishly refused to cooperate."

Even as Sin speaks, Britt sees the hapless naked man being brought from around behind the altar. Two beautiful nude Amazons hold him firmly by the arms. He appears not to be drugged and is fully conscious. Fearful of Ms impending fate, he struggles, but the strength of these incredible women is more than a match for even his well-developed masculine muscles.

He is forced up the side steps of the altar plat-form. Txuka moves back step by step as the war-riors bring the man across the altar until he stands in front of the reclining chair structure. Now Txuka brandishes the bloody phallic pole before the agent's face. His eyes wax wide with fright—and wider still as the woman on his right lets loose one hand from his arm and reaches up to grasp his hair and yank Ms head back so hard that Ms mouth gapes open. With a sudden savage thrust, Txuka shoves the rod hard and deep into his mouth. The man's knees buckle, both from the force of the thrust and from the choking effect of the shaft in his throat.

Txuka pulls out the rod at the same instant as the man is spun a quarter-turn and thrown down in the reclining chair. Swiftly, heavy hemp ropes are wrapped around his arms and chest, binding him back in the low chair. The short seat of the stracture ends beneath Ms buttocks and the women savagely stretch out his legs and spread them widely apart before tying them by the ankles to the altar plat-form.

Another warrior carrying a large hollowed gourd quickly mounts the steps of the altar and hands the gourd to Txuka. Again, the women on either side of the male agent savagely yank back his hair, forcing Ms head back and Ms mouth open. Txuka pours a

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liquid from the gourd into the man's mouth, and Britt can see in the light of the fire that the fluid is similar to that which

Sin has been sipping from a bowl that sits now on the table here beside the com-municator.

Sin notices Britt's glance at the bowl. "It's merely a ceremonial liquor. Very potent, however, ferment-ed from the roots of the *ayawasca* vine."

Britt can see the CIA agent's body convulsing, coughing as he chokes on the fluid flooding into his throat. The liquor gone, Txuka tosses the gourd into the raging bonfire. The two women turn loose the man's hair and descend from the altar, each one moving toward the steps on either side to join the lines of swaying warriors watching below.

Txuka suddenly whirls to face her subjects and raises her arms. The drumming and chanting stop instantly. Slowly, the queen's arms drop to her sides and as they drop a barely audible humming begins ... a soft, quiet sound that builds gradually into a solemn chant from the assembled Amazons.

Britt can see the agent's head lolling from the in-toxication of the liquor as he attempts to focus on what is happening to him.

Louder and louder grows the solemn song, over and over and over repeating the same refrain. Txuka's eyes close and her whole gleaming naked body begins to twist with the chant's irresistible rhythm.

From behind her the drugged agent can see the shimmering, sensuous beauty of her bare body writhing before him, and the sight arouses his ani-mal instincts, which are beyond the control of his in-tellect because of the influence of the liquor. The chanting women watch as his penis begins to swell, pulsing with the beat of his heart as it rises and rises, larger and harder, until it is an erect rod puls-ing against his sweaty abdomen. Txuka whirls again. Britt sees the blade of a small knife flash in the fire-light as she lunges toward the man.

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His body snaps stiff and tense as in one swift mo-tion Txuka continues her whirl until she stands again facing her tribe, her arms stretched straight out and high above her head. Rich, red blood runs down her wrists and forearms from the gory testicles she holds in her hands.

The body of the castrated agent is twisting in ag-ony against his bonds while with each thud of his heart his life blood spurts from his groin.

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"Over there," Karl whispers in his hoarse, heavily accented voice.

John squints to see in the direction that Karl's fin-ger points. The faint light from the city, which is now about a quarter-mile behind them, casts a moonlike glow over the dusty dirt road. John inches himself slightly higher out of the ditch beside the road. He is cautious. Only a minute earlier, a Brazil-ian Army armored personnel carrier had sped past on its way from the city to the racetrack. The machine's headlights had almost caught Karl and John in the open road, and sent the men diving here for cover.

"I still don't see anything," John hisses. "Are you certain you're seeing with your *eyes*, and that your mind is not 'seeing' an image that is really being picked up by your ESP?"

Karl eases himself up beside John. The blackness of the night shadows beneath the jumble of jungle plants which crowd close to the road is so thick that it can almost be touched. The shadow he had seen moving on the other side of the road is quiet now and blends invisibly into the black depths there.

"Greg!" Karl strains to keep his voice as low as possible and still be heard on the other side of the road, but John is nonetheless startled.

"Jesus Christ, Karl!" the slight scientist spits an-grily through clenched teeth. "What if it isn't Greg? There must be patrols all over here by now!" John's 84

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anger is interrupted by a sudden movement in the darkness across the road.

"Karl," comes the whisper from the night. Quickly, crouched, the shadow scuttles across the road and drops into the ditch beside John. "Karl," Greg says as he lands, "I'd know your voice any-where!"

"Whew!" John exhales a sigh of relief. "I'm glad it's you!"

Greg's grinning teeth are just barely visible in the dim starlight. "Now, who else would be out in the jungle on a night like this?" Greg's smile fades from his ruggedly handsome face. "Any sign of Britt?"

"No," John replies. "Worse yet—Kelly has disap-peared too."

"Did they get her?"

Grr-grr-grr-grr! The sound of the half-track treads of another armored personnel carrier inter-rupts John's answer. The three men scramble back into the shelter of the night-shrouded jungle as the tanklike machine grumbles past, kicking up twin trails of dust that swirl together behind it into a single swirling cloud of silver smoke lit by the star-light.

"To answer your question, Greg," John says as the armored unit disappears down the dark road, "we

don't know if 'they' got her. We aren't even sure who 'they' are. From what we have seen tonight so far, however, we know that at least the psychic warfare section of the CIA is involved down here. If Karl's senses are accurate, though, both Kelly and Britt are alive. By the way, what are you doing out here?"

"An army unit showed up at the track right be-fore sundown," Greg relates. "Just on a hunch, I faded into the crowd to see what was going on. Lucky I did, too, because they made a beeline for our garage."

"Hmmm," John murmurs. "I was almost ready to

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think that the Brazilians might believe we are part of a CIA plot to destroy public confidence in Fur-tado. But maybe . . . maybe the CIA and Furtado's government are working together in something big-ger—What is it, Karl?"

Alerted by his paranormal senses, the huge man has suddenly lifted a branch and is peering into the darkness with these eyes that see what others can-not. "Foot soldiers! Two patrols heading this way, one on either side of the road. We must flee."

John turns to Greg. "We don't have much time left to get a message to Mero, Greg. Was the auxil-iary communication equipment still in the garage when you left?"

"Yes. In fact, from what I could see before I had to get out of there, the disguise worked perfectly. The soldiers mistook the units for engine-tuning equipment and left it sitting on your workbench."

"Good," John says, nodding. His mind has been working furiously on a plan. "Look. Do you think you could get to that equipment?"

"Sure," Greg shoots back. "I cooked up a scheme while hiding in the jungle, but the attempt is some-thing I will have to do alone and in the morning af-ter the track opens for practice, so that I have a chance of blending into the crowds."

"OK, Greg. Karl will lead me to the ruins of Ta-pajos' temple. You know the whereabouts of that hidden trail, don't you?" He watches Greg nod affir-matively. "Good. We'll wait there until nine a.m. If you don't show by then, Karl and I will head for the Xingu River and try rafting our way out of here to link up with the Mero operatives in Rio."

"Sounds good to me," says Greg. Suddenly he turns his head toward the road. "Listen: footsteps! Let's split! See you tomorrow morning!"

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"Perhaps you can be of some use to me, St. Vincent," says Sin as he turns his back on the grisly scene before the raging fire outside. "But first, I must know what knowledge you have inside that brain of yours that should make me not give the sig-nal for them to come for you."

Britt glances toward the communication unit on the table.

"Yes, St. Vincent—start with *that!* I can easily accept the fact that human spiritual energy is essen-tially electromagnetic energy, part of the electromag-netic spectrum like nearly every form of energy . . . but why does the spirit not flee into the universe immediately after the death of this encumbering physical body? How can a human spirit become *en-snared* in some other physical object after its body dies?"

Britt sits silent, staring at the communication device. In the space of an instant all the scenes of the past months since he joined the Mero efforts flash through his consciousness in a cognitive whole. A great weariness washes through his own spirit.

Suddenly Sin's hand shoots out from its nest in the flowing sleeve of his robe. A flash of red and pain explodes in Britt's head as Sin's sharp knuckles crack into his right temple. "Speak!" the evil sexual mixture commands.

The pain throbs within Britt's skull. He blinks and finds his vision momentarily blurred.

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"Death," Britt begins slowly. "Death of the body is usually a gradual process."

Sin seems impatient, but is once again in control of his anger. He watches Britt closely.

Britt's head hangs, his chin almost touching his chest . . . a crooked thin thread of bright red blood trickles from the swollen, split-skin lump on his temple. He inhales deeply and exhales a bit. "As we grow old, the bond between body and spirit gradu-ally weakens until death comes . . . often during peaceful sleep for the aged. Even among young hu-mans the bond is dissolved by such things as illness, and death—though sometimes swift—is not instan-taneous." Britt snaps his head up and back, tossing his sweaty hair off of his

forehead.

Suddenly his eyes rivet on Sin's. "But when a healthy person dies violently and too quickly—such as when he is shot or stabbed or hanged—then the self commands the healthy body to generate all the electromagnetic energy it can to preserve the body/spirit bond. That split-second surge is so powerful that it is strong enough to disturb the electro-magnetic field of nearby objects, disturb them enough so that the magnetic field of the spirit and that of the object become fused together!"

Sin's eyes narrow in understanding. "Ah, yes," he says nodding slightly as he speaks, "so this is how 'hauntings' come about. I see ... haunting sites are usually sites where someone has met an untimely, usually violent death." Suddenly Sin's left eyebrow arches. He cocks his head slightly and grins at Britt. "Then this must of course be the reason why you are here: the rumored haunting of Tapajos' spirit in that temple of his! Ha-Ha! I find that amusing. What you say about how a haunting comes about is probably scientifically true, but the phenomenon that his followers experience at the temple is not the result of *his* spirit. It is the product of hallucinations projected by my psychic Amazons in the surrounding jungle from where they observe the ceremonies

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there. I find it amusing that you are now in this predicament because you have come here chasing a *fictional* spirit. Why, that temple is no more haunted than is this hut!"

Britt's cold eyes focus without blinking on Sin's. "Are you certain of that, my friend? Really certain?"

Sin's jaws tighten, but he blinks nervously. "Why," he counters, "if what you say were *always* true, then the world would be filled with haunting sites!"

Britt nods, a wry grin twisting his lips. "Indeed, that would be the case, Kim Sin. Fortunately for us, and for the trapped spirit, there are many natural occurrences that can free a spirit from its earthly anchor. The usual scene in ghost movies that show spirits walking around on stormy nights is based on fact that has been observed down through the ages of man. Lightning bolts naturally cause severe electromagnetic disruptions that *can* release the trapped spirits. Fire, too, is associated with hauntings. Often the fires are started by the trapped spirit focusing its psychokinetic power on nearby flammable objects. If the spirit is ensnared in a wooden object, such as a gallows, the molecular change of the wood to charcoal by fire can release it."

"But why here?" Sin puzzles. "Why do *you* search out hauntings in so remote an area as this?"

"There are very few *true* haunting sites," says Britt in answer to the question. "In the United States the constant pace of change destroys haunting sites; houses are demolished, hanging trees sawed down and burned to make room for housing tracts, even automobile wrecks are melted down more and more for recycling. So, at Mero headquarters there is a computer constantly at work sifting through haunting reports from around the world to determine what stories are most probably genuine. Since two other members of this Mero field research team and I had reputations as racing drivers before we

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became part of this secret effort, the computer selects haunting sites near racetracks and it plans our itinerary, to provide us this cover identity. We know that the psychic warfare groups within the Pentagon and from other nations are trying to learn the same secrets."

"And just how," says Sin smugly, "does a small organization like Mero expect to thwart opponents as powerful as the Pentagon?"

Britt shakes his head a bit. "With the truth," he says quietly. "Every bit of psychic science we learn at Mero we disseminate through our operatives in the media. One of our agents is even writing a series of stories that serve as vehicles for alerting people to the plotting going on around them."

Sin walks closer to the table and reaches out, placing his hand on the communicator. He looks curiously at it for several seconds. "How do you persuade a spirit to tell you a secret that has for aeons belonged to the dead only?"

"Not to the *dead*," Britt corrects him, "to the more *alive* than us. To those who have been born into the freer life, while our intellects are still buried in the womb of the body. But these trapped spirits whom we seek are snared halfway, unable to be part of either life. For their freedom, which we can give them, they will gladly share the secret of how the human intellect can focus and utilize the cosmic energy that flows through the universe—the energy which we call 'psychic' energy. This is a secret that Mero must learn first and give to the scientists of the world as a gift for everyone, before the military psychic warfare fanatics can abuse it to enslave the human mind."

"Ah." Sin grins thinly and pats the top of the communicator. "But now the secret can be *mine*."

Suddenly the grin freezes in fright on Sin's face as Britt erupts into action. His powerful body rockets up from the chair and lunges with its great muscular strength to overturn the table, sending Sin stumbling

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back and the communicator tumbling through the air. The device hits the dirt floor with a thud and the sound of thin glass shattering, as the dual screens and electronics inside scatter in pieces. With a mighty swipe of his left leg, Britt sends the fallen table flying aside and stomps his heel hard into the communicator. His ankle is gashed by the broken glass, but the bleeding is stopped instantly by a thin wisp of freezing white vapor that spins up from the smashed device. This is the signal that Britt has succeeded in destroying the protective insulation around the sensitive and vital maser crystal. The vapor from the evaporating liquid nitrogen hisses loudly and Britt spins toward the dark, cowering form of Dr. Sin.

Just as the muscles of Britt's powerful right leg begin the movement to send a death-dealing karate kick to the evil creature's skull, Britt's head explodes with a savage jolt. Everything becomes black..

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"Too bad." The devil grins down out of the black background of this fright-filled night. "You would have made an excellent breeder," Sin adds, reaching down to stroke Britt's naked inner thigh with the soft palm of his hand.

Britt strains against the heavy hemp rope that holds him in the ceremonial chair on the altar. He can feel the warmth of the fire behind him on his bare body. Shadows cast by the flames dance across Sin's hard, narrow face, and the creature's body wrapped in the black robe is barely visible against the background of the night. As Britt's brain clears from the blow, it seems for a second that Sin's head is floating in his black space.

Coming into clear focus now is the gleaming figure of Txuka. She stands between Britt's staked-apart legs. Her bare, perfect body, which was soft and sweaty on top of his today in her hut, now shines with scented ceremonial oil, and the highlights of the flames glow warmly on her breasts and smooth thighs. Straining to lift his head, Britt can see the Amazon women and girls standing in rows at the front of the altar; with flame-hot eyes they stare up at his exposed body and wait for the ritual to begin.

The drums start again... and that chanting.

The gourd of ritual liquor is brought to Txuka, and as she turns, Britt sees the flash of the small knife that hangs from the golden chain looped around her naked hips. The chain is the symbol of

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her leadership, and the knife still has sticky blood on it from its use a few moments ago on the CIA agent.

Pain sears through Britt's scalp as one of the warriors at his side seizes his scalp and pulls his head back viciously.

Txuka leans down. Britt clamps his mouth shut. *Her eyes ... her eyes*, he thinks as he feels his will to resist fading. She stares steadily into Britt's eyes, and he vaguely knows that his mouth is opening just as she wants it to. The thin amber liquid seems fire itself as it gushes down his throat and immediately seems to rise to his brain.

"You won't feel much, St. Vincent," Britt can faintly hear Sin saying. His voice echoes in Britt's brain. "The liquor of the sacred *ayawasca* vine contains a natural narcotic which disrupts the synaptic connection between your body and your conscious brain." Sin's face is swimming now in Britt's vision; he can see the firelit flash of the yellow teeth as the creature smiles.

The drumming and the drug create a crazy throbbing in Britt's brain. Everything seems to be happening in slow motion ... Txuka's lightning lunge with the knife toward his groin takes an eternity ... more than enough time for the gates of Britt's primordial subconscious—which the drug has left unguarded, uninhibited by his consciousness—to burst open and release the demon power of his will to survive. He can feel it rush up red through his limbs. Up from the depths of his being it explodes like lava from hell through his searing eyeballs, and a blinding flash lashes out and blasts Txuka even as the blade of her knife swoops toward his scrotum! Like the blow of a thousand sledgehammers the impact of Britt's blast smashes her full in her lovely face, cracking it, caving it inward. Her gory eyeballs bulge out from their sockets, and her white teeth scatter out of her blood-belching mouth.

Britt's body is like a steel coil as it begins to rise;

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the thick ropes stretch tight across his chest and snap apart. His eardrums vibrate almost painfully with the giant dynamo hum that fills his head as his unfettered primordial subconscious draws in more and more and more of the cosmic energy of the ages. Through the red blur of his bloodshot eyes comes the sight of the fear-frozen faces of the Amazons standing below, wearing masks of terror.

Suddenly, in an eyeblink, something small, white, like a moth attracted to the fire, darts out of the dark toward Britt! Vaguely he feels it sting the side of his throat. .. and instantly the world ends....

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The morning sounds of the jungle behind him assure Greg's alert ears that no one unseen is back there except chirping birds and scolding monkeys. Stray rays of the already hot sun strike randomly through the thick foliage and feel good, warm after the pre-dawn chill. Slowly, cautiously, he pushes aside a large leaf and peers out....

The pedestrian entrance to the racetrack is about thirty yards away. Directly in front of Greg, between him and that guarded gate, is a clearing filled with a colorful array of parked motorcycles that many of the crowd have ridden out here. The ten-foot-wide gate is the only gap in the eight-foot-high chain link fence which surrounds this half of the huge track. The almost impenetrable jungle around the far half of the track is fence enough. But here at each side of the gate stands a helmeted soldier in green army fatigues; each carries a deadly, black submachine gun.

Brap—bap—bap—bap! Brap—bap! The opportunity for which Greg has been waiting arrives now, in a cloud of dust and with the sharp sounds of tuned motorcycle exhaust systems. A dozen riders pull up together with pit passes fluttering colorfully from their shirts. They are obviously members of a sport riding club and are astride similar mean-looking motocross machines. The lead rider sits proudly on a new Yamaha MX 400B: a machine that Greg knows will do the job he has planned. Most of the cyclists leave their keys in the ignition. They know

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that Brasilia is isolated by hundreds of miles of deadly jungle: if anyone stole one of their bikes, there would be no place to ride it where it wouldn't be easily spotted.

Quickly Greg reaches into his shirt pocket and withdraws one of the extra pit passes which he, as a competitor, has been given. He ties the string of the tag to a lower button on the front of his blue checked sport shirt.

The riders stop a few yards from Greg, and the rust-colored dust billows toward him from beneath their tires. He takes advantage of the dust screen to move quickly from his hiding place. Greg grabs a helmet from an unattended motorcycle parked earlier by another rider.

The newcomers heave their machines up onto kickstands. Some of the young men hang their helmets by the straps from the bars of their cycles; others take their headgear with them as they head toward the gate. In high spirits in spite of the exhausting Mardi Gras night just ended, they laugh and engage in pushing and punching horseplay as they walk. Greg moves in close and puts the helmet on his head. The tinted plastic face-mask hides his face, and he uses both hands in the pretense of searching his pockets for something.

The motorcycle group seems to be well known to the equally young soldiers. Wide smiles and nods of recognition greet the group as it approaches. The soldiers don't give the cyclists a second glance as they and Greg move unchallenged through the gate in the midst of the rest of the crushing crowd.

Wow! Looks like they're ready for an invasion! Everywhere Greg glances here inside the gate he sees soldiers. Some walk in pairs through the throngs. Others stand alone, leaning against poles and empty oil barrels in the shadows of the grandstands. All of them cradle stubby, black submachine guns against their sides. *Good*, Greg thinks at seeing the cyclists now turn toward the pits. *I'll stick with*

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them until we get close to our garage, then I can see what has to be done to get into it.

The number of people with pit passes is large, and the crowd here on "gasoline alley," which passes

between the garages and leads to the track-side pits, is composed of colorfully dressed people. The warming morning air drifts rich with the intoxicating, exotic scent of hot racing oil and potent fuel. The chattering and laughing of the Latin crowd is frequently shredded by the ripping roar of a racing engine being turned in the garages that open toward the alley.

I expected that, Greg thinks sullenly upon seeing the armored personnel carrier parked beside the open and empty Mero garage. He glances in as he passes. *We're in luck! Everything seems to be in place including the communication equipment,*

Suddenly the cyclists stop. Other people come running toward where they now stand. The quickly gathered crowd presses tightly together with Greg caught near its center.

BRAM! BRAM! Bram! An engine has just been started in the garage in front of which the crowd is standing. Suddenly the soldiers are coming, their guns held out in front. Pressing their weapons against the chests of the onlookers, the soldiers make them clear the way to allow the Brazilian team to roll their idling red racing machine out of the garage. The noise of the engine even at idle is ear shattering. The sleek sharklike snout sniffs slowly down the slight incline from the front of the garage and turns to the right onto this alley that leads to the pits.

BRA—! Unexpectedly, the temperamental high-tuned engine dies. Immediately the mechanics in their grease-stained white coveralls are kneeling beside the rear of the car. They talk excitedly in Portuguese, and gesture, seemingly angry with each other. The curious crowd quickly presses closer in spite of the soldiers' futile efforts to keep them back.

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Greg works his way up beside one of the mechanics. The man is annoyed because of the people jostling him and literally breathing down his neck to see what he is about to do. A faded red shop towel is draped out of a pocket in the man's coveralls. The pocket bulges, too, with another shape which is familiar to Greg. The mechanic reaches for it.

He takes a small red can out of his pocket; the can has a long spout and a trigger for squirting out its contents. Greg knows that the can contains highly flammable starting fluid. Four silver fuel-injector stacks stick out of the right side of the red engine cowl like sparkling wine goblets on a banquet table. The mechanic pumps several shots of the fluid into each of the four stacks. He puts the can back into his large pocket, and taps the driver on the helmet, signaling him to hit the starter button.

Bram! Bram! The engine explodes to snarling life again, and the curious onlookers in the outer rim of the crowd suddenly surge forward to catch a glimpse of the action. Greg takes advantage of the crush against the car to dive quickly among the forest of legs. His hand darts through the maze and snatches the can from the mechanic's pocket. Greg unscrews the top as he rises again.

Here goes! He hurls the clear fluid toward the two hot exhaust pipes which protrude like small cannons from the rear of the engine.

Whoomph!!! The liquid ignites with a muffled explosion and sends a fireball into the air.

"Agh!" "Ayee" The cries of the crowd erupt with the flame. Instantly a panic of people is pushing in all directions to flee what looks like a terrible holocaust. Already turned and running in terror: no one notices what Greg had known: the flame was gone in an instant. No one was hurt by the flash of this fluid, which burns fast and without generating great heat. But the effect Greg desired is created. The soldiers are overwhelmed and fall back before the fleeing crowd. Greg moves with the mob, and

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amid the confusion, he manages to slip unseen into the door of the Mero garage.

OK, let's see.... His eyes skip quickly over the array of equipment. First he grabs a gray canvas backpack such as Britt had used to carry the psychic communicator out to the temple. Greg's hands rapidly reach out and back, out and back, filling the pack with what John will need to establish radio contact with Mero's mountaintop headquarters half a hemisphere away.

In less than a minute he has the canvas pack filled with everything he needs. But already the scene outside has changed. The crowd has fled a short distance and stopped. The moment's panic is passed. The soldiers are returning to their stations.

If I can get out the back door now while the attention of those soldiers in the carrier out there is still focused on the alley scene, I stand an even chance of reaching that motorcycle.

Greg glides to the small rear door. Slowly, he eases it open enough so that he can see out. The yard-wide walkway between the garages and the chain link fence is deserted of people, but the boxy back of the army-green armored personnel carrier extends beyond the side of the garage and to within a narrow foot of the fence.

With no time for hesitation, Greg slips out of the door and darts quietly to the edge of the garage. Slowly, he eases his head toward the corner of the building until he can just see around it. One soldier sits in each turret on top of the front corners of the armored unit. Their hands rest at the ready on the grips of .50-caliber machine guns. Greg remembers, too, the stubby snout of the 40-millimeter cannon he saw protruding from its slit in the front of the car-rier.

The sweltering sun rains its hot rays down on Greg. He's sweating. The air he breathes behind the helmet's dark gray face-shield is almost gagging him. Yet, he waits ... waits until the right moment...

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Now Ms mind commands as he sees the soldiers briefly distracted by an enticingly dressed pit bunny. He quickly slides his body through the narrow space behind the dusty, dark green war machine and darts to the shelter of the next garage.

Stepping lightly, Greg runs across behind this ga-rage and stops short, once more cautiously checking the space beside it which leads to the alley. "No sol-diers," he sighs in a relieved whisper.

Small groups of chattering stragglers are pushing their way out of the pit compound against the stream of curious crowds who are hurrying in to see what the excitement has been about. Greg walks quickly to the alley and attaches himself in the wake of a small group of men who are escorting their frightened women out of the area.

The guards are watching the throngs trying to en-ter the area. Greg is almost through the gate before one of them, his glance caught by the colorful yel-low helmet which has hidden Greg's identity so far, turns. Instantly, the armed youth recognizes what he had failed to see when Greg was in the company of the others: Greg's shirt pocket does not display the coiled anaconda emblem of the true members of the motorcycle club. Only a yard's space separates Greg from the soldier as he raises his weapon, but that space is closed in an eyeblink by Greg as he sinks his fist into the enemy's stomach. The body wheezes explosively and snaps forward, folding at the waist just as Greg's knee comes up into the nose and mouth to send the head snapping back and the hel-met spiraling off.

Greg is sprinting away even before the uncon-scious, bloodied body hits the dust. The bullet zings past Greg's helmet sounding like an angry hornet. His pulse pounding in his head as his feet pound the ground, Greg can hear only the tiny, fast popping of the machine gun of the other soldier. The explosions in the dust ahead of him tell Greg that the man's aim is badly hampered by the crowd. "C'mon,

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legs!!! Dig!" Greg growls through gritty clenched teeth.

And now he is there! His right leg goes over the narrow vinyl saddle of the big black and yellow Ya-maha; his right hand wraps around the throttle grip as his left twists the ignition key. One kick of the starter pedal and the gaping 38mm Mikuni carb gulps in a mighty, swallow of air to feed the ex-losion of power from the engine. It's done in the space of seconds, and Greg is into first gear and away.

The black exhaust pipe spits out a growl that be-comes a snarl of fiery fury as the engine revs toward top rpms. Greg fishtails the machine violently in the thick dust, to create a smokescreen behind which he crashes into the jungle and onto the almost invisible trail that had brought him here.

Whapl—Whock!—Thock! The branches of the underbrush reach out like tentacles that grab hard at his arms and batter his helmet as he blasts past them. The rugged race-bred suspension of the thor-oughbred Yamaha hisses and gurgles as it absorbs the shocks of the primitive trail. *I should be break-ing out of this jungle cover in a few seconds. That open field beyond is the only hazard between me and the hidden trail that leads to the temple where Karl and John are waiting. If I can get across that, I'll be in good shape.*

Christ! Greg blinks once only as he makes the transition from the deep shade of the dense jungle to the shattering sunlight of the parking field clearing. What he sees is three armored personnel carriers grinding toward him at full speed, their treads churn-ing up billowing dust that rises up reddish and dull against the crisp, blue morning sky. Greg's hands and feet work together rapidly squeezing the clutch lever, downshifting, foot sliding over the bumpy ground for balance in the tight 180° turn he makes to reverse his direction.

Whumph! The earth leaps and sandy dust hisses

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against Greg's helmet as the cannon shell explodes only ten feet in front of him.

The mighty Yamaha's knobby rear wheel spews out a tall roostertail of dirt in instant response to Greg's wide-open twist of the throttle.

Only one chance. I've got to go back through the track and pick up the trail where Karl says it runs on the far side near turn three.

Greg's head jerks back again and again as the Yamaha leaps forward with each savage upshift through the five gears. The scene seems like heaven and earth reversed: the speeding cycle and its dusty trail mimics a lone jet streaking high in the sky leav-ing a swirling contrail behind it. Puffs of dust erupt around the speeding speck long before the muffled "whumphs of the pursuing vehicles' cannons can reach Greg's ears.

Greg is speeding in top gear at near ninety miles per hour toward the chain link fence around the parking area. The barrier is only about a hundred yards away and fast approaching. Amid the loud explosions of the cannon shells, the machine gun slugs are stitching straight rows of smaller explosions. This new-plowed parking field is very choppy, crisscrossed by small ups and downs and mounds. At this speed, the bellowing yellow Yamaha is often airborne, its single big nitrogen-packed shock absorber hissing as it absorbs impact upon impact from skipping top to top across the mounds. Closer, closer rushes the fence. Through the bumping blur, Greg's eyes are searching for a special feature. He sees it now and lands his body a bit to the left. Like a stallion that knows what its master wants, the Yamaha alters its straight headlong rush and retargets itself toward one mound that is slightly steeper and higher and nearer the fence. The front suspension tubes contract at the instant that the front tire first touches the mound. Greg's body, too, reacts. Feet planted firmly on the side pegs, his strong thighs lift his body inches off the seat and back, to change the

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center of gravity of the man/machine union just as it is launched from the crest of the mound.

Only a slow-motion camera could catch the balletlike balance of this flight over the eight-foot fence ... the muscular absorption by Greg's body, and the Yamaha's suspension of the rear-wheel impact on the other side.

The people inside the fence are fleeing. Greg holds the throttle wide open and runs up on his rear wheel for several yards until he is just beyond the grandstands. People pass in a blur of wide eyes, open mouths and waving arms.

Suddenly Greg is leaning way over to the left to turn onto the blacktop of the track. The front tire bites on the sticky hot asphalt. Greg gets down behind the handlebars, cutting wind resistance for speed, and presenting a smaller target to the buzzing slugs that are kicking up bits of the blacktop ahead and around him. Up the hill, through turn two and sweeping down to the left into turn three. The toe of Greg's right shoe presses down hard now on the rear brake lever at the same time that his right-hand fingers tightly squeeze the chrome lever of the front brake. The thundering Yamaha squats down on its suspension as it slows quickly to a complete stop.

Should be through there, Greg calculates as he looks at what appears to be a thin spot in the wall of jungle next to the track here at turn three. With the strong engine idling impatiently between his legs, Greg glances over his shoulder and sees tiny figures running toward him from the distant pit area—army men. Several stop, aim and fire. A slug shatters the plastic number plate on the front handlebars. Greg knows there is absolutely no time to search for the trail—it simply must be there. He kicks the motor-cycle into low gear and twists the throttle grip.

Rowwwer! growls the engine as it instantly hurls itself and its human cargo into the arms of the waiting plants.

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"Kelly!" Even through the fuzziness of his vision at this moment Britt recognizes the beautiful face looking into his,

"Shhh!" she cautions, raising a finger to her lips. "Keep your voice down. Kim Sin has left for only a few moments. He's coming back with some sort of ceremonial garb for my coronation as queen of this tribe of Amazons."

Britt's head is reeling from something he assumes is a drug, but Kelly's remarks seem to make little sense even without the other influences. "What ... what are you talking about? Coronation? Queen? What happened to me? And how did you get here?" Britt manages to prop himself on his right elbow and survey his surroundings.

I'm back in Txuka's hut, he realizes as he recognizes the distinctive, grotesquely carved and savagely painted wooden masks which hang on the bamboo walls.

"Listen closely," Kelly whispers rapidly. "Dr. Webster sent me down here in response to John's radio message that you were missing. The hormone pills that you experimented with at Stonehenge in England on your last assignment have been proving out in tests with me as the subject." She reaches into her pocket and takes out a small vial of pills to show to Britt. "Dr. Webster felt that with these I could help locate you through ESP, since Karl's natural powers apparently weren't up to the task. John felt that your disappearance and the death of 104

the senator were both the work of Tapajos' anar-chist followers, so we went into the plaza early last evening to begin to search psychically for clues at the spot where the last senator was found.

"I had just swallowed several pills when I re-ceived thoughts from a woman who was in the crowd of Mardi Gras celebrants who were beginning to pour into the plaza. She was almost completely naked, except for a short skirt of large feathers that hung loosely from a gold band around her waist. I followed her and became separated from John and Karl. As I followed the woman, I realized that she knew I was tailing her. She led me into the jungle, down a long trail, until we arrived at a clearing in which stood a large pyramid that resembled those which the ancient Incas built. Immediately, I was surrounded by a half dozen women, all of whom looked very much like the one I had been following: white, blonde and naked. I realized that these were the fabled Amazons.

"They stared at me strangely, as if they were ex-pecting something to happen. They seemed puzzled that nothing did. During their second of hesitation, I tried to escape. The only place I could run was up the steps of the pyramid. About three-fourths of the way up, my legs just gave out on me. I thought I had had it and turned around just in time to see the first spear zip up past my ear. It struck one of the stone eagles that serve as columns to support the roof of the small temple atop the pyramid. But the spear penetrated into the eagle! Like into flesh! And blood came running out of the stone! Confused and frightened, I glanced down the steps again at the ad-vancing Amazons just as another spear was midway in flight between the thrower and my throat."

Kelly's speech has become so rapid that her words are running together. She pauses, swallows hard and forces control on her breathing. "Britt ... Britt, I knew that the spear was going to *kill* me. But something strange happened in my head. I

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could feel some kind of sudden, almost painful swelling—a tremendous pressure exploded out of my eyes in a red flash that partly blinded me for a split second. I hardly saw the spear flip over in midair and zip back to its thrower. It struck her in the heart with such impact that the bloody shaft was sticking halfway out her back as she tumbled back-ward down th& steep steps. The other warriors dropped their spears instantly and fell to their knees on the steps. I had no time to really try to under-stand what had happened because at that same mo-ment my mind received an image of you tied up and in trouble here."

Kelly glances over her shoulder toward the door of the hut, but Sin is still nowhere in sight. "Some-how I knew the way here. The Amazon warriors willingly followed me. The camp appeared deserted when we arrived; no one was visible except for the gruesomely battered body of the former chieftess. The warriors with me took one look at the scene and immediately escorted me to this hut. Inside, a dozen or so other Amazons were attending to you. You were out cold on that mat. They were washing your body with scented water and anointing it with perfumed oils.

"Then this man or whatever—I could see the bulge of those breasts beneath his black robe—ap-peared. He said something I didn't understand, but I got the impression that he told the warriors to seize me. All he got in return was a couple of spears pointed at him. He left in a rage and one of the men who was bringing in the oils for the Amazons—a captive who spoke some English—told me what had happened. Apparently, Britt, you killed the queen with a psychokinetic blast. After seeing this power of yours, the Amazons now want to make you the exclusive breed male for the queen." Kelly pauses and grins slightly in spite of the situation they are in.

"And," she continues, "it seems that I had killed

the next highest ranking Amazon after the queen with my equally impressive psychic powers, so that the Amazons intend to make *me* their queen. I am to be prepared for the ceremony, which will take place with the sunrise."

Britt smiles.

Kelly's brow wrinkles. She is concerned about the incongruity of Britt's apparent amusement at a time like this. "What," she demands, struggling to keep her voice down, "is so damn funny?"

"Oh," Britt replies, his eyes sparkling, "I'm just fascinated by the lengths some women will go to, to get their man."

Kelly's mouth opens, but finds no voice. She merely glares at Britt.

"Umm," Britt grunts as he stands. Completely serious again, he weaves slightly from the lingering effects of the drug. His head is clearing now, and his thoughts are racing as he tries to plan what he and Kelly will do next. Absently, he reaches up and touches the sore spot on his throat. "I wonder what knocked me out."

Kelly steps close beside him, and looks up at the slightly swollen area on his throat. In the flickering light of the hut's oil lamps she can see that there is a small, red pinhole in the center of the swelling. "When I first came in here, Britt, I saw a small white feathered dart on the mat beside you, and Sin was carrying a long tube. He must have shot you with a blowgun, probably with a dart dipped in something like *curare*. Only a drug like that which paralyzes the entire nervous system could have stopped you during such a psychic display."

"Speaking of psychic display," says Britt with a quick look toward the door and the brightening light outside, "you had better hide those pills somewhere in here. As you can see," he says and flicks his eyes down for an instant at his own nakedness, "it isn't exactly the fashion in these steaming jungles to wear clothes. If Sin or the Amazons even suspect that

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you must depend on that drug for your powers, we'll both have had it. As you probably learned from Dr. Webster, my power seems to be released by my subconscious only when it appears that my life is on the line. The hormones released by the emotional fear of death are what trigger my power. It probably won't take Sin long to figure that out, too. One well-placed blowgun dart when my back is turned and that's the end of me—and both of us."

"Just what is going on down here?" Kelly asks. "Before I left Mero headquarters, I read the back-ground report on the castration murders of the senators and the disappearance of Kim Sin. I suppose that I'm right in assuming that this Oriental is the one who disappeared?"

"Right," replies Britt. "But he's not a *victim* of what's going on down here; he's a *cause* of it." Britt stops suddenly and listens hard for sounds of some-one approaching.

After several intense seconds, Britt relaxes, satisfied that there is nothing and no one outside. "We're caught in the middle of a double-headed political plot," he continues. "Furtado is apparently a CIA puppet. His election, which appeared to the rest of the world to be such a democratic triumph, was rigged by the CIA. His strongest local opposition came from a powerful *macumba* priest named Tapa-jos. It seems that this Tapajos was murdered by Furtado's men, although his body has never been found."

Kelly recognizes the name. "John briefed me on Tapajos when I first arrived here. It's his spirit which is suspected to haunt the temple: isn't it?"

"Perhaps," answers Britt. "If he is dead. You see, I know now that it's no spirit which has been committing the mutilation murders of Furtado's Senate supporters. It's these Amazons ... under the direction of Dr. Sin."

"Sin? But why, Britt?"

"Well, Kelly, he's leading a rebel military action

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to topple the Furtado government and open the way for Eastern communist influence in this country, and for their control of the tremendous oil fields that lie under this jungle. However, I think that even his pals might be in for a surprise. Sin is very un-stable. As you noticed, Sin is a hermaphrodite—not a freak of nature, but a specially bred male/female mix. The generations of incestuous inbreeding that was required to achieve this mix has also resulted in his having some throwback ESP ability. But the most significant result is the psychological problems that his male/female body has caused in his mind. He is talking about an Amazon empire for Brazil, with women ruling men."

Even here, surrounded by this situation, Kelly's innate sense of humor cannot be suppressed. "That doesn't sound like a psychological problem to *me*!"

For a fleeting fraction of an instant, Britt flashes a grin. "In any case," he goes on seriously, "the CIA is taking no chances that these murders down here are *not* related to a paranormal phenomenon. Sin told me that there is a task force from the Pentagon psychic warfare group down here working with the CIA. The CIA wants to cultivate some controlled unrest against Furtado, enough to get headlines and prompt speeches from the hawks in the U.S. Senate about the attempts to overthrow our democratic ally down here. The CIA objective is the same as it was in the Vietnam war. There, the objective was to secure for the oil companies all that rich low-sulphur crude which lies beneath the shallow seas between South Vietnam and Indonesia. Here, the idea is to get the American people fired up so that the President sends massive military aid and advisers—supposedly to support the 'democratic' government, but in reality to protect an investment for big business at the cost of millions of tax dollars and the lives of U.S. troops."

Kelly understands completely now. "And we're in the middle."

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Britt nods.

Suddenly, footsteps and talking are heard outside the hut.

"Quick," says Britt as he drops to one knee and lifts up the corner of the sleeping mat, "hand me the vial of your pills." Britt hooks the fingers of his right hand into the dirt beneath the mat and gouges out a handful of soil. Reaching up for the vial, he says, "We have to hide these from Sin," and buries the precious drug. He stands and wipes his hands together. "Sin has a weak psychic influence over these women. He probably knows that he won't have any influence over you as queen. You are upsetting his plan, so I don't doubt that he will want to eliminate you as soon as possible. These pills might be our only chance if John and the others can't get through to Mero for help. We can't risk Sin's finding them. Now: make an effort to guard your thoughts from his probes."

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"Greg!"

He is startled by the call of his name from behind him, and he jerks his head around toward the trail from which he has just entered this clearing. The familiar figures of Karl and John emerge from the green, leafy jungle.

"My God." John grins behind his little beard as they jog toward the center of the clearing where Greg sits on the idling motorcycle, removing his helmet. "You almost beat *us* here. We were still a few yards down the trail from the clearing when we heard the roar of your motorcycle."

"*Ja*," nods Karl. A fleeting grin creases the usually stoic face of this German giant. "We thought," he adds in his heavily accented voice, "that you were some kind of army patrol."

Only now does the tension of the escape and the wild ride through the jungle make an impact on Greg. He inhales deeply, but his breath is shaky. He is still astride the yellow Yamaha and leaning on its handlebars. But now his arms tremble slightly. "I don't know," he says, "how long it will take them to find and follow the trail. Probably not long—"

His sentence is stopped in mid-word by the look on Karl's face. John notices it, too, and in a split second both he and Greg simultaneously flick their eyes toward the spot halfway up the steps of the vine-covered pyramid. The lifeless corpse of the slain Amazon lies sprawled head-down about half-way up the steep stone steps. The sharp spear is

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stuck between her breasts, and a broad trail of blood has flowed down the stones and dried black.

All three men are momentarily stunned by the sight. But John notices something vaguely familiar about the woman's face in spite of the death mask of horror frozen on it. "You know," he says as he slowly steps toward the foot of the huge steps, "I think I recall seeing this woman last night in the plaza." The others watch him and wait. "Yes ... yes ... I suppose it was her blonde hair and beautiful white body that caught my eye. She came into the plaza with a group of dancers just as Kelly and I had that little argument about my pulling up the vine."

Karl's eyes narrow as he, too, tries to recall the details of last night. "*Ja*," he nods. "I also remember her."

"Well, come on," Greg says quickly as he swings off the Yamaha and kicks down its stand. "We're going to have to go up to the top of that thing, anyway, in order to have a clear shot at broadcasting a radio message out of this jungle."

The wide steps are made of granite blocks that have been roughly carved. Each step is about two feet tall and the men must lift their legs high each time. The thick vines are everywhere, growing out of every crack, spreading and splitting the great stones.

"It's amazing," John observes as they climb, "how even the mightiest of man's monuments are so irresistibly reduced to dust again by the slow power of the plants."

All three men are breathing heavily as they reach the level where the woman's body lies. They pause and study her.

"Look at that waistband," John puffs. "Those eagle feathers hanging from that gold chain indicate that she was a leader of her tribe."

Karl shakes his head. "That spear must have been thrown with tremendous force to jam through her

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like that. It's hard to imagine anyone being able to throw such a big spear that hard."

"Well," comments Greg, "I don't know as much about this sort of thing as you, John, but from the way she's lying here like this, I'd say that her death was not part of some ritual."

"Right," John agrees. "It looks like a battle took place here—and not too long ago. The blood is still

sticky."

Silently the men turn and resume their steep climb.

"Do you see what I see?"

Only a half dozen steps below the small covered temple at the top, they stop again, simultaneously noticing what has promoted Greg's question.

"Damn!" whispers John.

The stone gargoyles of harpy eagles which support the peaked roof over the small open-air temple area atop of this pyramid are clearly carved from the same gray granite as the blocks from which the entire pyramid is built. Yet a spear is stuck deep into one of the eagles, and glistening red blood seeps slowly from the wound. Cautiously, they proceed up the final steps and onto the temple floor. Dry leaves cover the stone floor of the small area and crunch under their feet. A stubby slab of granite lies in one corner. It, too, is wrapped and cracked by the vines that are everywhere in this jungle.

"Look at that roof," cautions Greg. "It could come down on us at any minute. Those eight stone eagles—or whatever they are—that hold the whole thing up look strong enough, but the bamboo beams underneath appear to be just about rotted away. That terra cotta tiling on top must weigh a ton!"

"Right," John acknowledges. "We'll have to work fast."

Greg slips out of the backpack and places the ra-dio equipment on the altar stone. This temple section is the only part of the great pyramid extending just above the one-hundred-fifty-foot tall *mapacu*

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trees. The pyramid and the ceremonial clearing beneath the canopy of living branches are invisible from the air, and even this temple section, over-grown with green vines, blends in with the treetops. Greg stands up and faces into the westerly breeze. He is looking out across the rippling sea of green leaves which stretches away endlessly from here and washes silently against the mighty Andes Mountains in Bolivia a thousand miles to the west.

"Karl—" John's sentence to their psychic companion is stopped by the trancelike look on the German's face.

John and Greg watch as, over, the span of several seconds, the rigid expression gradually fades. Air rushes into Karl's great nostrils and his chest expands. He glances at John. "There's something here ... something beyond what eyes can see ... something alive and evil. *Very* evil."

Greg arches an eyebrow. "Well, we *still* need to get a message out of here,"

Greg begins connecting the radio wiring. Karl's huge left hand shoots out and restrains him. "No! There's no time for messages now! Britt ... Kelly ... they are—" His right arm rises quickly, its index finger rigid, pointing. Slowly, his arm moves in an arc along the jungle horizon.

His arm stops. "There," he says.

Greg and John squint in the direction that is indicated by Karl's finger. They see a column of smoke, which looks very tiny at this distance, curling up from the waving green sea of treetops.

"Looks like it's about five miles away," Greg estimates. "In this jungle it could take us about two hours to get there."

John turns to Karl. "Are you absolutely certain that Britt and Kelly are out there?"

"*Ganz und gar*," Karl emphatically asserts in German. "They are *there*." In a flash, he turns around and is descending the steps.

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John hesitates. "Isn't there time to try even once to get a message through to Mero?"

Karl is already down to the steps where the Amazon's body lies. He vehemently shakes his head, but neither turns around nor says a word.

John and Greg begin to follow him, down.

"Which way?" Greg calls out.

The German only points again—this time toward another trail which is only visible now from this high vantage point halfway up the pyramid. Both Greg and John notice something else that is more easily seen from up on these steps: bloody footsteps in the dust at the base of the stairs, footsteps that lead to the trail toward which Karl had pointed.

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"Here you are, woman!" snaps Sin as he ducks in through the door of the hut and tosses a leather bundle

to Kelly. "Get out of those clothes and into this."

Kelly catches the bundle and squats down to open it.

"What is it?" she asks, lifting a length of large, foot-long black feathers that hang down from a delicate gold chain.

"That, too, is power," Sin answers. "When you put that around your waist, you will have girded yourself with the Amazon's most respected symbol of authority. As part of the coronation you will be given the other symbol—this!" A tall Amazon steps in front of the door. In her outstretched arms, resting on a piece of glistening black jaguar pelt, is the rod that Txuka had wielded only last night.

Kelly is momentarily fascinated by the detail of the phallic carving. The blood from last night's ceremony has been wiped from it, but the wood is still almost black from the stains of a thousand years of such ceremonies. She glances at Britt. Her eyes, with an out-of-place twinkle, look over his naked body. "I wish you were hung like that." She grins.

"You joke?" Sin snaps in a flare of sudden anger. "Don't disgrace your womanhood! You are about to become the figurehead leader of a female society that holds within its genetic makeup the power to rule the world of men. I warn you, I will not permit you to frustrate my plans to do just that." 116

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Kelly looks evenly at Sin and says: "You speak of 'ruling' men. . . . I speak of sharing this life with them. Your ideas are as warped as some men's. Perhaps, deep in your subconscious, you are angry because you were not born with something bulging between your thighs," Sin blinks, his teeth clench in anger, but the small, femininely beautiful Kelly leans quickly toward the creature and warns, "Don't threaten me!"

Sin's anger falters. He steps back. For a long second, Sin and Kelly glare fiercely at each other.

Sudden drumbeats break the confrontation.

Sin turns and waves away the Amazon in the doorway. He turns again toward Kelly. "You must perform this ceremony well. If you do not, the Amazons will not object to my stopping you with the blowgun that I used on Dr. St. Vincent. And I *want* you to perform the ceremony, for if you do not do it satisfactorily, the Amazons must fight among themselves to determine a new queen. The struggles will further reduce the numbers of this already small tribe. I'm sure you don't want such needless bloodshed any more than I do."

"Then," says Kelly, "tell me what will be happening out there so I can prepare myself."

"It is a short simple ceremony," Sin explains. "You must prove yourself superior to men in two ways." He pauses. "You noticed that guarded pen of men at the edge of the village?" He waits for Kelly's affirmative nod. "Good. Those men in there are the strongest breed males we have. They are good breeders, but too strong and violent to be adequately controlled with the leashes that suffice for men of lesser spirit. Rather than risk their certain castration by a leash when they try to pull away, the Amazons keep these men in that pen and under guard until they are ready to use one for breeding.

"Three of the strongest of those males will be brought to the center of the village clearing and placed in a ring with you. They know that their only

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purpose is to copulate—and that is exactly what they will try to do as quickly as possible. You must exhibit psychic control of them strong enough to keep them at bay without weapons for at least five minutes." Sin pauses. "If you cannot, then, after the men have had their most brutal pleasure from you, you will be slaughtered, roasted and fed to the whole group of breeders."

Kelly inhales deeply. She exhales quickly through her nostrils. "OK . . . what's the second way that I have to prove myself superior to men?"

"If you pass that first test," the North Korean replies, "you must next demonstrate your superiority and skill at sexually satisfying your sisters. You must bring three of the best of the warriors to orgasm in the time that it takes for a special ceremonial jar of oil to burn completely away—and that takes about five minutes. If you pass . . ." Sin begins to walk away. He stops and looks at Kelly. "If you pass these tests, you will be handed this scepter and then will lead the tribe in a day-long feast on long pig." Sin's black robe swirls around him as he pivots sharply on his heel and leaves.

Britt waits until Sin is out of hearing distance.

"Do you think you're going to need more of these pills before you take on those men?" he asks Kelly.

Kelly shrugs as she unbuttons her blouse. "I really can't tell from the way I feel right now. But I don't think there's too much danger of an overdose after that encounter I had at the temple. The hormones

seem to metabolize fairly rapidly."

Britt kneels down and lifts up the corner of the mat. He unscrews the cap from the small vial and taps two of the six pills into her palm. He looks up at Kelly. She is balancing at this moment on her left foot as she steps out of her panties. She is slightly stooped over and reaching down to slip the tight panties over her heel of her uplifted foot. Her blouse lies crumpled on the floor and her breasts sway now as she leans over. Her thighs are smooth, and her

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taut, tan buttocks tantalizingly face Britt, who re-calls how satisfying her body was during his previous Mero assignment when he saved Kelly from the undead horror that dwelled in England's Stone-henge.

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Kelly's breasts are not overly large, but are perfectly formed, and pleasantly firm. Her dark, pink nipples are slightly contracted now, the tips aroused, hard and erect as she faces her male opponents here in the bamboo ring which was constructed this morning for this test by combat.

The ring is round, twenty feet in diameter, and made of yellow bamboo poles lashed together with strong green vines. The Amazons watch from the vantage of a catwalk they have constructed around the outside of the ring. They watch silently as the three men are slowly circling around Kelly's lone, nude female figure. Britt looks on, too. As the designated consort of the queen-elect, he is free and unfettered and permitted to watch.

Like awful animals, the naked men in the ring maneuver carefully around Kelly. Their bodies crouch, their muscles are coiled, arms open and ready, fingers extended like curved claws. Each male is over six feet tall and powerfully built. Huge muscles bunch hard on their upper backs and shoulders now as they begin to close in. They dart only the quickest of glances at Kelly's eyes, for they know the power that can pour out of Amazon eyes once they lock onto a man's.

Kelly is obviously not a warrior. Her moves are awkward and her strategy is poor. She has already allowed herself to be maneuvered into the center of the ring where she is now surrounded. Still . . . the men are very cautious. They know that Kelly is here ☺

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because she has in combat killed the second most potent of the warrior women.

The man behind Kelly suddenly lunges toward her. She hears him and whirls. He stops and steps back, but even as he does another of the three darts in. Kelly spins toward him and he, too, falls back. This fainting by the men is repeated several times. Kelly is clearly off balance and in trouble. The Amazons begin murmuring among themselves. They shake their heads, certain now that Kelly is going to be overpowered.

The men, too, appear to feel the same. They circle closer and closer . . . only a few feet away. Their testicles, which had been hanging loosely at the start of the contest, are now held tightly against their groins by the dark wrinkled skin of their contracted scrota. Slight erections pulse in their penises anticipating the uninhibited pleasure they will be allowed to take from this woman in a few moments when they overpower her.

Sin, who is standing beside Britt, turns his head toward him and grins with evil pleasure. "It would appear that your woman will be today's meal instead of today's queen!"

Britt does not reply. He is intent on the deadly, slow-motion ballet in the makeshift arena. / *wonder why Kelly doesn't strike . . . perhaps the pills take more time to build to PK levels and we didn't allow enough lead time for them to reach that level.* Britt's mind races and his muscles tighten as he decides what he must do to help Kelly.

One of the men lunges! Like a professional football player, he launches his body at her from the side, his huge shoulders striking her knees, knocking her legs from beneath her and flipping her delicate body into the air. Britt reacts, but finds himself restrained in an instant by many strong Amazon hands on his arms and throat.

Kelly twists in the air, her arms instinctively stretching out to break her face-down fall. Yet, even

as she touches the ground and rolls over to face the other two men, they are on her. One leaps on and straddles her chest, pinning her outstretched arms beneath his knees as his hand clamps tight around her throat and squeezes with consciousness-crushing power. Unable to lift her arms, unable to breathe because of the painful, powerful choking hands, Kelly still feels the second man "moving her legs apart, his arms sliding under her hips and lifting them as he kneels down between her thighs and prepares to penetrate her. Her chest cannot expand; she cannot breathe because of the choking hold on her throat.

She feels herself slipping into a deep, dark pool ... the black waters appear peaceful and quiet ... the sounds of the shrieking Amazons begin to fade as Kelly's consciousness drifts down toward the black waters and a lovely red ruby that glows deep in the depths. The ruby is slowly pulsing . . . it grows brighter! It grows larger and begins rising through the black water, pulsing faster, becoming brighter, growing larger and larger, faster and larger, until its rapid red pulsing fills her head and explodes out of her almost closed eyes.

Only a half-minute has passed since Kelly was seized by the men. Her weakly kicking legs have so far prevented the man between them from entering her. But now—even as he has his hard, pulsing penis aligned and ready to thrust, even as his hips begin their forward lunge—Kelly's eyes flash, and the head of the man on her chest suddenly snaps back as if hit by a sledgehammer. His brains explode in a bloody mass from his shattered skull and his backward blasted body bumps into his cohort behind. Quick as a cat, Kelly rolls to her feet, her face a mask of primordial ferocity that instantly focuses on the third man, who is charging at her. Her mouth grimaces in a silent snarl that bares her teeth at the instant that her brown eyes flash red again. Like a charging linebacker who is hit by an invisible

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car, the mighty man is stopped cold in midstride! His breath explodes from his crushed chest. A belch of thick blood rolls out of his opened mouth and splatters on the ground with the sound like the gore from a sword-stabbed bull in the ring at Tijuana. The remaining man recoils in terror and huddles cringing against the bamboo barrier.

The Amazons' grip on Britt's arms and legs melt away. They all stand in wide-eyed amazement of what they have seen and what they are feeling now: *fear* ... an emotion that has been alien to this tribe since time beyond time.

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The six-foot-long leaves of the wild banana trees wave gently in the midmorning breeze. Mountains of white cumulus clouds roll slowly through the crisp blue sunlit sky, and tell of afternoon rain that may cool the tropic temperatures.

Yet even as Britt and Kelly stroll along this green jungle trail, the already searing heat of this morning's equatorial sun does not reach them. It is pleasantly warm here in the deep shade of the rich tall trees ... cool and quiet.

"They were expecting that you would fight the men as an Amazon would." Britt says as they walk together. Britt wears a broad gold waistband from which hangs a leather breechclout. Kelly is adorned with the gold chain and skirt of gray and black harpy eagle feathers. "The primitive psychic power of the Amazons," Britt continues, "permits them to project debilitating terror into the minds of their opponents in battle. The Amazons, however, are incapable of psychokinetic blasts which both you and I have now demonstrated." Britt walks momentarily in silence. "I'm not sure that the fear they have for us is a good thing."

Kelly is massaging her temple with her fingertips as she walks beside Britt. He glances at her. "Your head still hurt?"

She nods. "Yes. And I still feel so weird. My brain feels like it's floating somewhere around outside my head. And my fingers and toes are tingling."

They stop. Britt puts his hand gently on her

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shoulder. "Don't you have any idea how long it will take for the effect of those hormone pills to wear off?"

"No," Kelly replies. "It always varied widely back in the experiments at Mero. The length of effectiveness seemed to vary with the degree of emotional activity in my subconscious."

Britt looks up at the tall trees. "It seems pretty obvious, Kelly, that subconscious emotions are still the trigger required to fire even your artificially induced psychokinetic power—just as with my naturally produced power. That same threat of death which ignites a body to surge with such force that a spirit can be 'welded' to a solid object is what triggers the PK blasts from our brains."

Kelly inhales deeply and exhales. "Let's walk some more. We have an hour or so before the formal coronation ceremony begins and it's so pleasant here surrounded by all the natural beauty of the jungle."

They walk slowly in thoughtful silence for several yards. Britt, too, feels spiritually renewed by the cool, green serenity and dignity of the plants and trees. " 'God's own temples,' " he murmurs.

"What?" asks Kelly.

"Oh," Britt replies languidly, "John Muir once said that the forests were God's first temples."

"How right he was," agrees Kelly. "Anything that humans have done since, even the great cathedrals, are poor by comparison. No matter how big a building humans construct, they cannot create one that is actually *alive*. I wonder what pleases the Creator more, the great cathedral of Notre Dame or the trees that have been planted on the streets around it?"

Britt smiles. "And think," he says, "of all the living trees that were destroyed to make way for that cathedral. You know, Muir also said that 'any fool can destroy trees. They cannot run away, and if they could, they would still be destroyed—chased and

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hunted down as long as a dollar could be got out their hides."

Kelly smiles warmly at Britt. The instant attraction that she felt when she met him on his previous assignment at Stonehenge had mellowed into a faint feeling of affection during her weeks away from him at Mero. Now that feeling grows a bit more as she learns that he shares her regard for all living things, in spite of the death-dealing business in which they have both become caught up. "I didn't know," she says softly, "that you had these kinds of feelings."

A wry, sad grin twists the corner of Britt's mouth as he glances at Kelly for an instant before his eyes return to the trees. He sighs. "What the hell," he says, "do you think keeps me going? I mean, look at the idiocy that swirls around us, and that we're caught up in. I've stopped asking myself 'What am I doing here?' when I'm on an assignment. There isn't any answer that satisfies me. I know that the work is necessary; that the work of Mero is perhaps the only hope the world has to prevent complete psychic enslavement by these military groups. But what the hell! What does the average person know or even care about the crud going on around him?"

"Or *her*," Kelly adds.

"Oh," says Britt as he retrieves his perspective from the morass of emotion, "every once in a while, especially after some mad mess like this assignment, I find myself depressed like this." He looks up at the stolid, silent trees. "There must be some type of intelligence in these plants, just as there is in all living things. Look at those vines there," says Britt, pointing to the thick, leafy ropes that run through almost every plant and tree they can see. "That's the *ayawasca* vine. It grows everywhere down here. It stitches this jungle together like the nerves of the human body. In fact, the natives have nicknamed it 'the nerves of the jungle.' They use the vine for many things, ranging from rope to dope. Vines are

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much like humans; although their roots are in one place, they roam far and wide."

"More and more research," says Kelly, "is showing that there is some sort of humanlike intelligence in plants. The same kind of great minds that believed the earth was round, and that led us to the moon, are today reaching out to plants and animals to communicate with the intelligence that the Creator has breathed into those life-forms. I only hope that the plants and animals aren't all murdered before we can reach them."

"I hope so, too, Kelly. Muir wasn't so hopeful, though. He pointed out that 'God has cared for trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches and a thousand tempests and floods—but he cannot save them from fools,' "

"But there *is* hope, Britt. Not only are some scientists already making the initial discoveries that will lead toward communication with plants, but others are finally beginning to unravel and understand how very much we humans depend on plants. Why, just before I left Los Angeles, I remember hearing a television newscaster commenting on the university report which explained that no matter how clean Detroit makes the exhaust from car engines, these engines will still be breathing in and burning the same oxygen that

human lungs need. And that at the same time the car is competing with us for oxygen, the search for oil to power the cars is destroying the trees and plant-life that provide us our oxygen. The university study said that one standard-sized car driving the fifty miles from Los Angeles to San Bernardino burns up as much oxygen as our lungs need to keep us alive for a 'year. Each fifty miles a car drives is taking a year's worth of life from its owner's lungs, while at the same time the prairies and forests needed to produce oxygen are being plowed up and paved over for roads. This search for oil beginning now in these Amazon jungles could destroy one of the last unexploited

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'lungs' of the world. Wouldn't it be ironic if the world's last breath were taken by a *machine*?"

Kelly abruptly stops talking and walking. She stands still, listening and staring at something in the air behind Britt.

"What is it?" asks Britt. His head turns to follow the line of her sight over Ms shoulder and above the trees. "It's only smoke," he says as he spots the black column which is billowing up from the nearby forest. "That work party of males who passed us on the trail just as we left the village is probably burn-ing off some of the forest to create a field for plant-ing crops. That's the traditional farming method down here." He turns again to Kelly and is puzzled to see her standing there with her hands pressed tightly over her ears and tears streaming down from her pain-filled eyes.

"They're screaming, Britt! Listen to the screams!"

"Who's screaming, Kelly? Who? I don't hear a thing!"

She starts to run toward the smoke, but Britt grabs her right wrist and holds her in his steel grip. "Who's screaming, Kelly?"

Crying and sobbing, she pulls frantically to free herself. "The trees! The plants! They're being burned to death! Listen to them screaming! I have to help them!"

Britt's grip loosens and Kelly sprints away. *She must still be highly sensitized by those pills, and is receiving some kind of message from the plants*, Britt realizes as he runs to follow her.

As she runs, Kelly's perfect thighs flash in the mottled sunlight that streams down through the high lacy canopy of *mapacu* leaves. For the briefest in-stant, the beauty of her running through this prime-val forest freezes an image in Britt's mind of what it must have been like as Adam and Eve frolicked in an unpaved paradise. But the imagery evap-orates in an eyeblink as Britt breaks into a clearing only a step behind Kelly. Across the. brush-clogged

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clearing, flames swirl around the green undergrowth, devouring its life. At the eastern edge of the area, one of the magnificent *mapacu* trees seems to tremble in terror as flames lick at its trunk like sinis-ter snakes.

"Stop it! Stop it!" Kelly shrieks at the surprised castrated males and their Amazon guards. Kelly seizes a piece of burlaplike cloth in which the farm-ing crew's lunch had been wrapped and she begins beating down the flames in a frenzy.

The crew and the guards don't understand what Kelly has said, but they immediately begin imitating her actions, beating the flames with branches and shoveling and kicking dirt on smoldering shrubs. They, too, work in a frenzy, fearful of incurring the deadly wrath of their new queen-elect by not putting out the fires fast enough.

In less than five minutes, the last flicker of flame is gone. The last of the black smoke disappears into the air. The clearing looks like a silent battlefield ... sweaty, sooty humans stand exhausted, coughing and choking among the smoldering skeletons of bushes and plants.

"Get out of here!" Kelly cries with a sweep of her arm that sends her subjects scurrying out of the clearing and onto the trail back to the village.

Britt drops the shovel he had been using to toss dirt od the flames. He walks to Kelly's side, puts his arms around her shoulders and gently removes the blackened burlap cloth from her trembling hand. She is weeping and gasping for breath at the same time, and almost choking on the acrid air that hangs here above the dead plants and blackened earth. Her knees begin to buckle, and Britt slips his other arm under her elbow for support. He leads her to the shade of the giant *mapacu* that has been saved.

"Here. Sit down and rest for a few minutes." Her head lolls back against the trunk of the tree. A strange, serene smile flows across her lips and her

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eyes look up at the waving green leaves. She nods as it she is listening to some silent voice of gratitude.

Britt tosses a look over his shoulder. "I had been planning that we would escape after the coronation, when your

leadership was confirmed, and you could simply order a party to take us to Brasilia. But this fire thing worries me, Kelly." He looks up into the air where the last wisps of smoke are evaporating. "Oh the one hand, when that work party gets back to the village, the rest of the tribe is going to be quite concerned that their queen-elect won't permit the fires they have traditionally relied on for clearing farm land. And on the other hand, many others could have seen that smoke and located this village. If so, I hope the smoke was spotted by John and the others—and not by Furtado's army and the CIA."

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"It's gone!"

John's words give unnecessary voice to what he, Greg and Karl all realize at this moment. "The smoke is gone. First, Karl loses his ESP reception from Britt and Kelly, and next the smoke is gone, too. What do we do now?"

The three men have stopped their rush through the jungle along this hot, narrow trail. Their hearts are pounding from the exertion, and beads of oily sweat stand out on each man's brow. The rising heat and humidity of the equatorial noon is now reaching down through the trees. The invisible energy of the sun's cosmic rays is taxing the ability of their bodies to keep cool.

Sweat trickles down into Greg's bushy black eye-brows and he wipes it away with a quick swipe of Ms damp, hairy forearm. "Well," he says, "I think we can be pretty certain that Britt and Kelly are somehow connected with the source of that smoke, since Karl's ESP and this trail were guiding us in that direction. I haven't seen even one other trail leading off this path, so I'll bet if we continue following it, we will come out at or near the source of the fire. What do you think, Karl?"

"*Ja, I agree,*" the huge man answers. "Whatever the danger was with Kelly and Britt, it has passed. They must be out of danger and well, too, for I didn't receive any indication that their psyches had surged beyond brain tolerance levels which would indicate the death of their physical bodies."

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"How far away do you figure we are from the spot where the smoke was coming from?" John asks Greg.

"I'd say about twenty-five or thirty minutes," Greg estimates.

Suddenly, Karl raises his huge hand. The little group freezes. Standing death-still, scarcely breathing, they listen. ...

At first, there are only the sounds of the late morning jungle . . . quietly buzzing insects . . . an occasional scream of a monkey that is not satisfied with its napping site as the pack sleepily settles down with bulging bellies after the morning's feed-ing.

Now . . . very lightly, they can feel it . . . a puls-ing pressure in the air. Gradually the feeling can be heard . . . quiet, high and far away, but coming closer: *whup-whup-whup* ...

John's eyes snap to each of the others. "Helicop-ters!" he whispers. They listen again, and so does the rest of the suddenly silent jungle. The only sound is this growing throb of the rotor blades.

"Sounds like Huey gunships," says Greg. "We'd better get moving. Furtado's troops must have spotted the smoke, too, and are on the way to inves-tigate."

"Karl? Karl, are you OK?" John asks. His concern is prompted by the strange, confused and painful expression that twists Karl's already craggy features.

"I . . . I don't understand," Karl stammers. "The danger I detected from Britt and Kelly when we were back at the temple passed so suddenly and was replaced by such a strange peacefulness coming from their subconscious psyches. But now—now I am again experiencing that fear of deadly danger. It makes no sense. How can the output of their psyches vary so quickly from one extreme to an-other?"

"There's no time now," Greg urges, "for us to try

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to figure it out. Since that fire's no longer burning, those helicopters may have some problems locating anything down below this canopy of trees. We've at least got the trail to follow; maybe we can still beat them to wherever Britt and Kelly are. Let's go!"

Like tiny, ghostly moths, two small white dots dart out of the underbrush, They strike simultane-ously. One hurls itself against Britt's back as he kneels beside Kelly, and it sticks there in the muscle between his shoulder blades. The other flashes quickly and silently past him and bites into Kelly's bare breast just above her soft nipple.

Britt's back arches in instant reflex to the sharp stab, and Kelly's hand snaps quickly toward the dart on her as she would react to strike an annoying in-sect.

But it is already too late for either man or woman—the nerve drug has already chemically blocked the synaptic nerve link of their intellects to their bodies.

Britt's body sags drunkenly to the ground. His vision is swimming and blurred, and he can only just make out the sight of Kelly's head lolling on her chest. But Britt's tremendous willpower strains to re-route some of the messages that are trying to reach his brain. By using cerebral circuitry which humans have not relied on since the evolutionary ascendance of the cortex, Britt's conscious self manages to mon-itor what is happening.

That dart in Kelly's breast ... the white feathers ... it is just like the one that Kim Sin shot into me. Wait! Who's coming? A few yards to the left, the underbrush from which the darts had flown begins to part. Britt's conscious self compels its sluggishly obeying body up onto its knees. With supreme men-134

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tal effort, he even manages to plant one foot firmly on the ground before a feminine foot savagely strikes him in the jaw and sends him sprawling into the dust.

Britt rolls onto his back. The face that sneers down at him is Sin's, and behind the creature are several of the woman warriors.

"You continue -to amaze me, Dr. St. Vincent. First, your truly impressive display of natural psy-chic powers, and now this demonstration of pure mental mastery over an electrochemical machine that should not have been able to respond to the in-tellect it carries in its skull. .Very impressive." He arches an eyebrow and looks down at Kelly. "Im-pressive, too, is the progress that your Mero Insti-tute labs have made in developing chemical control of man's ancient psychic powers."

Through the pain and the haze, Britt can see Sin fingering the vial of pills that had been hidden beneath the mat in the hut.

"You see, Dr. St. Vincent, I knew as soon as I found these pills what this young lady here had done. When the farming crew came running back breathless with the story of the strange behavior your accomplice had exhibited here, I showed the tribal women these pills. I had no trouble at all con-vincing them that they had been tricked by white man's magic."

Sin holds the pills in his fingertips and grins as he looks at them. Suddenly, with a sideward swipe of his arm he tosses the pill vial to the ground. Britt can only watch helplessly as the plastic tube hits the dust and rolls beneath the leafy tendril of one of the silent, watching *ayawasca* vines.

Sin's face reflects smug satisfaction as he looks down at Britt. "You and this female were to be the honored guests at the great feast which is already being prepared. Now, you will be *part* of the feast!" His evil black eyes snap toward his obedient warrior women. "Bring them!" he barks.

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The rough grasps of the warriors only vaguely reach Britt's brain across the nerve gap that is blocked by the drug. Trapped deep in the prison of its physical body, Britt's intellectual self is rapidly searching a myriad of alternatives which might provide some hope of escape.

"You see," Sin explains as he watches Kelly and Britt being bound by their wrists and ankles to car-rying poles like freshly captured game, "these Amazons still envy the physical strength of the male body. The testicles of the males they castrate in battle or ceremonies are always mashed and boiled into a bloody soup. The Amazons drink it in the be-lief that the brew will impart masculine strength to them. Some captured males are also roasted and eaten for the same reason. The CIA agent was to have been the main

who had placed the pot on the ground. Now the woman between Kelly's thighs holds the remaining razor erect in her left hand and dips her right hand into the pot.

Kelly's firm stomach muscles contract at the sud-den splash of the cold soapy water onto her vagina. She struggles to sit up, but the others pin her wrists to the ground with their knees.

Britt can feel the drug wearing off more and more, but he knows it isn't fading fast enough. Even now he can barely lift his arms, and has far from the strength he would need to try to break the thick cords that firmly bind his wrists and ankles. He can only watch helplessly as the razor-wielding woman leans forward and begins to shave Kelly's hair. She splashes more soapy water on Kelly's groin and rubs the mixture into the hair to create a lather. Kelly's body writhes in response to the Amazon's fingers in this sensitive area, and the Amazon takes a perverse moment of pleasure by massaging her prisoner in such a sensuous manner that Kelly's vaginal lips swell with blood, unfolding and expanding like a blossoming pink flower.

Sin says something to the woman and she imme-diately stops. Cold water tossed on Kelly's hungry lips sends a jolt through her body again. The shaving proceeds swiftly. The gleaming blade of the fast-moving knife reflects explosive flashes of the sunlight that are filtering down through the thin can-op of branches high above the village.

Britt struggles harder at his bonds now and is an-noyed by the tickling touch of a vine which brushes again and again against his face.

One tiny but brilliant flash of reflected sunlight glances up off the blade, escapes the grasping branches and rockets free into the sky. In less than an eyeblink it travels high and more than a mile from the village, to stab into a sinister, searching sil-ver eye.

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A black-gloved hand adjusts the silver-mirrored flight goggles.

A leather-sheathed finger points toward where the flash had come from. The white helmet of the nearby gunner nods, looking like a robot with a dark plastic shield in place of a face.

Like a flock of mechanical pterodactyls pouncing on some prehistoric prey, the helicopters turn tightly toward the spot, their rotors chopping the air as they strain through a steep banking dive.

The entire village falls silent. All movement stops. Eyes turn to the skies.

Britt's steadily reawakening body hears the sound he learned to hate so much in Vietnam. *Helicopters!* his consciousness calls out even before the first black form swoops only inches above the treetops. The rapid chop of the rotors is loud and painful. Copter after copter swoops over the village with blades blasting great quantities of leaves from the tree branches, which had so long shielded this site from earlier air searches. Children scream in terror, and some Amazons respond to an instinct even greater than their psychic breeding—they open their arms protectively over the panicked children and be-gin herding the youngsters out of the village's cen-tral open area and into the shelter of the surround-ing jungle.

Strength now grows in Britt's arms and legs with each more rapid beat of his heart. Hot blood courses through his system, and he can feel it squirting 140

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through the veins which bulge taut beneath the skin of Ms skull and forehead. He strains at his bonds as the Amazons abandon Kelly, and him and run for their weapons.

"Come back!" shouts Sin. He runs after the women. "Come back! I command you!" But they pay him no heed and are running across the cleared circular area, which is now completely open to the sky beneath the leaf-bare branches that stretch like black veins against the blue sky. The brave war-riors are intent on seizing their crude bows and spears and blowguns to fight off these mechanical eagles from the technological outer world. Sin dashes madly among the warriors, grabbing one or another by the arm in a futile attempt to warn them that their primitive weapons will have no effect on these modern murder machines.

Goddamn cords are too strong! Britt drops his head back hard onto the ground after another futile strain to free himself. *What the hell!* The sight he sees freezes his mind for an instant. The vial of vital pills

which Sin had tossed into the jungle more than a half-mile distant are now slowly approaching Britt along the ground, held tight in the tendril of an *ayawasca* vine!

Britt's self can hardly accept what his eyes are feeding into his brain. His amazed intellect sits in the dark control-room interior of his skull and ponders the reality being transmitted to it from his vision organs. *My God! It's alive! Alive! How arrogant of me! Of course it's alive! All plants are living creatures. But it is intelligent too!* Britt's mind can't find words for the rest of the realization that sweeps through his psyche in a tidal wave of revelation.

The multi-tendriled tip of the vine is inching its way along the ground like a green snake. One of the tough curling tendrils holds the cap of the vial; two others are tightly wrapped around the plastic vial itself. The oval white pills jiggle slightly as they are carried carefully along.

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Britt's attention is distracted for an instant as an immense shadow sweeps over him. He looks up in time to see the tube, which protrudes beneath the nose of the lead attacking chopper, suddenly spit out a stream of small black specks, like a person spitting out watermelon seeds. *Grenade launcher*, Britt recalls automatically from his green beret days, in seeming slow motion the specks arc to the ground and explode in a trail of dusty eruptions that march across the central clearing of the circular village. He can see running Amazons screaming, spinning and spilling to the ground as grenade shrapnel chews into their flesh. The noise of the choppers, the sounds of the explosions, the screams, the shouts, the smell of gunsmoke and death reawaken the old rage in Britt. He pulls at the cords on his wrists until blood oozes out of his raw flesh. "Come on! Come on!" he growls at the vine. This talking to a plant and knowing it understands—a reality which only moments earlier Britt didn't believe possible—now seems perfectly normal.

Britt stretches Ms neck as far as he can and even extends his tongue to its limits from his wide-open mouth, so eager is his enraged and feverish body to suck the power from those approaching pills.

Britt doesn't see Sin rising from the dust of the battle in the center of the village. The hermaphrodite stands up unsteadily and shakes Ms hand to clear his blast-blurred vision. Through the smoke and dust and darting warriors, Sin's vision zeros in on the incredible scene between Britt and the vine. Sin's hatred is so great that he pauses not even a nanosecond to marvel at the wonder he perceives. He pries a bloody machete from the hand of a dead Amazon and staggers toward the still-bound figure of Britt.

Britt sees the approaching danger and lunges with such physical force at the vial that the thick bamboo pole to which he is tied snaps like a stick. His teeth lock tight onto the tube and he turns his face up,

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pouring the pills into his mouth and forcing them down dry with his tongue.

Britt's pounding, racing heart instantly circulates the superdose of hormones throughout his body and brain. Reality erupts around him in a surge of hell-fire heat. The cords seem to melt from his wrists as his muscles flex with ancient energy. The flat slabs of steel-like muscle on Britt's back ripple beneath his tight sweaty skin as his hand reaches down, seizes and rips apart the bindings around his ankles. Instantly he is on his feet, crouched forward, veins blue and bulging over crisp, tight muscles that seem ready to launch him like a naked ape at the mad-man rushing toward him now with the sharp machete.

"AAAAAAAAARRRRRRRRRRGGGH!" The bellow blasts from Britt's lungs with such incredible power that the whole scene—helicopters, Amazons, explosions and spears—seems frozen in time for an eternal instant. But this bellow is only the sound that signals the primordial power which vents like invisible lava from the depths of Britt's cosmic-linked soul. It is power that transcends time. Like deafening thunder rolling through the sky, the crushing wave of psychic energy collides with the charging Sin; it hits him like a speeding locomotive with such force that his body is shattered to bloody bits which toss and tumble in all directions. And the incredible psychic impulse rolls on like a tidal wave across the village, flattening the bamboo arena as if it were made of matchsticks, and leveling Sin's hut in a whirlwind of thatch and bamboo beams.

Everywhere now there are flames and smoke, bodies and blood and the rapid whopping, chopping throb of the attacking helicopters. The hideous death machines reel and dive from all directions, intent on annihilating the Amazons. A trail of machine-gun slugs suddenly stitches toward where the flaming psyche of Britt stands beside the pros-trate Kelly.

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Chupchupchup! The slugs burrow into the earth by Britt's feet. He looks down through the dust and sees rich red blood oozing from Kelly's temple. Britt's instant reaction is a mental leap into the skies to battle these birds. His wilful desire is expressed as a series of mighty psychic surges which pulse from his boiling brain and are aimed by his eyes at the machines in the skies.

Ka-rump! The first helicopter to be hit is lifted up by the force of Britt's blast and breaks in the middle. Yet

even before both crazily spinning halves can begin to fall, a second chopper is shattered by the energy which rapidly pulses from Britt's eyes to rake the skies.

Again and again the silent thunder of the stars boils up from Britt's hormone-fueled metabolic furnace. One by one as fast as the clock ticks the heli-copters are smashed to flaming bits; they are still fluttering to the ground now as Britt suddenly sags to his knees beside Kelly's bloody body.

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Ka-rumph! Whumph! Whumph!

"Those are the worst series of explosions yet," shouts John to the men running just ahead of him. At the first sounds of battle minutes ago, John, Karl and Greg broke into a run to try to reach the site of the fight and help Britt and Kelly if they could.

"Someone is coming!" calls Karl. His long strong strides have carried him out in front of his friends.

Almost before his words are out of his mouth, three Amazon warriors who are fleeing the mayhem behind them appear around the bend in the jungle trail. Instinctively, they raise their spears and stare savagely into Karl's eyes, but their primitive powers that for ages have worked so well on the jungle Indians are ineffective on this psychically gifted German.

Karl's almost seven-foot size is imposing, too, and his eyes are afire with his own anger at finding the path blocked between himself and Britt and Kelly.

Confused at the ineffectiveness of their power on this giant and in near shock from the impact of the death and destruction they are fleeing, the Amazons drop their spears and disappear in different directions into the jungle.

With absolutely no attempt to pursue them, Karl springs forward again down the trail. Automatically, John and Greg follow his flying footsteps. As they run, each is thinking about the suddenly ominous silence that washes through the jungle in the wake of what sounded like a small war. The birds and an-

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imals are quiet and quivering in their hiding places. The pounding of their own footsteps is the only sound the men hear as they charge onward.

"Good God." The words are whispered reverently from Greg's lips as he breaks into the clearing and stops beside Karl. John, too, stops and stands, mouth open and amazed, hardly breathing in spite of the run and his thudding heart.

The clearing is a graveyard of smoking skeletons of burned-out huts. Dark red flames swirl fierce and hot from the fiery fuel burning aboard the crashed helicopters. Bloody bodies and debris lie scattered everywhere.

"*Sei mal an!*" calls Karl, unconsciously reverting to his native tongue. John and Greg look quickly in the direction that he is pointing.

There, on the opposite side of the smoldering village, Britt and Kelly are busy bandaging some of the small group of surviving women and children who huddle around them.

"Here come our rescuers," Britt says to Kelly as he looks up and sees the three Mero men. The formerly formidable Amazons have been so shaken by the death-dealing technology which has rained down upon them that they recoil and huddle in fear of the rapidly approaching white men. Britt calms the group with words and gestures. Kelly picks up a crying baby and comforts him on her soft shoulder.

"My God—what a sight!" exclaims Greg breathlessly as he and his companions arrive. "This looks just like the aftermath of a battle in Vietnam."

"Well, there'll be plenty more scenes like this down here," Britt states, "if we don't figure out how to stop the CIA from staging a phony revolution against Furtado and getting the U.S. to intervene."

His friends look puzzled.

"I'll explain all that later. First, tell me if we can get to our radio equipment to send a message to Dr. Webster at Mero. Kim Sin bragged to me that he had the word spread in Brasilia that our team was

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responsible for the castrations of the senators. Something in the back of my mind kept me thinking that you yourselves wouldn't be captured ... but what about the radio?"

"It's safe," says John. "We left it in the temple on top of the pyramid. But the streets of Brasilia are crawling with troops who are looking for any and all of us. We can be at the temple in a couple of hours. Is Kelly well enough to travel?"

Kelly, wearing a magnificent spotted jaguar robe around her body and a bloodstained white bandage around her head, answers, "Yes, this was only a small scalp wound from a sliver of machine-gun slug. It looks worse than it is. I'm going to stay here, though. These woman and children have been violently

blasted into our twentieth century. They're dazed and injured. They know now that their crude psychic powers are no protection from the electronic and mechanical death that is dealt out by modern armies. They're frightened and need help."

"Right," John agrees. "There's one organization here in Brazil which seems to remain above politics and can help—the National Foundation for the Indian, known as FUNAI. They've done a fantastic job with lost prehistoric tribes like the Kreen-Ak-arore and other Stone Age people who are being discovered as modern-day roads begin to penetrate the interior of the Amazon jungle."

"Good," says Britt. He tightens the beaded belt of the Indian-style leather breeches he has put on. "John, you and Greg remain here with Kelly. There's no purpose to be served by all of us risking our necks to send that message. Karl and I can handle it."

John nods. "OK, then. If you're not back by morning, we are going to start out for the FUNAI camp in the Xingu National Park."

"In the meanwhile," Britt says, "I've told Kelly all I've learned about what the CIA is doing down here. She can fill you in. If we don't return, you

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must get the information to Dr. Webster so he can start a public information campaign through his newspaper publishing friends that will tell Americans of the real situation down here before the CIA can convince everyone otherwise."

Britt looks at Kelly. The head of the small boy is cuddled on her shoulder; she's gently, reassuringly, patting his heaving back as his sobs subside. She smiles at Britt. For only a fleeting second—which seems like an eternity—their eyes meet and a human vibration passes between them that is more powerful than any psychic energy.

Britt abruptly turns. "Come on, Karl."

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"Do you think it was the army, Karl?"

"*Nein*," the man answers. The leaves through which he is peering cast a mottled pattern of shadows across his craggy, sweaty face. "My senses were sharp and receptive when we were here earlier and I detected no one following Greg—although I did feel the presence of something ... something strange ... evil."

"Perhaps," Karl speculates as he scans the clearing before the pyramid from their hiding place in the jungle fringe, "the followers of Tapajos were the ones responsible for what we see now."

Britt shakes his head. "No ... that temple on top is a restricted place where only a high priest like Tapajos himself could go without fear of being devoured by demons, according to the *macumba* religion. In any case, I think his superstitious followers would have been frightened away by the sight of that dead Amazon lying out there halfway up the steps."

Both men scan the surrounding jungle once more, but see no signs and hear no sounds that anyone else has been or is in the vicinity. Almost simultaneously, they turn their eyes upward again, toward the sight that has caused them to pause here: the roof which had been over the small temple atop the pyramid has collapsed onto the temple. Several of the thick red terra cotta tiles from the roof lie scattered and broken on the steep steps and slanted sides of the granite pyramid.

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"Well," says Britt as he rises from the cover and pushes through the sheltering branches, "we aren't going to guess what happened up there, or who did it. Let's take a look and see if the radio is there and workable."

The decaying granite crunches beneath their feet as they ascend the steps. The climb is steep, the steps high and narrow. Britt's legs, already tired from the two-hour jog from the ruined Amazon village, begin to burn almost immediately.

A third of the way up, both men stop to catch their breath.

Britt looks down at the vines and grasses which are growing out of every crevice in the steps, splitting the mighty granite—the start of the ages-long process by which the patient plants reduce man's mightiest monuments to rubble and reclaim the earth. Britt knows that he'll never again be able to look at even a blade of grass in a crack in the sidewalk without seeing the profound procedure that is happening.

Now, as if on signal, Britt and Karl resume their climb . . . up past the silent, staring corpse of the Amazon ... kicking aside a scattering of tiles from the fallen roof ... up, up they continue, forcing their burning thigh muscles to lift their bodies up each difficult step.

"Whew!" says Britt, panting stale air explosively through his mouth as they arrive at the edge of the collapsed roof. For almost a full minute, he and Karl inhale and exhale deeply, catching their breath. Thick, sour saliva wells up in their open mouths as they gasp for breath, and both men must spit several times.

"It may have been an earthquake," Karl offers as a possible reason for what has caused the collapse of the covering over the small temple area.

"Possibly, but do you notice something strange?"

Karl's piercing brown eyes narrow as he concentrates on looking for some detail that is out of place.

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"Yes ... yes, there's something ... but I can't quite say what it is."

"The supporting columns," answers Britt. "Those eaglelike gargoyles carved out of granite that held up the roof ... unless they all somehow fell inward and are under the roof, they're gone! It almost makes me believe what Kelly mentioned about a spear sticking into one of them and drawing blood."

"But it is true, *mein Freund*," Karl says solemnly. "Greg, John and I saw it too, when we came up here with the radio."

Britt's disbelief is reflected on his face as he looks at his companion's eyes. Slowly, however, Britt's eyes turn back toward the roof. He is thinking about what lies beneath this heavy lid ... thinking about the details of *macumba* legend that he had studied prior to starting this assignment. "Come on, Karl," he suddenly says. "Let's get this roof off and see if the radio is still working."

Even though it is only ten-feet square, the roof is made of big bamboo beams with a thick covering of clay tiles. It weighs many hundreds of pounds. At first, the men study the problem. Karl's large powerful fingers wrap around a beam that protrudes from the front edge of the fallen structure. He tugs and twists at it. Three of the thick, heavy tiles slide off the small peaked roof and slide down the steep side of the pyramid, breaking like glass and scattering fragments down to the distant ground.

"Uh! There!" Karl says as the bamboo pole suddenly comes free. The strong, heavy pole is about six inches in diameter, and ten feet long.

Britt immediately recognizes Karl's plan. No words are spoken, but both men work together as a team. Karl, who is much taller and physically stronger than Britt, kneels on one knee and places one end of the beam on his right shoulder while Britt pushes the other end firmly under the edge of the collapsed roof. Next, Britt moves back to the middle of the pole. He eases down onto his left knee and

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places his left shoulder beneath the sturdy bamboo lever.

"On three," he calls to Karl. "One ... two ... three!" Their bodies suddenly stiffen under the strain of trying to rise. Legs tremble, veins stand out thick and blue on their tanned throats and foreheads.

Small soft cracking sounds indicate the stress borne by the bamboo. *Hope it holds up*, Britt thinks. *Just a little more. The roof sounds like it's beginning to slide.*

A gritty grating sound encourages the men to force their straining muscles a little longer, to try to lift the pole a little higher. Suddenly the roof slips sideways several inches.

"Come on, Karl," gasps Britt as both men together begin lifting the lever off their shoulders to increase its angle and keep the heavy roof moving. Like Olympic weight lifters, they slowly extend their arms upward, their triceps and trapezoids bulging and hard and sharply outlined beneath the taut, sweaty skin of their shoulders and arms.

The grinding and cracking grows louder. The roof begins to slide easier, faster, off the temple area like the lid sliding away from a long-unopened coffin.

Now the pressure eases off the beam as the heavy roof begins to tilt. Tiles tumble, framework poles creak and crack, and the gritty grating grows louder. For an instant the structure teeters, but Karl moves quickly. With all his incredible strength, he shoves the pole deep under the roof shell. Ponderously, the heavy structure slips over the edge and starts down the high steep side of the pyramid. Grinding and crashing, tossing shattered tiles like shrapnel, the mass picks up speed and skids and skips faster and faster down like an avalanche until it explodes in the dust at the bottom.

"Good job, Karl," says Britt as the men look down at the spreading mushroom of dust around the silent mound of debris that once was the roof of this

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small temple. "But look at that," Britt adds, turning his attention to the radio equipment.

"Ach!" Karl curses at the sight of the smashed electronics. "It is useless. What shall we do now?"

Britt doesn't answer. He glances down and picks his way across the clutter of broken tiles to look over

the back edge of the pyramid. He turns to Karl. "The gargoyles weren't under the roof ... and I don't see any sign of them having fallen down here either." At first, Britt assumes Karl's brow is wrin- kling in puzzlement over the mystery of the vanished granite gargoyles, but in seconds it is evident that something else is wrong.

"I ... I have that feeling again, Britt. There is something here ... some *presence*."

"I knew that the computer back at Mero was right about this haunting!" says Britt, solidly smack-ing his right fist into the palm of his other hand. "If only I had our spirit communication device, I'm cer- tain we could make contact." He looks down at the debris-littered floor of this ancient temple. "Perhaps there is some blood on the sacrificial slab over there. If Furtado's men did cut out Tapajos' heart here, they may have done it on that slab."

"No," says Karl in a near whisper. His head is tilted and he seems to be listening. Britt knows that his friend is listening with a sense that most men have lost the use of.

"Here," Karl says and nods toward the center of the floor. He drops to his knees and with his huge hands begins sweeping away the dried leaves and rubble. "Look."

Britt quickly squats down beside his teammate. "It looks like some kind of trapdoor, Karl. The an- cient Inca priests who built this temple used trapdoors like this to impress their naive followers with tricks that made it look like they could de-materialize and vanish."

Even as Britt speaks, Karl's tough fingers are probing the crumbly grout around the edge of the

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stone door, feeling for a place to lift. He's found a hold now and quickly works his fingers beneath the edge of the ancient stone. "Do you see what I see?" asks Britt. Karl nods. "Yes, it appears that this stone was lifted not long ago,"

"Here, let me give you a hand, Karl." Together the men hook their fingers beneath one end of the dusty slab. It is heavy and the strain shows on their faces as they rock backward on their haunches and lift.

"It's coming, Karl..."

The stone slowly rises, and as a small space opens around its edge, an invisible coldness escapes from the blackness beneath. The coldness is accompanied by the smell of dampness and death which contrasts with the warm sunlight on their backs. It's as if they are opening the door to another world.

"Phew!" says Britt, turning his face as much as possible from the smell. Karl says nothing, but even his stoic German face reflects his revulsion at the gut-wrenching stench escaping from the black hole.

"Just a little more ... a little more," Britt grunts. The heavy slab rises more and more.

"Jesus!" Britt exclaims softly. Karl just shakes his head at the sight which slowly comes to light beneath the rising stone.

"It must be Tapajos' body, Karl." The black-brown corpse is standing in the narrow shaft they have uncovered. The vertical opening is only just wide enough to fit a human body so that the corpse is in a standing position with its arms up and folded over its head.

"Look at this, Britt," says Karl as they lift the stone all the way back off the opening and lay it on the ground.

"Scratches!" whispers Britt, looking at the marks scraped in the slime on the unturned underside of the stone. "He must have been buried in there *alive*." Britt glances down at the shriveled arms of

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the corpse and notices the broken nails on the fin- gers. "Of course ... it all fits. Furtado's soldiers pursued Tapajos up here, but were still afraid to kill a *macumba* high priest. According to *macumba* be- liefs, the spirit of anyone buried alive is not free. They must have stuffed him alive into this shaft in the belief that since his spirit would be trapped here, too, they would, not have to fear its seeking revenge. Since they needed something to convince Furtado that they had killed Tapajos, they must have brought back the heart of some peasant they killed in the jungle."

Britt squats down and examines the corpse. "The coolness in this stone shaft has preserved the body reasonably well. There's not too much rotting of the flesh. I'm certain, Karl, that the soul of this man is indeed still trapped inside this body and is what you have sensed. This shows how very correct are an- cient beliefs like this one of burying a person alive to trap his soul. It also fits right into Mero's findings that during an emotional surge, such as a person who is buried alive must experience in his struggle to escape, the soul can become ensnared. I'm certain that if we had my equipment, we could have contact- ed Tapajos' spirit and bargained for the information we seek in exchange for its freedom."

Britt pauses for several seconds and seems to be thinking about something. "Karl, I don't like to leave any spirit trapped like this, no matter how evil it might be. And I've just got an idea of how we can both set

this soul free and upset the CIA plans with-out waiting to get a message to Mero. Come on. Help me get this body out of the shaft."

Karl seems reluctant to reach down into' the hole and touch the corpse,

"I don't think there's anything to worry about, Karl. Evil as Tapajos might be, I think his spirit knows that we are helping it to break free of its en-snarement in this rotting corpse, and at the same time helping to put Furtado out of business."

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"*Mein Freund*," Karl says solemnly. "When John, Greg and I first came up here this morning, I sensed the presence of something I had never experienced before, a feeling which drifted through my soul with the same effect that the smell from this corpse is now in my nostrils. It was *evil*. It was *death*, death beyond that of the body . . . death of the soul. Now look around us. What is happening here? Where are those gargoyles?" Karl points at his own eyes. "I myself saw that spear stuck into the stone eagle and the blood running from the wound! I know of nothing in Mero's hard, scientific research of theo-ries about the spiritual side of life that attempts to explain something like that, do you"

"No, Karl," admits Britt, "I don't, but look at those numbers tattooed on your wrist. Do you know any explanation for the evil which can possess a soul to create a Hitler who brands children and sends them into ovens? All I know, Karl, is that the essence of evil exists and is as much a part of the natural forces in us and around us as are the stars and the air we breathe. Evil is the test of the intel-lect, the fire that molds the self, the mirror that pro-vides our free will with the choice between what is ugly and what is good. The power of the evil essence that may possess this soul cannot possess *ours* unless we ourselves permit it to. It can, how-ever, do great harm to our physical persons, but that is a risk we assumed already when we began this work. We have a good chance right now to prevent an immense amount of suffering if we can stop the CIA and Furtado. Are you willing to take the risk for those stakes?"

Without a word, Karl begins to reach down for the corpse.

Britt reaches out and grasps Karl's wrist, prevent-ing him for the moment from actually touching the cold, clammy flesh. "The risk is here, Karl, but I don't think that Tapajos' spirit will concern itself

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with harming us. Right now, *we* are his only hope of escaping this trap."

Karl nods. Britt releases his wrist and together they reach down into the damp shaft.

A chill shoots through both Britt and Karl as they first touch the cold corpse. The flesh, although fairly well preserved by the coolness of this unusual grave, is nonetheless on the verge of decay. Small pieces of it fall off gray and jellylike at the pressure of their fingers as they slide their hands beneath the uplifted arms and begin to pull the body up.

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, Black figures shift silently in the night-shrouded shadows of the shanties which crowd the curbs here in the foul-smelling *favela*—those sullen slums that surround gleaming central Brasilia.

Whispering which is as soft as breathing drifts through the dark air along with an emotional elec-tric tension.

Already the distant heart of Brasilia is beginning to throb with Mardi Gras sounds. The downtown marble high-rise buildings glow like silver shafts in the black evening sky, but here hi the slums where Britt and Karl slowly carry the corpse of Tapajos, there are no lights, no music ... only the crunch of their steps and the soft scraping of the corpse's de- caying feet dragging in the gravel of the street. The cold, sticky rotting arms are draped around the necks of Karl and Britt as they bear the body along.

"Just keep walking, Karl," Britt cautions in hushed tones. "They will let us know soon enough where they want us to go."

The murmuring from the shadows gradually grows. The shadows swell closer with the gathering crowds of poor, oppressed *favelados*. Suddenly and silently the shadows close in front of Karl and Britt, blocking their way. The two men stop and wait with their awful burden hanging between them.

The walls of shadows become a black silhouette of massed human forms as torches approach from behind it. The wall parts in the middle, revealing to Britt's alert eyes the sight of a stern, strong man 158

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whose brown skin has been dyed blood red with paint mixed from the *urucu* plant and human spit. He

wears a small black skullcap.

"He must have been Tapajos' mystic," Britt whis-pers to Karl. "He is dressed tonight to look like the most feared of the *macumba* gods of evil—*Exu*."

Flames from the torches held by the two men on either side of this *macumba* mystic cast strange moving shadows on his face, and the flames reflect in Ms eyes as if there were hell-fire in his head.

The head nods.

Instinctively, Karl and Britt know that they are supposed to follow the man. He turns and begins to lead them deeper into the inner depths of the slums. Britt and Karl follow slowly, taking care not to stumble with the corpse they carry. The silent wall of slum dwellers closes in behind them as they pass through. The shadowy mob follows a few feet be-hind. A low, slow drumbeat begins ... and a deep, regular chant rumbles from the unseen throats of the *macumba* worshipers. Down narrow, twisty streets Karl and Britt bear the body. Even the putrid odor of its dead flesh between them cannot over-come the stench of the rotting garbage and sewage that oozes here in these slimy gutters. The swelling celebration sounds from distant downtown Brasilia are now filtering into this scene like sounds from an-other world—a world of light and bright, wide streets, of aristocratic people out tonight for a great holiday. For this is the evening on which *Presidents* Furtado will sit in review of the bands and dancers from Brasilia's many *escolas de samba* and confer upon one of them the coveted honor of being select-ed as the best of this year's Mardi Gras.

The narrow slum street ends suddenly at an open area, a marketplace which by day is walled with lively stalls of city farmers displaying bright arrays of vegetables, and jungle Indians hawking ham-mered silver pendants on which are embossed sto-ries of a primitive pride first trampled by the sense-

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less Spanish search for gold ... a pride and people that today suffer from the increasing competition for their jungle's oil.

The market stalls are silent skeletons tonight. The shadows are filled with staring eyes that flicker like stars hi the skies reflecting the licking light of the torches.

Britt studies the huge dark pyramid of logs that towers in the blackness of the marketplace. *That must be a funeral pyre*, Britt notes, *and here they come for the body*.

Four burly natives approach: two are the torch bearers, and the other two carry a wooden pallet. The eyes of the pallet bearers are cold, zombielike, but Britt and Karl can feel the heat radiating from the men's bodies as they walk up close and carefully ease the rotting arms of the corpse from around Britt's and Karl's necks. The men squat down and lay the body out on the stretcherlike pallet, taking care to place its feet against a small board at one end. Suddenly the squatting men recoil in fear from the corpse, falling back on the ground and raising their arms before their eyes.

"*Gott in Himmel!*" exclaims Karl.

Britt is startled, too. The eyelids of the dead mats have suddenly snapped open. The whits eyeballs stare skyward with no pupils. An excited murmur begins among the onlookers behind Britt and Karl, and spreads rapidly through the crowds who have packed both this marketplace and the side streets leading to it. Britt cautiously glances around at the mob, which he can see only dimly in the wavering torchlight: thousands of slum dwellers have gathered. Scattered throughout the tattered mob are some brightly costumed aristocrats drawn from the inner city by the whispered word of what is happening here; all of them, like all the poor of Brazil, innate believers in the power of *macumba* magic. Britt looks toward the central city. An airy, distant dome of white light shimmers in the black sky above the area,

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and below it. Britt can picture the whispering which is rippling through the celebrating crowds.

The word is spreading, he thinks with satisfaction. *By tomorrow, what is happening here now will be known throughout the entire nation, transmitted by telephone, telegraph, drums and donkey-back. Fur-tado's credibility with the people will be shattered; even his own generals and Senate supporters will waver in the face of the wave of national sentiment. Furtado will be forced to resign. The CIA, the war hawks and the oil barons back in the States won't have any revolution or insurrection against this "de-mocracy" to point at to rouse Americans into an-other war,*

Britt's attention is called back to the scene before Mm by a quick command barked by the mystic. The cowering pallet bearers still quiver in fear around the staring corpse. But they respond to the' com-mand and take hold of the handles of the pallet. They stand, the mystic pivots sharply and, flanked by the torch bearers, slowly leads the small proces-sion toward the twenty-foot-high funeral pyre. Britt and Karl remain where they are.

As the torches approach the pyre, Britt can see that the pyramid is made of horizontally laid logs and is flat on top. Carefully, the procession picks its way up the steplike logs on this near side of the pyre. Arriving at the top, the pallet carrier at the feet of the corpse sets down his end of the stretcher. Slowly, the other man raises the head end until the corpse is almost standing erect, held in place on the pallet by the board beneath its feet. The torch bearers on either side of the body move the flames close to the corpse. Many in the crowd fall to their knees and cross themselves in an incongruous Christian gesture. The mystic points toward the corpse's chest to show the assembled thousands that there has been no incision, that Tapajos' heart is still in his body. The murmurings of the multitude grow louder and carry a tone of anger.

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The man behind the pallet gently lowers the star-ing corpse until the pallet is lying horizontally.

Slowly, chanting in deep tones, the mystic leads the small group down from the peak of the pyre. As the torch bearers descend, the shadows of the surrounding crowds bounce with each step, seeming to pulsate and grow higher and higher as the torches go lower and lower. The corpse lying alone at the top of the pyre is invisible now in the blackness.

The mystic stops at the bottom of the pyre and turns toward it. The torch bearers stop at his side and turn, too, while the empty-handed pallet carriers move off into the shadowy crowd.

The man on the mystic's right hands him a torch. A sudden and complete silence blankets the on-lookers. Anticipation hangs in the air. Slowly the mystic, who represents the presence here of the demon Exu, raises the torch above his head. His *urucáu*-dyed face reflects the flames, and his mouth moves slowly as his deep, low voice speaks words which Britt cannot understand ... words from another culture ... another world.

The mystic's arms drop. The torch touches the bottom of the pyre, and flames race around the entire base in an instant. The faces of the crowd become visible, bathed in the flickering firelight. Their expressions are solemn, vengeful. Thousands of unblinking eyes stare at the yard-high flames, which dance like mad midget demons around the perimeter of the pyre. Snapping and cracking, climbing quickly, the tongues of flame grow and grow. Their heat radiates out to touch everyone like hot hands reaching out of hell. The heat sears into the assembled souls and fans fire of hate and revenge.

Spears of flame now throw themselves up in their final assault on the top level of the pyre. The corpse of Tapajos begins to smolder and smoke from the tremendous heat. The hell-fire inferno glow reaches out and up into the night. The pyre becomes a fountain of fire over thirty feet in the air, higher than the

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two-story shacks surrounding the decrepit market-place.

"Look!" Karl says to Britt, and points skyward. Britt's eyes, however, are already moving upward in response to the sudden shift of everyone's gaze from the flaming funeral pyre to the sky.

"Incredible," is all Britt can comment in a hushed voice. High in the sky and illuminated by this fire float the forms of giant birds. They circle the death scene like vultures, but the *favelados* and Britt and Karl recognize the distinctive wingspread: the winged wolves of the jungle! Harpy eagles!

"There," says Karl, aiming his finger at one of the foreboding black creatures. "That one! What do you see?"

Britt need not reply. Karl knows that he has seen the spear imbedded in the breast of the fearsome death bird.

Suddenly the flames surge upward like lava from an erupting volcano, and from the flames leaps a silver streak of smoke which soars up to the eagles and vanishes with them.

The agitated mob has no time to wonder at what has happened, for immediately the huge pyramidal pyre begins collapsing. Long flaming logs crash down to the street and send waves of sparks and fiery embers exploding into the crowd. Screams and shouts are heard everywhere; people are running, pushing and shoving to flee the flow of fiery logs.

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This clear, warm night seems to have been made for Mardi Gras. Already the revelers are shoulder to shoulder here in the huge *Plaza del Sol*. They are laughing and dancing and drunk with wine and passion. The white concrete government buildings gleam, bathed with special lights for this occasion. The scene is an incredible riot of sounds and sights, and a cacophony of drums, whistles and wheezes from native *cuica* playing infectiously fast samba syncopation. Perspiring naked bodies ripple everywhere like waves on an ocean. A scantily clad female beauty gyrates sensuously before an aroused man dressed as a gladiator; his erection is as hard as the sword he carries. Libidinous fantasy is to-night's reality. Dormant desires

masked by day now expose themselves to their native night. And no one notices the tiny tongue of flame so far away in the *favela*. And no one cares. The slums can rot—or they can burn. Who cares? The rats will flee into the jungle . . . the poor will rebuild their rats' nests like always.

But tonight! Tonight is time for samba and sex. Let the peasants burn.

The clamor of the monstrous mob and the beat of the music is so overpowering that Furtado's aide must point toward the distant fire rather than speak too loudly into the ear of the President. The colorful crowd at the foot of Brasilia's beautiful presidential palace cheers wildly and surges against the linked arms of the guards as Furtado pauses on the top 164

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step and squints across the plaza scene to see the fire in the *favela*. Furtado tugs a small wrinkle out of his white and gold general's uniform. He turns to his aide. The aide leans close, almost touching Furtado's lips with his ear as the President speaks. The aide nods and comes stiffly to attention.

Furtado looks down at the crowd and smiles broadly. Thousands cheer with a roar like a mighty explosion. The roar rolls on and on, and the samba bands waiting to be judged join in the salute with their loudest and fastest music.

The aide at Furtado's side suddenly glances away. He squints . . . he cocks his head. He is puzzled by the sight of the tiny firelit specks he sees circling in the air above the faraway flames. The flames suddenly make a surge skyward, and a silvery shaft shoots up toward the specks. At the same instant, the crowd here at the foot of the steps roars louder. Furtado raises his arms in salute to his worshipers. And if this moment of reality were played in slow motion, this next instant would reveal the open-mouth smile on his face frozen with the sight of the first giant eagle rocketing down out of the night, wings spread wide, bloody beak gaping and clawed feet thrust forward. The rear claws hook into Furtado's eyesockets with such tremendous impact that his heavy body is lifted and the top of his skull tipped off. Furtado's brain-filled, bloody white ceremonial army hat sails against the shoulder of the aide, splattering the man's white uniform with wet, red gore.

Furtado's decapitated corpse barely falls back onto the steps before another monstrous harpy eagle swoops in like lightning. In the split second that the great bird flashes past, its hooked claws slice with razor sharpness through Furtado's gold-braided, medal-decked jacket and snatches his intestines from his belly. Without even an eyeblink pause the giant bird is continuing its swoop upward again, trailing bloody, gray-blue entrails.

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The throngs are stunned stone-silent. No one can move . . . the only sound is the loud beat of the monstrous wings of the eagles. A third bird dives and spreads its fifteen-foot black wings as it brakes its landing facing the wide-eyed onlookers. It alights on the shoulders of the shattered corpse and glares at the hypnotized thousands with round red eyes afire with evil. The wooden shaft of a spear protrudes from the bird's great gray breast. The monster slowly retracts its huge wings, bends down and sinks its strong mandibles into the chest of the dead man. The snap and crack of the sternum and ribs echo through the silent plaza . . . the great bird straightens up again with Furtado's heart dark and red and barely beating in its bloody beak. Quickly, the eagle flicks its head back and forth, opens wide its beak, and the pulpy hunk of human heart slides down into its throat. Once . . . twice . . . three times the bird convulsively swallows, its thick neck rapidly retracting and extending to gulp the meaty mass into its stomach.

The stunned crowds watch as the incredible creature begins a rapid metamorphosis: the bloody black feathers begin changing to ancient gray granite. In seconds, the incredible eagle is a gargoyle again. Its stone eyes glare out across the disemboweled body.

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"What are you reading?" asks Kelly conversationally as she sits beside Britt. She curls her feet beneath her on the comfortable seat of this small, plush Westwind executive jet.

Britt closes the thick book, his thumb in the page to hold his place as he shows the cover to Kelly. He reads it aloud: "*The Meridian Handbook of Classical Mythology*,"

"I'm impressed." Kelly smiles with a teasing sparkle in her eyes. "Why the heavy reading?"

"Well," Britt replies, "last night while Karl, John and Greg were packing the cars aboard the freighter for California, I was doing a little reading in the United States Information Agency Library in downtown Rio."

"Research on what?"

"On gargoyles, pretty lady, that's what." Britt pushes the button on the armrest and reclines his seat. He leans back, holds the book in his lap and looks at Kelly. "I found that the first gargoyles were painted in caves by prehistoric humans. Now consider this: prehistoric humans didn't have much ability at creating abstract things . . . their art reflected *real* things in the world around them."

"So?" Kelly shrugs.

"So," Britt explains, "based on what I've researched, I think that gargoyles represent intelligent evil essences which did visit our physical dimension frequently during the early ages of our universe and our planet. Just think about it: most of

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us, no matter what type of religion we adhere to, believe in the opposing powers of Good and Evil. It is quite possible that what we saw take the form of harpy eagles last night were actually embodiments of evil essences and intelligences—the demons, and devils which are part of religious dogma around the world." Britt picks up the book and looks at it.

"Take harpy eagles, for example. They have been written about for ages. The Greeks and the Romans wrote a great deal about them. Listen to this." He opens the book to where he was reading. "Researchers describe harpies as 'birdlike female monsters. Some scholars believe, however, that the harpies, as well as other birdlike female creatures, are also *ghosts* who might snatch away living things.' " Britt pauses and runs his index finger farther down the page, searching for another important point.

"Here it is. Both Vergil and Homer wrote extensively about harpies. In his *Aeneid*, Vergil reported that while on their way to devastate Italy, the Trojans encountered harpies. In Vergil's account, the birds had metallic feathers which were impervious to the Trojan swords. One of the harpies spoke in a human voice and said she was 'the eldest of the Furies.' " Quickly, Britt flips back a few pages in the book and glances at Kelly.

"And listen to this," he says, "how ancients described the Furies. 'Female spirits who punished offenders against blood kin. The Erinyes, whom the Romans called Furies, were born, together with the Giants and the Meliae, from the earth when it was fertilized by drops of blood from the castrated Uranus.'" Britt's finger moves a little farther down the page. "It further reveals that 'the Erinyes were said by some writers to inflict in Hades the tortures prescribed by the gods.'" He looks at Kelly. "Hades, as you well know, is the equivalent of modern man's theological concept of *hell*." His eyes dart back to the page. "The Erinyes were often called up by curses. 'Some scholars believe, in

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fact, that the Erinyes were originally personified curses. Whatever their precise origin, however, they reflect a very ancient Greek belief in a divine mechanism of retributive justice. Nemesis grew out of this same conviction, and her functions often overlapped those of the Erinyes. Cruel and bloodthirsty though the Erinyes seemed, they were not regarded, at least in primitive times, as unjust or even malign. Their work of retribution protected those whom human law failed to protect.' "

"What do you mean by all this, Britt?"

"Merely this," he answers and leans forward in the seat. "We already know that psychic powers were part of human mental makeup from the beginning of time, and that these powers have merely atrophied and sunk into our subconscious because of the weight of 'civilization's' restraints. What *other* realities about ourselves and this world—realities that today we consider mere myth—are *real* and will be discovered as we dig, like archaeologists, deeper into our ancient human psyches and sift through the rubble of aeons there?" Britt nods toward the report folders that Kelly holds on her lap.

"For example, Kelly ... you'll find from reading the report there of this team's second assignment—the one code-named 'Shamballah'—that we discovered that the human subconscious does indeed have the power to call up the embodiments of evil. This seems to correspond with what is described here in this book. Namely, that the harpies are curses come to life. Perhaps before Tapajos died in the shaft, he called up a curse upon Furtado ... or perhaps the Amazons, while death rained down on them from the skies, subconsciously called up curses on the military leader whom they knew was responsible for the helicopter attack."

Kelly is slowly shaking her head and staring at the folders in her lap. She sighs. "I don't know Britt," she says softly. "I don't know."

Britt reaches over and places his hand warmly on

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top of hers. "Pretty lady, you have fallen into becoming an operative of Mero in almost the same way that all of us on this team have. If you hadn't got involved during our last assignment at the Stone-henge, you would never have even heard of Mero Institute and its struggle to prevent the psychic enslavement of many key nations."

Kelly is fingering the folder marked *The Door* and remembering her first encounter with Britt and the new psychic technology which is unlocking ancient secrets.

The other seats here in the plush passenger cabin are empty, except for an aisle seat in the front row where Karl reclines, napping. Through the open door to the cockpit, Britt can see Greg and John in the flight seats. They are going over the preflight checklist and occasionally replying through their microphones to messages that come to them over the headphones they wear. The gentle whine of the jet's engines drifts through the cozy cabin while the crew awaits final takeoff clearance from the Rio de Janeiro tower.

Kelly nibbles at her lip and toys with the tip of a report folder. "I don't know," she says, "if I'm going to like being a new person ... living a life which I know isn't real."

"Oh, come on," Britt chides. "What man or woman wouldn't want to be the chairman of a successful cosmetics firm and fly around the world in the company jet with the racing team the firm sponsors?"

"You know," she answers, "I don't even mind being a human guinea pig for Mero's psychic hormone development until the drugs are perfected and can be released to the world for peaceful purposes. What bugs me is that I know that this role I'll be playing really isn't *my* life. I can't explain it."

Britt nods. "I know what you're saying. I had a lot of plans myself about what I was going to do with my life after the army and college. None of it happened." Britt pauses as his own deep feelings on

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this topic well up. "I know what we're doing now is incredibly important, but ... still ... I wish that after this is done, I could somehow come back and live my life the way I had wanted."

"Well," says Kelly as she stands up and holds out the folders for Britt to take, "maybe you'll get that wish."

Britt's brow wrinkles and his eyes speak the question he is thinking.

She smiles again. "Our next assignment is in the bottom folder. It's code-named 'Recycled Souls.'"

Britt takes the folders and shifts the bottom one to the top.

Kelly continues: "It seems that there's a new mystery in sunny Southern California. A few weeks ago, the Long Beach police arrested a man in a bar brawl and tossed him in jail. They found him dead in his cell the next morning. A routine fingerprint check revealed that the man was a U.S. Navy captain who was listed as missing in action in 1943 after his ship and another in his convoy were torpedoed off the seaward side of Cataline Island and went down with all hands. Yet, when this man was first booked by the police, the required physical exam he was given showed him to be about thirty-five years old—the same age he was when he supposedly died."

Britt again pushes the button on the arm of the seat to return the back to the upright position so he can read. He questions Kelly as he opens the folder. "What did the autopsy show he died from in the jail?"

Kelly folds her arms over her breasts. "There was no autopsy, Britt ... because there was no body. The jailers found only a fully clothed skeleton on the floor of that cell."

Kelly reaches out for the seatback to steady herself as the small jet suddenly begins to roll. "I'm going up the cockpit for the takeoff," she says as she turns and starts walking forward.

Britt opens the folder as the whine of the engines

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grows louder. The plane, out of its element here on the ground, bounces as it rolls onto the main runway and points its nose north. The whine drops in tone and becomes a muffled roar.

The airframe shudders with the strain of full-throttle acceleration. Britt feels his body being pressed back against the seat. The pressure on his eyeballs grows greater as the plane gathers speed and leaves the ground.

In the air now, everything is smooth, the pressures are gone. Two muffled thuds indicate that the wheels have come up. Britt looks out the window. His eyes watch the earth shrinking below, but his mind has already rocketed ahead to another hemisphere. A strange image begins to form deep in the dark recesses of his mind ... gray images ... underwater ... cold shapes moving in the depths. He shakes his head sharply, forcing the images to retract.

He sighs and sinks back into his seat. He closes his eyes and lets the jet carry him into the unknown.

... another beginning ...

Ian Ross

a medical center famous for its work in understanding the human body. Today a respected business editor, Ross collected the facts of psychic sci-ence cited in his writing during his years of association with the worldwide *Los Angeles Times* network.