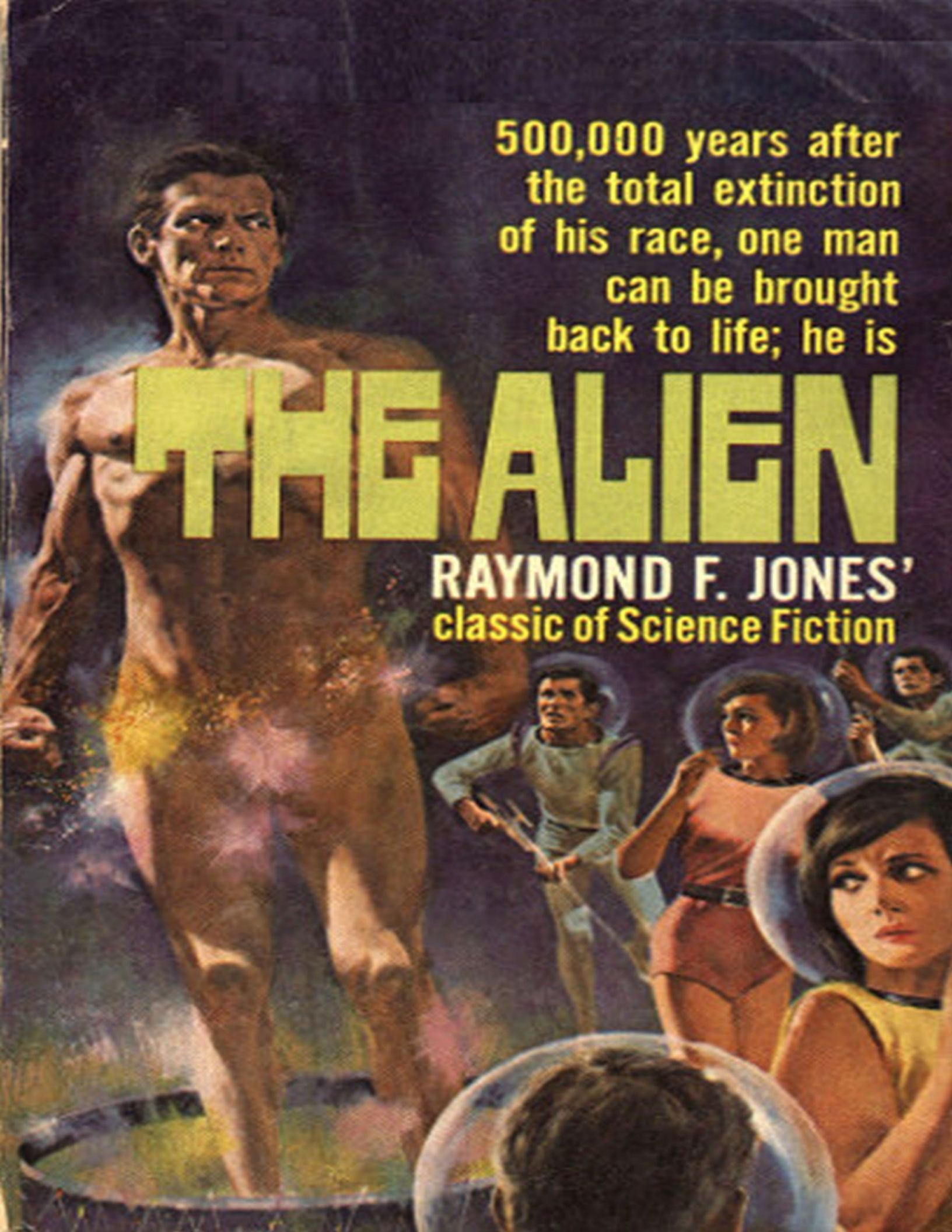
500,000 years after the total extinction of his race, one man can be brought back to life; he is
THE ALIEN
RAYMOND F. JONES'
classic of Science Fiction

THE ALIEN

A Gripping Novel of Discovery and Conquest in Interstellar Space

by Raymond F. Jones

A Complete ORIGINAL Book, UNABRIDGED

Just speculate for a moment on the enormous challenge to archeology when interplanetary flight is possible ... and relics are found of a race extinct for half a million years! A race, incidentally, that was scientifically so far in advance of ours that they held the secret of the restoration of life!

One member of that race can be brought back after 500,000 years of death....

That's the story told by this ORIGINAL book-length novel, which has never before been published! You can expect a muscle-tightening, sweat-producing, mind-prodding adventure in the future when you read it!

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CHAPTER ONE

Out beyond the orbit of Mars the *Lavoisier* wallowed cautiously through the asteroid fields. Aboard the laboratory ship few of the members of the permanent Smithson Asteroidal Expedition were aware that they were in motion. Living in the field one or two years at a time, there was little that they were conscious of except the half-million-year-old culture whose scattered fragments surrounded them on every side.

The only contact with Earth at the moment was the radio link by which Dr. Delmar Underwood was calling Dr. Illia Morov at Terrestrial Medical Central.

Illia's blonde, precisely coiffured hair was only faintly golden against, the stark white of her surgeons' gown, which she still wore when she answered. Her eyes widened with an expression of pleasure as her face came into focus on the screen and she recognized Underwood.

"Del! I thought you'd gone to sleep with the mummies out there. It's been over a month since you called. What's new?"

"Not much. Terry found some new evidence of Stroid III. Phyfe has a new scrap of metal with inscriptions, and they've found something that almost looks as if it might have been an electron tube five hundred thousand years ago. I'm working on that. Otherwise all is peaceful and it's wonderful!"

"Still the confirmed hermit?" Illia's eyes lost some of their banter, but none of their tenderness.

"There's more peace and contentment out here than I'd ever dreamed of finding. I want you to come out here, Illia. Come out for a month. If you don't want to stay and marry me, then you can go back and I won't say another word."

She shook her head in firm decision. "Earth needs its scientists desperately. Too many have run away already. They say the Venusian colonies are booming, but I told you a year ago that simply running away wouldn't work. I thought by now you would have found it out for yourself."

"And I told you a year ago," Underwood said flatly, "that the only possible choice of a sane man is escape."

"You can't escape your own culture, Del. Why, the expedition that provided the opportunity for you to become a hermit is dependent on Earth. If Congress should cut the Institute's funds, you'd be dropped right back where you were. You can't get away."

"There are always the Venusian colonies."

"You know it's impossible to exist there independent of Earth."

"I'm not talking about the science and technology. I'm talking about the social disintegration. Certainly a scientist doesn't need to take that with him when he's attempting to escape it."

"The culture is not to blame," said Illia earnestly, "and neither is humanity. You don't ridicule a child for his clumsiness when he is learning to walk."

"I hope the human race is past its childhood!"

"Relatively speaking, it isn't. Dreyer says we're only now emerging from the cave man stage, and that could properly be called mankind's infancy, I suppose. Dreyer calls it the 'head man' stage."

"I thought he was a semanticist."

"You'd know if you'd ever talked with him. He'll tear off every other word you utter and throw it back at you. His 'head man' designation is correct, all right. According to him, human beings in this stage need some leader or 'head man' stronger than themselves for guidance, assumption of responsibility, and blame, in case of failure of the group. These functions have never in the past

been developed in the individual so that he could stand alone in control of his own ego. But it's coming—that's the whole import of Dreyer's work."

"And all this confusion and instability are supposed to have something to do with that?"

"It's been growing for decades. We've seen it reach a peak in our own lifetimes. The old fetishes have failed, the head men have been found to be hollow gods, and men's faith has turned to derision. Presidents, dictators, governors, and priests—they've all fallen from their high places and the masses of humanity will no longer believe in any of them."

"And *that* is development of the race?"

"Yes, because out of it will come a people who have found in themselves the strength they used to find in the 'head men.' There will come a race in which the individual can accept the responsibility which he has always passed on to the 'head man,' the 'head man' is no longer necessary."

"And so—the ultimate anarchy."

"The 'head man' concept has, but first he has to find out that has nothing to do with government. With human beings capable of independent, constructive behavior, actual democracy will be possible for the first time in the world's history."

"If all this is to come about anyway, according to Dreyer, why not try to escape the insanity of the transition period?"

Illia Morov's eyes grew narrow in puzzlement as she looked at Underwood with utter incomprehension. "Doesn't it matter at all that the race is in one of the greatest crises of all history? Doesn't it matter that you have a skill that is of immense value in these times? It's peculiar that it is those of you in the physical sciences who are fleeing in the greatest numbers. The Venusian colonies must have a wonderful time with physicists trampling each other to get away from it all—and Earth almost barren of them. Do the physical

sciences destroy every sense of social obligation?"

"You forget that I don't quite accept Dreyer's theories. To me this is nothing but a rotting structure that is finally collapsing from its own inner decay. I can't see anything positive evolving out of it."

"I suppose so. Well, it was nice of you to call, Del. I'm always glad to hear you. Don't wait so long next time."

"Illia—"

But she had cut the connection and the screen slowly faded into gray, leaving Underwood's argument unfinished. Irritably, he flipped the switch to the public news channels.

Where was he wrong? The past year, since he had joined the expedition as Chief Physicist, was like paradise compared with living in the unstable, irresponsible society existing on Earth. He knew it was a purely neurotic reaction, this desire to escape. But application of that label solved nothing, explained nothing—and carried no stigma. The neurotic reaction was the norm in a world so confused.

He turned as the news blared abruptly with its perpetual urgency that made him wonder how the commentators endured the endless flow of crises.

The President had been impeached again—the third one in six months.

There were no candidates for his office.

A church had been burned by its congregation.

Two mayors had been assassinated within hours of each other.

It was the same news he had heard six months ago. It would be the same again tomorrow and next month. The story of a planet repudiating all leadership. A lawlessness that was worse than anarchy, because there was still government—a government that could be driven and whipped by the

insecurities of the populace that elected it.

Dreyer called it a futile search for a 'head man' by a people who would no longer trust any of their own kind to be 'head man.' And Underwood dared not trust that glib explanation.

Many others besides Underwood found they could no longer endure the instability of their own culture. Among these were many of the world's leading scientists. Most of them went to the jungle lands of Venus. The scientific limitations of such a frontier existence had kept Underwood from joining the Venusian colonies, but he'd been very close to going just before he got the offer of Chief Physicist with the Smithson Institute expedition in the asteroid fields. He wondered now what he'd have done if the offer hadn't come.

The interphone annunciator buzzed. Underwood turned off the news as the bored communications operator in the control room announced, "Doc Underwood. Call for Doc Underwood."

Underwood cut in. "Speaking," he said irritably.

The voice of Terry Bernard burst into the room. "Hey, Del! Are you going to get rid of that hangover and answer your phone or should we embalm the remains and ship 'em back?"

"Terry! You fool, what do you want? Why didn't you say it was you? I thought maybe it was that elephant-foot Maynes, with chunks of mica that he thought were prayer sticks."

"The Stroids didn't use prayer sticks."

"All right, skip it. What's new?"

"Plenty. Can you come over for a while? I think we've really got something here."

"It'd better be good. We're taking the ship to Phyfe. Where are you?"

"Asteroid C-428. It's about 2,000 miles from you. And bring all the hard-rock mining tools you've got. We can't get into this thing."

"Is *that* all you want? Use your double coated drills."

"We wore five of them out. No scratches on the thing, even."

"Well, use the Atom Stream, then. It probably won't hurt the artifact."

"I'll say it won't. It won't even warm the thing up. Any other ideas?"

Underwood's mind, which had been half occupied with mulling over his personal problems while he talked with Terry, swung startledly to what the archeologist was saying. "You mean that you've found a material the Atom Stream won't touch? That's impossible! The equations of the Stream prove—"

"I know. *Now* will you come over?"

"Why didn't you say so in the first place? I'll bring the whole ship."

Underwood cut off and switched to the Captain's line. "Captain Dawson? Underwood. Will you please take the ship to the vicinity of Asteroid C-428 as quickly as possible?"

"I thought Doctor Phyfe—"

"I'll answer for it. Please move the vessel."

Captain Dawson acceded. His instructions were to place the ship at Underwood's disposal.

Soundlessly and invisibly, the distortion fields leaped into space about the massive laboratory ship and the *Lavoisier* moved effortlessly through the void. Its perfect inertia controls left no evidence of its motion apparent to the occupants with the exception of the navigators and pilots. The hundreds of

delicate pieces of equipment in Underwood's laboratories remained as steadfast as if anchored to tons of steel and concrete deep beneath the surface of Earth.

Twenty minutes later they hove in sight of the small, black asteroid that glistened in the faint light of the faraway Sun. The spacesuited figures of Terry Bernard and his assistant, Batch Fagin, clung to the surface, moving about like flies on a blackened, frozen apple.

Underwood was already in the scooter lock, astride the little spacescooter which they used for transportation between ships of the expedition and between asteroids.

The pilot jockeyed the *Lavoisier* as near as safely desirable, then signaled Underwood. The physicist pressed the control that opened the lock in the side of the vessel. The scooter shot out into space, bearing him astride it.

"Ride 'em, cowboy!" Terry Bernard yelled into the intercom. He gave a wild cowboy yell that pierced Underwood's ears. "Watch out that thing doesn't turn turtle with you."

Underwood grinned to himself. He said, "Your attitude convinces me of a long held theory that archeology is no science. Anyway, if your story of a material impervious to the Atom Stream is wrong, you'd better get a good alibi. Phyfe had some work he wanted to do aboard today."

"Come and see for yourself. This is it."

As the scooter approached closer to the asteroid, Underwood could glimpse the strangeness of the thing. It looked as if it had been coated with the usual asteroid material of nickel iron debris, but Terry had cleared this away from more than half the surface.

The exposed half was a shining thing of ebony, whose planes and angles were machined with mathematical exactness. It looked as if there were at least a thousand individual facets on the one hemisphere alone.

At the sight of it, Underwood could almost understand the thrill of discovery that impelled these archeologists to delve in the mysteries of space for lost kingdoms and races. This object which Terry had discovered was a magnificent artifact. He wondered how long it had circled the Sun since the intelligence that formed it had died. He wished now that Terry had not used the Atom Stream, for that had probably destroyed the validity of the radium-lead relationship in the coating of debris that might otherwise indicate something of the age of the thing.

Terry sensed something of Underwood's awe in his silence as he approached. "What do you think of it, Del?"

"It's—beautiful," said Underwood. "Have you any clue to what it is?"

"Not a thing. No marks of any kind on it."

The scooter slowed as Del Underwood guided it near the surface of the asteroid. It touched gently and he unstrapped himself and stepped off. "Phyfe will forgive all your sins for this," he said. "Before you show me the Atom Stream is ineffective, let's break off a couple of tons of the coating and put it in the ship. We may be able to date the thing yet. Almost all these asteroids have a small amount of radioactivity somewhere in them. We can chip some from the opposite side where the Atom Stream would affect it least."

"Good idea," Terry agreed. "I should have thought of that, but when I first found the single outcropping of machined metal, I figured it was very small. After I found the Atom Stream wouldn't touch it, I was overanxious to undercover it. I didn't realize I'd have to burn away the whole surface of the asteroid."

"We may as well finish the job and get it completely uncovered. I'll have some of my men from the ship come on over."

It took the better part of an hour to chip and drill away samples to be used in a dating attempt. Then the intense fire of the Atom Stream was turned upon the remainder of the asteroid to clear it.

"We'd better be on the lookout for a soft spot." Terry suggested. "It's possible this thing isn't homogeneous, and Papa Phyfe would be very mad if we burned it up after making such a find."

From behind his heavy shield which protected him from the stray radiation formed by the Atom Stream, Delmar Underwood watched the biting fire cut between the gemlike artifact and the metallic alloys that coated it. The alloys cracked and fell away in large chunks, propelled by the explosions of matter as the intense heat vaporized the metal almost instantly.

The spell of the ancient and the unknown fell upon him and swept him up in the old mysteries and the unknown tongues. Trained in the precise methods of the physical sciences, he had long fought against the fascination of the immense puzzles which the archeologists were trying to solve, but no man could long escape. In the quiet, starlit blackness there rang the ancient memories of a planet vibrant with life, a planet of strange tongues and unknown songs—a planet that had died so violently that space was yet strewn with its remains—so violently that somewhere the echo of its death explosion must yet ring in the far vaults of space.

Underwood had always thought of archeologists as befogged antiquarians poking among ancient graves and rubbish heaps, but now he knew them for what they were—poets in search of mysteries. The Bible-quoting of Phyfe and the swearing of red-headed Terry Bernard were merely thin disguises for their poetic romanticism.

Underwood watched the white fire of the Atom Stream through the lead glass of the eye-protecting lenses. "I talked to Illia today," he said. "She says I've run away."

"Haven't you?" Terry asked.

"I wouldn't call it that."

"It doesn't make much difference what you call it. I once lived in an apartment underneath a French horn player who practised eight hours a day. I

ran away. If the whole mess back on Earth is like a bunch of horn blowers tootling above your apartment, I say move, and why make any fuss about it? I'd probably join the boys on Venus myself if my job didn't keep me out here. Of course it's different with you. There's Illia to be convinced—along with your own conscience."

"She quotes Dreyer. He's one of your ideals, isn't he?"

"No better semanticist ever lived," Terry said flatly. "He takes the long view, which is that everything will come out in the wash. I agree with him, so why worry—knowing that the variants will iron themselves out, and nothing I can possibly do will be noticed or missed? Hence, I seldom worry about my obligations to mankind, as long as I stay reasonably law-abiding. Do likewise, Brother Del, and you'll live longer, or at least more happily."

Underwood grinned in the blinding glare of the Atom Stream. He wished life were as simple as Terry would have him believe. Maybe it would be, he thought—if it weren't for Illia.

As he moved his shield slowly forward behind the crumbling debris, Underwood's mind returned to the question of who created the structure beneath their feet, and to what alien purpose. Its black, impenetrable surfaces spoke of excellent mechanical skill, and a high science that could create a material refractory to the Atom Stream. Who, a half million years ago, could have created it?

The ancient pseudo-scientific Bode's Law had indicated a missing planet which could easily have fitted into the Solar System in the vicinity of the asteroid belt. But Bode's Law had never been accepted by astronomers—until interstellar archeology discovered the artifacts of a civilization on many of the asteroids.

The monumental task of exploration had been undertaken more than a generation ago by the Smithson Institute. Though always handicapped by shortage of funds, they had managed to keep at least one ship in the field as a permanent expedition.

Dr. Phyfe, leader of the present group, was probably the greatest student of asteroidal archeology in the System. The younger archeologists labeled him benevolently Papa Phyfe, in spite of the irascible temper which came, perhaps, from constantly switching his mind from half a million years ago to the present.

In their use of semantic correlations, Underwood was discovering, the archeologists were far ahead of the physical scientists, for they had an immensely greater task in deducing the mental concepts of alien races from a few scraps of machinery and art.

Of all the archeologists he had met, Underwood had taken the greatest liking to Terry Bernard. An extremely competent semanticist and archeologist, Terry nevertheless did not take himself too seriously. He did not even mind Underwood's constant assertion that archeology was no science. He maintained that it was fun, and that was all that was necessary.

At last, the two groups approached each other from opposite sides of the asteroid and joined forces in shearing off the last of the debris. As they shut off the fearful Atom Streams, the scientists turned to look back at the thing they had cleared.

Terry said quietly, "See why I'm an archeologist?"

"I think I do—almost," Underwood answered.

The gemlike structure beneath their feet glistened like polished ebony. It caught the distant stars in its thousand facets and cast them until it gleamed as if with infinite lights of its own.

The workmen, too, were caught in its spell, for they stood silently contemplating the mystery of a people who had created such beauty.

The spell was broken at last by a movement across the heavens. Underwood glanced up. "Papa Phyfe's coming on the warpath. I'll bet he's ready to trim

my ears for taking the lab ship without his consent."

"You're boss of the lab ship, aren't you?" said Terry.

"It's a rather flexible arrangement—in Phyfe's mind, at least. I'm boss until he decides he wants to do something."

The headquarters ship slowed to a halt and the lock opened, emitting the fiery burst of a motor scooter which Doc Phyfe rode with angry abandon.

"You, Underwood!" His voice came harshly through the phones. "I demand an explanation of—"

That was as far as he got, for he glimpsed the thing upon which the men were standing, and from his vantage point it looked all the more like a black jewel in the sky. He became instantly once more the eager archeologist instead of expedition administrator, a role he filled with irritation.

"What have you got there?" he whispered.

Terry answered. "We don't know. I asked Dr. Underwood's assistance in uncovering the artifact. If it caused you any difficulty, I'm sorry; it's my fault."

"Pah!" said Phyfe. "A thing like this is of utmost importance. You should have notified me immediately."

Terry and Underwood grinned at each other. Phyfe reprimanded every archeologist on the expedition for not notifying him immediately whenever anything from the smallest machined fragment of metal to the greatest stone monuments were found. If they had obeyed, he would have done nothing but travel from asteroid to asteroid over hundreds of thousands of miles of space.

"You were busy with your own work," said Terry.

But Phyfe had landed, and as he dismounted from the scooter, he stood in

awe. Terry, standing close to him, thought he saw tears in the old man's eyes through the helmet of the spaceship.

"It's beautiful!" murmured Phyfe in worshipping awe. "Wonderful. The most magnificent find in a century of asteroidal archeology. We must make arrangements for its transfer to Earth at once."

"If I may make a suggestion," said Terry, "you recall that some of the artifacts have not survived so well. Decay in many instances has set in—"

"Are you trying to tell me that this thing can decay?" Phyfe's little gray Van Dyke trembled violently.

"I'm thinking of the thermal transfer. Doctor Underwood is better able to discuss that, but I should think that a mass of this kind, which is at absolute zero, might undergo unusual stresses in coming to Earth normal temperatures. True, we used the Atom Stream on it, but that heat did not penetrate enough to set up great internal stresses."

Phyfe looked hesitant and turned to Underwood. "What is your opinion?"

Underwood didn't get it until he caught Terry's wink behind Phyfe's back. Once it left space and went into the museum laboratory, Terry might never get to work on the thing again. That was the perpetual gripe of the field men.

"I think Doctor Bernard has a good point," said Underwood. "I would advise leaving the artifact here in space until a thorough examination has been made. After all, we have every facility aboard the *Lavoisier* that is available on Earth."

"Very well," said Phyfe. "You may proceed in charge of the physical examination of the find, Doctor Underwood. You, Doctor Bernard, will be in charge of proceedings from an archeological standpoint. Will that be satisfactory to everyone concerned?"

It was far more than Terry had expected.

"I will be on constant call," said Phyfe. "Let me know immediately of any developments." Then the uncertain mask of the executive fell away from the face of the little old scientist and he regarded the find with humility and awe. "It's beautiful," he murmured again, "*beautiful*."

CHAPTER TWO

Phyfe remained near the site as Underwood and Terry set their crew to the routine task of weighing, measuring, and photographing the object, while Underwood considered what else to do.

"You know, this thing has got me stymied, Terry. Since it can't be touched by an Atom Stream, that means there isn't a single analytical procedure to which it will respond—that I know of, anyway. Does your knowledge of the Stroids and their ways of doing things suggest any identification of it?"

Terry shook his head as he stood by the port of the laboratory ship watching the crews at work outside. "Not a thing, but that's no criterion. We know so little about the Stroids that almost everything we find has a function we never heard of before. And of course we've found many objects with totally unknown functions. I've been thinking—what if this should turn out to be merely a natural gem from the interior of the planet, maybe formed at the time of its destruction, but at least an entirely natural object rather than an artifact?"

"It would be the largest crystal formation ever encountered, and the most perfect. I'd say the chances of its natural formation are negligible."

"But maybe this is the one in a hundred billion billion or whatever number chance it may be."

"If so, its value ought to be enough to balance the Terrestrial budget. I'm still convinced that it must be an artifact, though its material and use are beyond me. We can start with a radiation analysis. Perhaps it will respond in some way that will give us a clue."

When the crew had finished the routine check, Underwood directed his men to set up the various types of radiation equipment contained within the ship. It was possible to generate radiation through almost the complete spectrum from single cycle sound waves to hard cosmic rays.

The work was arduous and detailed. Each radiator was slowly driven through its range, then removed and higher frequency equipment used. At each fraction of an octave, the object was carefully photographed to record its response.

After watching the work for two days, Terry wearied of the seemingly non-productive labor. "I suppose you know what you're doing, Del," he said. "But is it getting you anywhere at all?"

Underwood shook his head. "Here's the batch of photographs. You'll probably want them to illustrate your report. The surfaces of the object are mathematically exact to a thousandth of a millimeter. Believe me, that's some tolerance on an object of this size. The surfaces are of number fifteen smoothness, which means they are plane within a hundred-thousandth of a millimeter. The implications are obvious. The builders who constructed that were mechanical geniuses."

"Did you get any radioactive dating?"

"Rather doubtfully, but the indications are around half a million years."

"That checks with what we know about the Stroids."

"It would appear that their culture is about on a par with our own."

"Personally, I think they were ahead of us," said Terry. "And do you see what that means to us archeologists? It's the first time in the history of the science that we've had to deal with the remains of a civilization either equal or superior to our own. The problems are multiplied a thousand times when you try to take a step up instead of a step down."

"Any idea of what the Stroids looked like?"

"We haven't found any bodies, skeletons, or even pictures, but we think they were at least roughly anthropomorphic. They were farther from the Sun than we, but it was younger then and probably gave them about the same amount

of heat. Their planet was larger and the Stroids appear to have been somewhat larger as individuals than we, judging from the artifacts we've discovered. But they seem to have had a suitable atmosphere of oxygen diluted with appropriate inert gases."

They were interrupted by the sudden appearance of a laboratory technician who brought in a dry photographic print still warm from the developing box.

He laid it on the desk before Underwood. "I thought you might be interested in this."

Underwood and Terry glanced at it. The picture was of the huge, gemlike artifact, but a number of the facets seemed to be covered with intricate markings of short, wavy lines.

Underwood stared closer at the thing. "What the devil are those? We took pictures of every facet previously and there was nothing like this. Get me an enlargement of these."

"I already have." The assistant laid another photo on the desk, showing the pattern of markings as if at close range. They were clearly discernible now.

"What do you make of it?" asked Underwood.

"I'd say it looked like writing," Terry said. "But it's not like any of the other Stroid characters I've seen—which doesn't mean much, of course, because there could be thousands that I've never seen. Only how come these characters are there now, and we never noticed them before?"

"Let's go out and have a look," said Underwood. He grasped the photograph and noted the numbers of the facets on which the characters appeared.

In a few moments the two men were speeding toward the surface of their discovery astride scooters. They jockeyed above the facets shown on the photographs, and stared in vain.