

**A WORLD AT STAKE IN
A DEADLY GAME OF
GALACTIC STRATEGY**

slave planet

**a science fiction novel by
LAURENCE M. JANIFER**



SLAVE PLANET

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*This moral tale is dedicated
To Philip Klass
Who will probably find it disagreeable
But who will think about it:
An occupation as cheering to the writer
As it is rare in the world.*

Fruyling's World

... rich in the metals that kept the Terran Confederation going—one vital link in a galaxy-wide civilization. But the men of Fruyling's World lived on borrowed time, knowing that slavery was outlawed throughout the Confederation—and that only the slave labor of the reptilian natives could produce the precious metals the Confederation needed!

As the first hints of the truth about Fruyling's World emerge, the tension becomes unbearable—to be resolved only in the shattering climax of this fast-paced, thought-provoking story of one of today's most original young writers.

"On Saturday, July 30, Dr. Johnson and I took a sculler at the Temple-stairs, and set out for Greenwich. I asked him if he really thought a knowledge of the Greek and Latin languages an essential requisite to a good education. JOHNSON. 'Most certainly, Sir; for those who know them have a very great advantage over those who do not. Nay, Sir, it is wonderful what a difference learning makes upon people even in the common intercourse of life, which does not appear to be much connected with it.' 'And yet, (said I) people go through the world very well, and carry on the business of life to good advantage, without learning.' JOHNSON. 'Why, Sir, that may be true in cases where learning cannot possibly be of any use; for instance, this boy rows us as well without learning, as if he could sing the song of Orpheus to the Argonauts, who were the first sailors.' He then called to the boy, 'What would you give my lad, to know about the Argonauts?' 'Sir, (said the boy) I would give what I have.' Johnson was much pleased with his answer, and we gave him a double fare. Dr. Johnson then turning to me, 'Sir, (said he) a desire of knowledge is the natural feeling of mankind; and every human being, whose mind is not debauched, will be willing to give all that he has, to get knowledge.'"

—James Boswell,
The Life of Samuel Johnson, L. L. D.

"It has become a common catchword that slavery is the product of an agricultural society and cannot exist in the contemporary, mechanized world. Like so many catchwords, this one is recognizable as nonsense as soon as it is closely examined. Given that the upkeep of the slaves is less than the price of full automation (and *its* upkeep), I do not think we shall prove ourselves morally so very superior to our grandfathers."

—H. D. Abel,
Essays in History and Causation

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PART ONE

1

"I would not repeat myself if it were not for the urgency of this matter." Dr. Haenlingen's voice hardly echoed in the square small room. She stood staring out at the forests below, the coiling gray-green trees, the plants and rough growth. A small woman whose carriage was always, publicly, stiff and erect, whose iron-gray eyes seemed as solid as ice, she might years before have trained her voice to sound improbably flat and formal. Now the formality was dissolving in anger. "As you know, the mass of citizens throughout the Confederation are a potential source of explosive difficulty, and our only safety against such an explosion lies in complete and continuing silence." Abruptly, she turned away from the window. "Have you got that, Norma?"

Norma Fredericks nodded, her trace poised over the waiting pad. "Yes, Dr. Haenlingen. Of course."

Dr. Haenlingen's laugh was a dry rustle. "Good Lord, girl," she said. "Are you afraid of me, too?"

Norma shook her head instantly, then stopped and almost smiled. "I suppose I am, Doctor," she said. "I don't quite know why—"

"Authority figure, parent-surrogate, phi factor—there's no mystery about the why, Norma. If you're content with jargon, and we know all the jargon, don't we?" Now instead of a laugh it was a smile, surprisingly warm but very brief. "We ought to, after all; we ladle it out often enough."

Norma said: "There's certainly no real reason for fear. I don't want you to think—"

"I don't think," Dr. Haenlingen said. "I never think. I reason when I must, react when I can." She paused. "Sometimes, Norma, it strikes me that the

Psychological Division hasn't really kept track of its own occupational syndromes."

"Yes?" Norma waited, a study in polite attention. The trace fell slowly in her hand to the pad on her knees and rested there.

"I ask you if you're afraid of me and I get the beginnings of a self-analysis," Dr. Haenlingen said. She walked three steps to the desk and sat down behind it, her hands clasped on the surface, her eyes staring at the younger woman. "If I'd let you go on I suppose you could have given me a yard and a half of assorted psychiatric jargon, complete with suggestions for a change in your pattern."

"I only—"

"You only reacted the way a good Psychological Division worker is supposed to react, I imagine." The eyes closed for a second, opened again. "You know, Norma, I could have dictated this to a tape and had it sent out automatically. Did you stop to think why I wanted to talk it out to you?"

"It's a message to the Confederation," Norma said slowly. "I suppose it's important, and you wanted—"

"Importance demands accuracy," Dr. Haenlingen broke in. "Do you think you can be more accurate than a tape record?"

A second of silence went by. "I don't know, then," Norma said at last.

"I wanted reaction," Dr. Haenlingen said. "I wanted somebody's reaction. But I can't get yours. As far as I can see you're the white hope of the Psychological Division—but even you are afraid of me, even you are masking any reaction you might have for fear the terrifying Dr. Anna Haenlingen won't like it." She paused. "Good Lord, girl, I've got to know if I'm getting through!"

Norma took a deep breath. "I'm sorry," she said at last. "I'll try to give you what you want—"

"There you go again." Dr. Haenlingen shoved back her chair and stood up, marched to the window and stared out at the forest again. Below, the vegetation glowed in the daylight. She shook her head slowly. "How can you give me what I want when I don't know what I want? I need to know what

you think, how *you* react. I'm not going to bite your head off if you do something wrong: there's nothing wrong that you *can* do. Except not react at all."

"I'm sorry," Norma said again.

Dr. Haenlingen's shoulders moved, up and down. It might have been a sigh. "Of course you are," she said in a gentler voice. "I'm sorry, too. It's just that matters aren't getting any better—and one false move could crack us wide open."

"I know," Norma said. "You'd think people would understand—"

"People," Dr. Haenlingen said, "understand very little. That's what we're here for, Norma: to make them understand a little more. To make them understand, in fact, what we want them to understand."

"The truth," Norma said.

"Of course," Dr. Haenlingen said, almost absently. "The truth."

This time there was a longer pause.

"Shall we get on with it, then?" Dr. Haenlingen said.

"I'm ready," Norma said. "Complete and continuing silence."

Dr. Haenlingen paused. "What?... Oh. It should be perfectly obvious that the average Confederation citizen, regardless of his training or information, would not understand the project under development here no matter how carefully it was explained to him. The very concepts of freedom, justice, equality under the law, which form the cornerstone of Confederation law and, more importantly, Confederation societal patterns, will prevent him from judging with any real degree of objectivity our actions on Fruyling's World, or our motives."

"Actions," Norma muttered. "Motives." The trace flew busily over the pad, leaving its shorthand trail.

"It was agreed in the original formation of our project here that silence and secrecy were essential to the project's continuance. Now, in the third generation of that project, the wall of silence has been breached and I have received repeated reports of rumors regarding our relationship with the natives. The very fact that such rumors exist is indication enough that an

explosive situation is developing. It is possible for the Confederation to be forced to the wall on this issue, and this issue alone: I cannot emphasize too strongly the fact that such a possibility exists. Therefore—"

"Doctor," Norma said.

The dictation stopped. Dr. Haenlingen turned slowly. "Yes?"

"You wanted reactions, didn't you?" Norma said.

"Well?" The word was not unfriendly.

Norma hesitated for a second. Then she burst out: "But they're so far away! I mean—there isn't any reason why they should really care. They're busy with their own lives, and I don't really see why whatever's done here should occupy them—"

"Because you're not seeing them," Dr. Haenlingen said. "Because you're thinking of the Confederation, not the people who compose the Confederation, all of the people on Mars, and Venus, the moons and Earth. The Confederation itself—the government—really doesn't care. Why should it? But the people do—or would."

"Oh," Norma said, and then: "Oh. Of course."

"That's right," Dr. Haenlingen said. "They hear about freedom, and all the rest, as soon as they're old enough to hear about anything. It's part of every subject they study in school, it's part of the world they live in, it's like the air they breathe. They can't question it: they can't even think about it."

"And, of course, if they hear about Fruyling's World—"

"There won't be any way to disguise the fact," Dr. Haenlingen said. "In the long run, there never is. And the fact will shock them into action. As long as they continue to live in that air of freedom and justice and equality under the law, they'll want to stop what we're doing here. They'll have to."

"I see," Norma said. "Of course."

Dr. Haenlingen, still looking out at the world below, smiled faintly. "Slavery," she said, "is such an *ugly* word."

2

The Commons Room of the Third Building of City One was a large affair, whose three bare metal walls enclosed more space than any other single living-quarters room in the Building; but the presence of the fourth wall made it seem tiny. That wall was nearly all window, a non-shatterable clear plastic immensely superior to that laboratory material, glass. It displayed a single unbroken sweep of forty feet, and it looked down on the forests of Fruyling's World from a height of sixteen stories. Men new to the Third Building usually sat with their backs to that enormous window, and even the eldest inhabitants usually placed their chairs somehow out of line with it, and looked instead at the walls, at their companions, or at their own hands.

Fruyling's World was disturbing, and not only because of the choking profusion of forest that always seemed to threaten the isolated clusters of human residence. A man could get used to forests. But at any moment, looking down or out across the gray-green vegetation, that man might catch sight of a native—an Elder, perhaps heading slowly out toward the Birth Huts hidden in the lashing trees, or a group of Small Ones being herded into the Third Building itself for their training. It was hard, perhaps impossible, to get used to that: when you had to see the natives you steeled yourself for the job. When you didn't have to see them you counted yourself lucky and called yourself relaxed.

It wasn't that the natives were hideous, either. Their very name had been given to them by men in a kind of affectionate mockery, since they weren't advanced enough even to have such a group-name of their own as "the people." They were called Alberts, after a half-forgotten character in a mistily-remembered comic strip dating back before space travel, before the true beginnings of Confederation history. If you ignored the single, Cyclopean eye, the rather musty smell and a few other even more minor details, they looked rather like two-legged alligators four feet tall, green as

jewels, with hopeful grins on their faces and an awkward, waddling walk like a penguin's. Seen without preconceptions they might have been called cute.

But no man on Fruyling's World could see the Alberts without preconceptions. They were not Alberts: they were slaves, as the men were masters. And slavery, named and accepted, has traditionally been harder on the master than the slave.

John Dodd, twenty-seven years old, master, part of the third generation, arranged his chair carefully so that it faced the door of the Commons Room, letting the light from the great window illumine the back of his head. He clasped his hands in his lap in a single, nervous gesture, never noticing that the light gave him a faint saintlike halo about his feathery hair. His companion took another chair, set it at right angles to Dodd's and gave it long and thoughtful consideration, as if the act of sitting down were something new and untried.

"It's good to be off-duty," Dodd said violently. "Good. Not to have to see them—not to have to think about them until tomorrow."

The standing man, shorter than Dodd and built heavily, actually turned and looked out at the window. "And then tomorrow what do you do?" he asked. "Give up your job? You're just letting the thing get you, Johnny."

"I'd give up my job in twenty seconds if I thought it would do any good," Dodd said. He shook his head. "I give up a job here in the Buildings, and then what do I do? Go out and starve in the jungle? Nobody's done it, nobody's ever done it."

"Well?" the squat man said. "Is that an excuse?"

Dodd sighed. "Those who work get fed," he said. "And housed. And clothed. And—God help us—entertained, by 3D tapes older than our fathers are. If a man didn't work he'd get—cast out. Cut off."

"There's more than 3D tapes," the squat man said, and grinned.

"Sure." Dodd's voice was tired. "But think about it for a minute, Albin. Do you know what we've got here?"

"We've got a nice, smooth setup," Albin said. "No worries, no fights, a job to do and a place to do it in, time to relax, time to have fun. It's okay."

There was a little silence. Dodd's voice seemed more distant. "Marxian economics," he said. "Perfect Marxian economics, on a world that would make old Karl spin in his grave like an electron."

"I guess so," Albin said. "History's not my field. But—given the setup, what else could there be? What other choice have you got?"

"I don't know." Again a silence. Dodd's hands unclasped: he made a gesture as if he were sweeping something away from his face. "There ought to be something else. Even on Earth, even before the Confederation, there were conscientious objectors."

"History again," Albin said. He walked a few steps toward the window. "Anyhow, that was for war."

"I don't know," Dodd said. His hands went back into his lap, and his eyes closed. He spoke, now, like a man in a dream. "There used to be all kinds of jobs. I guess there still are, in the Confederation. On Earth. Back home where none of us have ever been." He repeated the words like an echo: "Back home." In the silence nothing interrupted him: behind his head light poured in from the giant window. "A man could choose his own job," he went on, in the same tone. "He could be a factory-worker or a professor or a truck-driver or a musician or—a lot of jobs. A man didn't have to work at one, whether he wanted to or not."

"All right," Albin said. "Okay. So suppose you had your choice. Suppose every job in every damn history you've ever heard of was open to you. Just what would you pick? Make a choice. Go ahead, make—"

"It isn't funny, Albin," Dodd said woodenly. "It isn't a game."

"Okay, it isn't," Albin said. "So make it a game. Just for a minute. Think over all the jobs you can and make a choice. You don't like being here, do you? You don't like working with the Alberts. So where would you like to be? What would you like to do?" He came back to the chair, his eyes on Dodd, and sat suddenly down, his elbows on his knees and his chin cupped in his hands, facing Dodd like a gnome out of pre-history. "Go on," he said. "Make a choice."

"Okay," Dodd said without opening his eyes. His voice became more distant, dreamlike. "Okay," he said again. "I—there isn't one job, but maybe a kind of

job. Something to do with growing things." There was a pause. "I'd like to work somewhere growing things. I'd like to work with plants. They're all right, plants. They don't make you feel anything." The voice stopped.

"Plants?" Albin hooted gigantically. "Good God, think about it! You're stuck on a planet that's over seventy per cent plant life—trees and weeds and jungles all over the land and even mats of green stuff covering the oceans and riding on the rivers—a planet that's just about nothing but plants, a king-sized hothouse for every kind of leaf and blade and flower and fruit you could ever dream up—"

"It's not the same," Dodd said.

"You," Albin said, "are out of your head. So if you're crazy for plants, so grow them in your spare time. If you've got a window in your room you can put up a window-box. If not, something else. Me, I think it's damn silly: with the plants all around here, what's the sense of growing more? But if you like it, God knows Fruyling's World is ready to provide it for you."

"As a hobby," Dodd said flatly.

"Well, then, a hobby," Albin said. "If you're interested in it."

"Interested." The word was like an echo. A silence fell. Albin's eyes studied Dodd, the thin face and the play of light on the hair. After a while he shrugged.

"So it isn't plants," he said. "It isn't any more than the Alberts and working with them. You want to do anything to get away from them—anything that won't remind you you have to go back."

"Sure," Dodd said. "Sure I do. So do all of us."

"Not me," Albin said instantly. "Not me, brother. I get my food and my clothing and my shelter, just like good old Marx, I guess, says I should. I'm a trainer for the Alberts, supportive work in the refining process, and some day I'll be a master trainer and get a little more pay, a little more status, you know?" He grinned and sat straight. "What the hell," he said "It's a job. It pays my way. And there's enough leisure time for fun—and when I say fun I don't mean 3D tapes, Dodd. I really don't."

"But you—"

"Look," Albin said. "That's what's wrong with you, kid. You talk as if we all had nothing to do but work and watch tapes. What you need is a little education—a little real education—and I'm the one to give it to you."

Dodd opened his eyes. They looked very large and flat, like the eyes of a jungle animal. "I don't need education," he said. "And I don't need hobbies. I need to get off this planet, that's all. I need to stop working with the Alberts. I need to stop being a master and start being a man again."

Albin sighed. "Slavery," he said. "You think of slavery and it all rises up in front of you—Greece, India, China, Rome, England, the United States—all the past before the Confederation, all the different slaves." He grinned again. "You think it's terrible, don't you?"

"It is terrible," Dodd said. "It's—they're people, just like us. They have a right to their own lives."

"Sure they do," Albin said. "They have the right to—oh, to starve and die in that forest out there, for instance. And work out a lot of primitive rituals, and go through all the Stone Age motions for thousands of years until they develop civilization like you and me. Instead of being kept nice and warm and comfortable and taken care of, and taught things, by the evil old bastards like—well, like you and me again. Right?"

"They have rights," Dodd said stubbornly. "They have rights of their own."

"Sure they do," Albin agreed with great cheerfulness. "How'd you like it if they got some of them? Dodd, maybe you'd like to see them starve? Because it's going to be a long, long time before they develop anything like a solid civilization, kiddo. And in the meantime a lot of them are going to die of things we can prevent. Right? And how'd you like that, Dodd? How would you like that?"

Dodd hesitated. "We ought to help them," he muttered.

"Well," Albin said cheerfully, "that's what we are doing. Keeping them alive, for instance. And teaching them."

"Teaching," Dodd said. Again his voice had the faintly mocking sound of an echo. "And what are we teaching them? Push this button for us. Watch this process for us. If anything changes push this button. Dig here. Carry there." He paused. "Wonderful—for us. But what good does it do them?"

"We've got to live, too," Albin said.

Dodd stared. "At their expense?"

"It's a living," Albin said casually, shrugging. Then: "But I'm serious. One good dose of real enjoyment will cure you, friend. One good dose of fun—by which, kiddo, I mean plain ordinary old sex, such as can be had any free evening around here—and you'll stop being depressed and worried. Uncle Albin Cendar's Priceless Old Recipe, kiddo, and don't argue with me: it works."

Dodd said nothing at all. After a few seconds his eyes slowly closed and he sat like a statue in the room.

Albin, watching him, whistled inaudibly under his breath. A minute went by silently. The light in the room began to diminish.

"Sun's going down," Albin offered.

There was no response. Albin got up again and went to the window.

"Maybe you're right," he said with his back to Dodd's still figure. "There ought to be some way of getting people off-planet, people who just don't want to stay here."

"Do you know why there isn't?" Dodd's voice was a shock, stronger than before.

"Sure I know," Albin said. "There's—"

"Slavery," Dodd said. "Oh, sure, maybe somebody knows about it, but it's got to be kept quiet. And if anybody got back—well, look."

"Don't bother me with it." Albin's voice was suddenly less sure.

"Look," Dodd said. "The Confederation needs the metal. It exists pure here, and in quantity. But if they knew, really knew, how we mined and smelted and purified it and got it ready for shipment...."

"So suppose somebody goes back," Albin said. "Suppose somebody talks. What difference does it make? It's just rumor, nothing official. No, the reason nobody goes back is cargo space, pure and simple. We need every inch of cargo space for the shipments."

"If somebody goes back," Dodd said, "the people will know. Not the

government, not the businesses, the people. And the people don't like slavery, Albin. No matter how necessary a government finds it. No matter what kind of a jerry-built defense you can put up for it."

"Don't be silly," Albin said. There was less conviction in his voice; he looked out at the sunset as if he were trying to reassure himself.

"Nobody's allowed to leave," Dodd said, more quietly. "We're—they're taking every precaution they can. But some day—maybe some day, Albin—the people are going to find out in spite of every precaution." He sat straighter. "And then it'll all be over. Then they'll be wiped out, Albin. Wiped out."

"They need us," Albin said uncertainly. "They can't do without us."

Dodd swung round to face him. The sunset was a deepening blaze in the Commons Room. "Wait and find out," he said in a voice that suddenly rang on the metal walls. "Wait and find out."

After a long time Albin said. "Damn it, what you need is education. A cure. Fun. What I've been saying." He paused and took a breath. "How about it, Dodd?"

Dodd didn't move. Another second passed. "All right, Albin," he said slowly, at last. "I'll think about it. I'll think about it."