

E. E. "Doc" Smith

The Gift of the Secret Planet —
Second in the great Lensman series

First Lensman



FIRST LENS MAN

E. E. "DOC" SMITH

To E. Everett Evans

ATTACK FROM SPACE

The enemy spacefleet arrowed toward the armored mountain—nerve center of the Galactic Patrol. The Patrol battle cruisers swerved to meet them, and a miles-long cone of pure energy ravened out at the invaders, destroying whatever it touched.

But the moment before the force beam struck, thousands of tiny objects dropped from the enemy fleet and, faster than light, flashed straight at their target—each one an atom bomb powerful enough to destroy Patrol Headquarters by itself!

The Galactic Patrol—and civilization itself—had seconds to live. Unless a miracle happened....

A LENSMAN ADVENTURE

Second in the Great Series

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CHAPTER 1

The visitor, making his way unobserved through the crowded main laboratory of The Hill, stepped up to within six feet of the back of a big Norwegian seated at an electrono-optical bench. Drawing an automatic pistol, he shot the apparently unsuspecting scientist seven times, as fast as he could pull the trigger; twice through the brain, five times, closely spaced, through the spine.

"Ah, Gharlane of Eddore, I have been expecting you to look me up. Sit down." Blonde, blue-eyed Dr. Nels Bergenholm, completely undisturbed by the passage of the stream of bullets through his head and body, turned and waved one huge hand at a stool beside his own.

"But those were not ordinary projectiles!" the visitor protested. Neither person—or rather, entity—was in the least surprised that no one else had paid any attention to what had happened, but it was clear that the one was taken aback by the failure of his murderous attack. "They should have volatilized that form of flesh—should at least have blown you back to Arisia, where you belong."

"Ordinary or extraordinary, what matter? As you, in the guise of Gray Roger, told Conway Costigan a short time since, 'I permitted that, as a demonstration of futility.' Know, Gharlane, once and for all, that you will no longer be allowed to act directly against any adherent of Civilization, wherever situate. We of Arisia will not interfere in person with your proposed conquest of the two galaxies as you have planned it, since the stresses and conflicts involved are necessary—and, I may add, sufficient—to produce the Civilization which must and shall come into being. Therefore, neither will you, or any other Eddorian, so interfere. You will go back to Eddore and you will stay there."

"Think you so?" Gharlane sneered. "You, who have been so afraid of us for over two thousand million Tellurian years that you dared not let us even learn of you? So afraid of us that you dared not take any action to avert the destruction of any one of your budding Civilizations upon any one of the worlds of either galaxy? So afraid that you dare not, even now, meet me mind

to mind, but insist upon the use of this slow and unsatisfactory oral communication between us?"

"Either your thinking is loose, confused, and turbid, which I do not believe to be the case, or you are trying to lull me into believing that you are stupid." Bergenholm's voice was calm, unmoved. "I do not *think* that you will go back to Eddore; I know it. You, too, as soon as you have become informed upon certain matters, will know it. You protest against the use of spoken language because it is, as you know, the easiest, simplest, and surest way of preventing you from securing any iota of the knowledge for which you are so desperately searching. As to a meeting of our two minds, they met fully just before you, operating as Gray Roger, remembered that which your entire race forgot long ago. As a consequence of that meeting I so learned every line and vibration of your life pattern as to be able to greet you by your symbol, Gharlane of Eddore, whereas you know nothing of me save that I am an Arisian, a fact which has been obvious from the first."

In an attempt to create a diversion, Gharlane released the zone of compulsion which he had been holding; but the Arisian took it over so smoothly that no human being within range was conscious of any change.

"It is true that for many cycles of time we concealed our existence from you," Bergenholm went on without a break. "Since the reason for that concealment will still further confuse you, I will tell you what it was. Had you Eddorians learned of us sooner you might have been able to forge a weapon of power sufficient to prevent the accomplishment of an end which is now certain.

"It is true that your operations as Lo Sung of Uighar were not constrained. As Mithridates of Pontus—as Sulla, Marius, and Nero of Rome—as Hannibal of Carthage—as those self-effacing wights Alcixerxes of Greece and Menocoptes of Egypt—as Genghis Khan and Attila and the Kaiser and Mussolini and Hitler and the Tyrant of Asia—you were allowed to do as you pleased. Similar activities upon Rigel Four, Velantia, Palain Seven, and elsewhere were also allowed to proceed without effective opposition. With the appearance of Virgil Samms, however, the time arrived to put an end to your customary pernicious, obstructive, and destructive activities. I therefore interposed a barrier between you and those who would otherwise be completely defenseless against you."

"But why now? Why not thousands of cycles ago? And why Virgil Samms?"

"To answer those questions would be to give you valuable data. You may—too late—be able to answer them yourself. But to continue: you accuse me, and all Arisia, of cowardice; an evidently muddy and inept thought. Reflect, please, upon the completeness of your failure in the affair of Roger's planetoid; upon the fact that you have accomplished nothing whatever since that time; upon the situation in which you now find yourself.

"Even though the trend of thought of your race is basically materialistic and mechanistic, and you belittle ours as being 'philosophic' and 'impractical', you found—much to your surprise—that your most destructive physical agencies are not able to affect even this form of flesh which I am now energizing, to say nothing of affecting the reality which is I.

"If this episode is the result of the customary thinking of the second-in-command of Eddore's Innermost Circle ... but no, my visualization cannot be that badly at fault. Overconfidence—the tyrant's innate proclivity to underestimate an opponent—these things have put you into a false position; but I greatly fear that they will not operate to do so in any really important future affair."

"Rest assured that they will not!" Gharlane snarled. "It may not be—exactly—cowardice. It is, however, something closely akin. If you could have acted effectively against us at any time in the past, you would have done so. If you could act effectively against us now, you would be acting, not talking. That is elementary—self-evidently true. So true that you have not tried to deny it—nor would you expect me to believe you if you did." Cold black eyes stared level into icy eyes of Norwegian blue.

"Deny it? No. I am glad, however, that you used the word 'effectively' instead of 'openly'; for we have been acting effectively against you ever since these newly-formed planets cooled sufficiently to permit of the development of intelligent life."

"What? You have? How?"

"That, too, you may learn—too late. I have now said all I intend to say. I will give you no more information. Since you already know that there are more adult Arisians than there are Eddorians, so that at least one of us can devote

his full attention to blocking the direct effort of any one of you, it is clear to you that it makes no difference to me whether you elect to go or to stay. I can and I will remain here as long as you do; I can and I will accompany you whenever you venture out of the volume of space protected by Eddorian screen, wherever you go. The election is yours."

Gharlane disappeared. So did the Arisian—instantaneously. Dr. Nels Bergenholm, however, remained. Turning, he resumed his work where he had left off, knowing exactly what he had been doing and exactly what he was going to do to finish it. He released the zone of compulsion, which he had been holding upon every human being within sight or hearing, so dexterously that no one suspected, then or ever, that anything out of the ordinary had happened. He knew these things and did these things in spite of the fact that the form of flesh which his fellows of the Triplanetary Service knew as Nels Bergenholm was then being energized, not by the stupendously powerful mind of Drounli the Molder, but by an Arisian child too young to be of any use in that which was about to occur.

Arisia was ready. Every Arisian mind capable of adult, or of even near-adult thinking was poised to act when the moment of action should come. They were not, however, tense. While not in any sense routine, that which they were about to do had been foreseen for many cycles of time. They knew exactly what they were going to do, and exactly how to do it. They waited.

"My visualization is not entirely clear concerning the succession of events stemming from the fact that the fusion of which Drounli is a part did not destroy Gharlane of Eddore while he was energizing Gray Roger," a young Watchman, Eukonidor by symbol, thought into the assembled mind. "May I take a moment of this idle time in which to spread my visualization, for enlargement and instruction?"

"You may, youth." The Elders of Arisia—the mightiest intellects of that tremendously powerful race—fused their several minds into one mind and gave approval. "That will be time well spent. Think on."

"Separated from the other Eddorians by inter-galactic distance as he then was, Gharlane could have been isolated and could have been destroyed," the youth pointed out, as he somewhat diffidently spread his visualization in the public mind. "Since it is axiomatic that his destruction would have weakened

Eddore somewhat and to that extent would have helped us, it is evident that some greater advantage will accrue from allowing him to live. Some points are clear enough: that Gharlane and his fellows will believe that the Arisian fusion could not kill him, since it did not; that the Eddorians, contemptuous of our powers and thinking us vastly their inferiors, will not be driven to develop such things as atomic-energy-powered mechanical screens against third-level thought until such a time as it will be too late for even those devices to save their race from extinction; that they will, in all probability, never even suspect that the Galactic Patrol which is so soon to come into being will in fact be the prime operator in that extinction. It is not clear, however, in view of the above facts, why it has now become necessary for us to slay one Eddorian upon Eddore. Nor can I formulate or visualize with any clarity the techniques to be employed in the final wiping out of the race; I lack certain fundamental data concerning events which occurred and conditions which obtained many, many cycles before my birth. I am unable to believe that my perception and memory could have been so imperfect—can it be that none of that basic data is, or ever has been available?"

"That, youth, is the fact. While your visualization of the future is of course not as detailed nor as accurate as it will be after more cycles of labor, your background of knowledge is as complete as that of any other of our number."

"I see." Eukonidor gave the mental equivalent of a nod of complete understanding. "It is necessary, and the death of a lesser Eddorian—a Watchman—will be sufficient. Nor will it be either surprising or alarming to Eddore's Innermost Circle that the integrated total mind of Arisia should be able to kill such a relatively feeble entity. I see."

Then silence; and waiting. Minutes? Or days? Or weeks? Who can tell? What does time mean to any Arisian?

Then Drounli arrived; arrived in the instant of his leaving The Hill—what matters even inter-galactic distance to the speed of thought? He fused his mind with those of the three other Molders of Civilization. The massed and united mind of Arisia, poised and ready, awaiting only his coming, launched itself through space. That tremendous, that theretofore unknown concentration of mental force arrived at Eddore's outer screen in practically the same instant as did the entity that was Gharlane. The Eddorian, however,

went through without opposition; the Arisians did not.

Some two thousand million years ago, when the Coalescence occurred—the event which was to make each of the two interpassing galaxies teem with planets—the Arisians were already an ancient race; so ancient that they were even then independent of the chance formation of planets. The Eddorians, it is believed, were older still. The Arisians were native to this, our normal space-time continuum; the Eddorians were not.

Eddore was—and is—huge, dense, and hot. Its atmosphere is not air, as we of small, green Terra, know air, but is a noxious mixture of gaseous substances known to mankind only in chemical laboratories. Its hydrosphere, while it does contain some water, is a poisonous, stinking, foully corrosive, slimy and sludgy liquid.

And the Eddorians were as different from any people we know as Eddore is different from the planets indigenous to our space and time. They were, to our senses, utterly monstrous; almost incomprehensible. They were amorphous, amoeboid, sexless. Not androgynous or parthenogenetic, but absolutely sexless; with a sexlessness unknown in any Earthly form of life higher than the yeasts. Thus they were, to all intents and purposes and except for death by violence, immortal; for each one, after having lived for hundreds of thousands of Tellurian years and having reached its capacity to live and to learn, simply divided into two new individuals, each of which, in addition to possessing in full its parent's mind and memories and knowledges, had also a brand-new zest and a greatly increased capacity.

And, since life was, there had been competition. Competition for power. Knowledge was worth while only insofar as it contributed to power. Warfare began, and aged, and continued; the appallingly efficient warfare possible only to such entities as those. Their minds, already immensely powerful, grew stronger and stronger under the stresses of internecine struggle.

But peace was not even thought of. Strife continued, at higher and even higher levels of violence, until two facts became apparent. First, that every Eddorian who could be killed by physical violence had already died; that the survivors had developed such tremendous powers of mind, such complete mastery of things physical as well as mental, that they could not be slain by

physical force. Second, that during the ages through which they had been devoting their every effort to mutual extermination, their sun had begun markedly to cool; that their planet would very soon become so cold that it would be impossible for them ever again to live their normal physical lives.

Thus there came about an armistice. The Eddorians worked together—not without friction—in the development of mechanisms by the use of which they moved their planet across light-years of space to a younger, hotter sun. Then, Eddore once more at its hot and reeking norm, battle was resumed. Mental battle, this time, that went on for more than a hundred thousand Eddorian years; during the last ten thousand of which not a single Eddorian died.

Realizing the futility of such unproductive endeavor, the relatively few survivors made a peace of sorts. Since each had an utterly insatiable lust for power, and since it had become clear that they could neither conquer nor kill each other, they would combine forces and conquer enough planets—enough galaxies—so that each Eddorian could have as much power and authority as he could possibly handle.

What matter that there were not that many planets in their native space? There were other spaces, an infinite number of them; some of which, it was mathematically certain, would contain millions upon millions of planets instead of only two or three. By mind and by machine they surveyed the neighboring continua; they developed the hyper-spatial tube and the inertialess drive; they drove their planet, space-ship-wise, through space after space after space.

And thus, shortly after the Coalescence began, Eddore came into our space-time; and here, because of the multitudes of planets already existing and the untold millions more about to come into existence, it stayed. Here was what they had wanted since their beginnings; here were planets enough, here were fields enough for the exercise of power, to sate even the insatiable. There was no longer any need for them to fight each other; they could now cooperate whole-heartedly—as long as each was getting more—and *more* and MORE!

Enphilisor, a young Arisian, his mind roaming eagerly abroad as was its wont, made first contact with the Eddorians in this space. Inoffensive, naive, innocent, he was surprised beyond measure at their reception of his friendly

greeting; but in the instant before closing his mind to their vicious attacks, he learned the foregoing facts concerning them.

The fused mind of the Elders of Arisia, however, was not surprised. The Arisians, while not as mechanistic as their opponents, and innately peaceful as well, were far ahead of them in the pure science of the mind. The Elders had long known of the Eddorians and of their lustful wanderings through plenum after plenum. Their Visualizations of the Cosmic All had long since forecast, with dreadful certainty, the invasion which had now occurred. They had long known what they would have to do. They did it. So insidiously as to set up no opposition they entered the Eddorians' minds and sealed off all knowledge of Arisia. They withdrew, tracelessly.

They did not have much data, it is true; but no more could be obtained at that time. If any one of those touchy suspicious minds had been given any cause for alarm, any focal point of doubt, they would have had time in which to develop mechanisms able to force the Arisians out of this space before a weapon to destroy the Eddorians—the as yet incompletely designed Galactic Patrol—could be forged. The Arisians could, even then, have slain by mental force alone all the Eddorians except the All-Highest and his Innermost Circle, safe within their then impenetrable shield; but as long as they could not make a clean sweep they could not attack—then.

Be it observed that the Arisians were not fighting for themselves. As individuals or as a race they had nothing to fear. Even less than the Eddorians could they be killed by any possible application of physical force. Past masters of mental science, they knew that no possible concentration of Eddorian mental force could kill any one of them. And if they were to be forced out of normal space, what matter? To such mentalities as theirs, any given space would serve as well as any other.

No, they were fighting for an ideal; for the peaceful, harmonious, liberty-loving Civilization which they had envisaged as developing throughout, and eventually entirely covering the myriads of planets of, two tremendous Island Universes. Also, they felt a heavy weight of responsibility. Since all these races, existing and yet to appear, had sprung from and would spring from the Arisian life-spores which permeated this particular space, they all were and would be, at bottom, Arisian. It was starkly unthinkable that Arisia would

leave them to the eternal dominance of such a rapacious, such a tyrannical, such a hellishly insatiable breed of monsters.

Therefore the Arisians fought; efficiently if insidiously. They did not—they could not—interfere openly with Eddore's ruthless conquest of world after world; with Eddore's ruthless smashing of Civilization after Civilization. They did, however, see to it, by selective matings and the establishment of blood-lines upon numberless planets, that the trend of the level of intelligence was definitely and steadily upward.

Four Molders of Civilization—Drounli, Kriedigan, Nedanillor, and Brolenteen, who, in fusion, formed the "Mentor of Arisia" who was to become known to every wearer of Civilization's Lens—were individually responsible for the Arisian program of development upon the four planets of Tellus, Rigel IV, Velantia, and Palain VII. Drounli established upon Tellus two principal lines of blood. In unbroken male line of descent the Kinnisons went back to long before the dawn of even mythical Tellurian history. Kinnexa of Atlantis, daughter of one Kinnison and sister of another, is the first of the blood to be named in these annals; but the line was then already old. So was the other line; characterized throughout its tremendous length, male and female, by peculiarly spectacular red-bronze-auburn hair and equally striking gold-flecked, tawny eyes.

Nor did these strains mix. Drounli had made it psychologically impossible for them to mix until the penultimate stage of development should have been reached.

While that stage was still in the future Virgil Samms appeared, and all Arisia knew that the time had come to engage the Eddorians openly, mind to mind. Gharlane-Roger was curbed, savagely and sharply. Every Eddorian, wherever he was working, found his every line of endeavor solidly blocked.

Gharlane, as has been intimated, constructed a supposedly irresistible weapon and attacked his Arisian blocker, with results already told. At that failure Gharlane knew that there was something terribly amiss; that it had been amiss for over two thousand million Tellurian years. Really alarmed for the first time in his long life, he flashed back to Eddore; to warn his fellows and to take counsel with them as to what should be done. And the massed and integrated force of all Arisia was only an instant behind him.

Arisia struck Eddore's outermost screen, and in the instant of impact that screen went down. And then, instantaneously and all unperceived by the planet's defenders, the Arisian forces split. The Elders, including all the Molders, seized the Eddorian who had been handling that screen—threw around him an impenetrable net of force—yanked him out into inter-galactic space.

Then, driving in resistlessly, they turned the luckless wight inside out. And before the victim died under their poignant probings, the Elders of Arisia learned everything that the Eddorian and all of his ancestors had ever known. They then withdrew to Arisia, leaving their younger, weaker, partially-developed fellows to do whatever they could against mighty Eddore.

Whether the attack of these lesser forces would be stopped at the second, the third, the fourth, or the innermost screen; whether they would reach the planet itself and perhaps do some actual damage before being driven off; was immaterial. Eddore must be allowed and would be allowed to repel that invasion with ease. For cycles to come the Eddorians must and would believe that they had nothing really to fear from Arisia.

The real battle, however, had been won. The Arisian visualizations could now be extended to portray every essential element of the climactic conflict which was eventually to come. It was no cheerful conclusion at which the Arisians arrived, since their visualizations all agreed in showing that the only possible method of wiping out the Eddorians would also of necessity end their own usefulness as Guardians of Civilization.

Such an outcome having been shown necessary, however, the Arisians accepted it, and worked toward it, unhesitatingly.

CHAPTER 2

As has been said, The Hill, which had been built to be the Tellurian headquarters of the Triplanetary Service and which was now the headquarters of the half-organized Solarian Patrol, was—and is—a truncated, alloy-sheathed, honey-combed mountain. But, since human beings do not like to live eternally underground, no matter how beautifully lighted or how carefully and comfortably air-conditioned the dungeon may be, the Reservation spread far beyond the foot of that gray, forbidding, mirror-smooth cone of metal. Well outside that farflung Reservation there was a small city; there were hundreds of highly productive farms; and, particularly upon this bright May afternoon, there was a Recreation Park, containing, among other things, dozens of tennis courts.

One of these courts was three-quarters enclosed by stands, from which a couple of hundred people were watching a match which seemed to be of some little local importance. Two men sat in a box which had seats for twenty, and watched admiringly the pair who seemed in a fair way to win in straight sets the mixed-doubles championship of the Hill.

"Fine-looking couple, Rod, if I do say so myself, as well as being smooth performers." Solarian Councillor Virgil Samms spoke to his companion as the opponents changed courts. "I still think, though, the young hussy ought to wear some clothes—those white nylon shorts make her look nakeder even than usual. I told her so, too, the jade, but she keeps on wearing less and less."

"Of course," Commissioner Roderick K. Kinnison laughed quietly. "What did you expect? She got her hair and eyes from you, why not your hard-headedness, too? One thing, though, that's all to the good—she's got what it takes to strip ship that way, and most of 'em haven't. But what I can't understand is why they don't...." He paused.

"I don't either. Lord knows we've thrown them at each other hard enough, and Jack Kinnison and Jill Samms would certainly make a pair to draw to. But if

they won't ... but maybe they will yet. They're still youngsters, and they're friendly enough."

If Samms père could have been out on the court, however, instead of in the box, he would have been surprised; for young Kinnison, although smiling enough as to face, was addressing his gorgeous partner in terms which carried little indeed of friendliness.

"Listen, you bird-brained, knot-headed, grand-standing half-wit!" he stormed, voice low but bitterly intense. "I ought to beat your alleged brains out! I've told you a thousand times to watch your own territory and *stay out of mine!* If you had been where you belonged, or even taken my signal, Frank couldn't have made that thirty-all point; and if Lois hadn't netted she'd've caught you flat-footed, a kilometer out of position, and made it deuce. What do you think you're doing, anyway—playing tennis or seeing how many innocent bystanders you can bring down out of control?"

"What do *you* think?" the girl sneered, sweetly. Her tawny eyes, only a couple of inches below his own, almost emitted sparks. "And just look at who's trying to tell who how to do what! For your information, Master Pilot John K. Kinnison, I'll tell you that just because you can't quit being 'Killer' Kinnison even long enough to let two good friends of ours get a point now and then, or maybe even a game, is no reason why I've got to turn into 'Killer' Samms. And I'll also tell you...."

"You'll tell me nothing, Jill—I'm telling *you!* Start giving away points in anything and you'll find out some day that you've given away too many. I'm not having any of that kind of game—and as long as you're playing with me you aren't either—or else. If you louse up this match just once more, the next ball I serve will hit the tightest part of those fancy white shorts of yours—right where the hip pocket would be if they had any—and it'll raise a welt that will make you eat off of the mantel for three days. So watch your step!"

"You insufferable lug! I'd like to smash this racket over your head! I'll do it, too, and walk off the court, if you don't...."

The whistle blew. Virgilia Samms, all smiles, toed the base-line and became the personification and embodiment of smoothly flowing motion. The ball whizzed over the net, barely clearing it—a sizzling service ace. The game went on.

And a few minutes later, in the shower room, where Jack Kinnison was caroling lustily while plying a towel, a huge young man strode up and slapped him ringingly between the shoulder blades.

"Congratulations, Jack, and so forth. But there's a thing I want to ask you. Confidential, sort of...?"

"Shoot! Haven't we been eating out of the same dish for lo, these many moons? Why the diffidence all of a sudden, Mase? It isn't in character."

"Well ... it's ... I'm a lip-reader, you know."

"Sure. We all are. What of it?"

"It's only that ... well, I saw what you and Miss Samms said to each other out there, and if that was lovers' small talk I'm a Venerian mud-puppy."

"*Lovers!* Who the hell ever said we were lovers?... Oh, you've been inhaling some of dad's balloon-juice. *Lovers!* Me and that red-headed stinker—that jelly-brained sapadilly? *Hardly!*"

"Hold it, Jack!" The big officer's voice was slightly edged. "You're off course—a hell of a long flit off. That girl has got everything. She's the class of the Reservation—why, she's a regular twelve-nineteen!"

"Huh?" Amazed, young Kinnison stopped drying himself and stared. "You mean to say you've been giving her a miss just because...." He had started to say "because you're the best friend I've got in the System," but he did not.

"Well, it would have smelled slightly cheesy, I thought." The other man did not put into words, either, what both of them so deeply knew to be the truth. "But if you haven't got ... if it's O.K. with you, of course...."

"Stand by for five seconds—I'll take you around."

Jack threw on his uniform, and in a few minutes the two young officers, immaculate in the space-black-and-silver of the Patrol, made their way toward the women's dressing rooms.

"... but she's all right, at that ... in most ways ... I guess." Kinnison was half-apologizing for what he had said. "Outside of being chicken-hearted and pig-headed, she's a good egg. She really qualifies ... most of the time. But I wouldn't have her, bonus attached, any more than she would have me. It's

strictly mutual. You won't fall for her, either, Mase; you'll want to pull one of her legs off and beat the rest of her to death with it inside of a week—but there's nothing like finding things out for yourself."

In a short time Miss Samms appeared; dressed somewhat less revealingly than before in the blouse and kilts which were the mode of the moment.

"Hi, Jill! This is Mase—I've told you about him. My boat-mate. Master Electronicist Mason Northrop."

"Yes, I've heard about you, 'Troncist—a lot." She shook hands warmly.

"He hasn't been putting tracers on you, Jill, on accounta he figured he'd be poaching. Can you feature that? I straightened him out, though, in short order. Told him why, too, so he ought to be insulated against any voltage you can generate."

"Oh, you did? How sweet of you! But how ... oh, those?" She gestured at the powerful prism binoculars, a part of the uniform of every officer of space.

"Uh-huh." Northrop wriggled, but held firm.

"If I'd only been as big and husky as you are," surveying admiringly some six feet two of altitude and two hundred-odd pounds of hard meat, gristle, and bone, "I'd have grabbed him by one ankle, whirled him around my head, and flung him into the fifteenth row of seats. What's the matter with him, Mase, is that he was born centuries and centuries too late. He should have been an overseer when they built the pyramids—flogging slaves because they wouldn't step just so. Or better yet, one of those people it told about in those funny old books they dug up last year—liege lords, or something like that, remember? With the power of life and death—'high, middle, and low justice', whatever that was—over their vassals and their families, serfs, and serving-wenches. *Especially* serving-wenches! He likes little, cuddly baby-talkers, who pretend to be utterly spineless and completely brainless—eh, Jack?"

"Ouch! Touché, Jill—but maybe I had it coming to me, at that. Let's call it off, shall we? I'll be seeing you two, hither or yon." Kinnison turned and hurried away.

"Want to know why he's doing such a quick flit?" Jill grinned up at her companion; a bright, quick grin. "Not that he was giving up. The blonde over there—the one in rocket red. Very few blondes can wear such a violent

shade. Dimples Maynard."

"And is she ... er...?"

"Cuddly and baby-talkish? Uh-uh. She's a grand person. I was just popping off; so was he. You know that neither of us really meant half of what we said ... or ... at least...." Her voice died away.

"I don't know whether I do or not," Northrop replied, awkwardly but honestly. "That was savage stuff if there ever was any. I can't see for the life of me why you two—two of the world's finest people—should have to tear into each other that way. Do you?"

"I don't know that I ever thought of it like that." Jill caught her lower lip between her teeth. "He's splendid, really, and I like him a lot—usually. We get along perfectly most of the time. We don't fight at all except when we're too close together ... and then we fight about anything and everything ... say, suppose that that could be it? Like charges, repelling each other inversely as the square of the distance? That's about the way it seems to be."

"Could be, and I'm glad." The man's face cleared. "And I'm a charge of the opposite sign. Let's go!"

And in Virgil Samms' deeply-buried office, Civilization's two strongest men were deep in conversation.

"... troubles enough to keep four men of our size awake nights." Samms' voice was light, but his eyes were moody and somber. "You can probably whip yours, though, in time. They're mostly in one solar system; a short flit covers the rest. Languages and customs are known. But how—*how*—can legal processes work efficiently—work at all, for that matter—when a man can commit a murder or a pirate can loot a space-ship and be a hundred parsecs away before the crime is even discovered? How can a Tellurian John Law find a criminal on a strange world that knows nothing whatever of our Patrol, with a completely alien language—maybe no language at all—where it takes months even to find out who and where—if any—the native police officers are? But there must be a way, Rod—there's *got* to be a way!" Samms slammed his open hand resoundingly against his desk's bare top. "And by God I'll find it—the Patrol *will* come out on top!"