

Chris Godfrey:

# The Dark Triangle

by Hugh Walters

A Chris Godfrey of U.N.E.X.A. Adventure  
Book 20 in the series.

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# CHAPTER 1

## **PRESIDENT AND PRIME MINISTER VANISH**

The headlines screamed out in the largest of print from the pages of the world's press. Radio and television cancelled all programmes to report on the most astounding news they had ever had to broadcast.

The President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Britain had both vanished from the face of the earth.

No one could believe it. Two of the most prominent and powerful people on this planet had suddenly disappeared? Incredible!

As more details unfolded the story became more fantastic and frightening. Not only had President Maxwell and Miss Moore disappeared, but their plane, with twenty other people, crew, aides and secretaries, had totally vanished.

Almost everyone knew about the important conference that had just taken place in Florida between Mr. Maxwell and Miss Moore. It had been even more momentous than the other regular meetings of these two Heads of State, for it had been held to discuss what action the two governments could take about the growing crisis in the world's energy supply. And now, before any decisions could be made known or put into action, the Bermuda Triangle had claimed its latest batch of victims.

The very name of this sinister area of the Western Atlantic Ocean brought a shudder to everyone who knew anything about it. The Bermuda Triangle, with the Bermuda Islands to the north, Florida to the south, and a point about a thousand miles out in the Atlantic as its eastern tip, had long had a most frightening reputation.

When Chris Godfrey heard the news on his transistor, he was having a bath at his London flat. He jumped out and towelled himself dry as he listened to the solemn voice of the news-reader.

Chris was aware of the long list of people, ships and aircraft that

had vanished without trace inside the Triangle. Records of these inexplicable events had been kept for over two hundred years. Scores of ships, dozens of planes, and thousands of people had vanished as if they had never existed. Now the Triangle had added Lucy Moore, the British Prime Minister, and James Maxwell, President of the United States, to its long list of victims.

The news bulletin went on to say that an intensive search was being made for the missing aircraft by scores of planes and ships. So far no trace had been found. But there was still a chance that the pilot had crash-landed on the sea and that the searchers hadn't yet spotted the tiny rubber dinghies in which the survivors could be floating.

Chris finished dressing and then went to knock on the door of the next flat. This was occupied by Morrison Kant, an American astronaut, who had been his close friend for a long time. The door was opened almost at once.

"Heard the news, Morrey?" Chris asked, but he already had his answer from the American's face.

"Yes. It's terrible, isn't it? Your Prime Minister and our President! Now perhaps people will take the menace of the Triangle seriously."

He was referring to the fact that for years the governments of many countries, including the U.S.A. and the U.K., had been extremely reticent about the Bermuda Triangle. Reports of strange happenings and disappearances had been played down, even denied, in official quarters. At best they were declared to be the unfortunate results of extraordinary natural phenomena. When relations of missing people pressed for information, they had been met with a wall of official silence. The military leaders of the countries concerned refused to admit that the threat of the Triangle existed.

Now, with President and Premier lost within it, to say nothing of the plane and its other passengers, matters must come to a head. No longer could Officialdom avoid a full-scale investigation into the nature and cause of the events in this most mysterious area.

"Perhaps the United Nations may officially recognize the problem of the Bermuda Triangle," Chris observed. "I think we'd better get back to New York."

Though their spell of leave was less than half over, Morrey quietly agreed.

If the U.N. decided, following this latest event, to order an all-out investigation, it would probably request one of its Agencies—the United Nations Exploration Agency—to conduct operations. And if U.N.E.X.A. did get the job, both Chris and Morrey would be deeply involved.

“I’ll put a call through to Sir Billy,” Chris said, “and let him know we’re on our way back.”

“Use my phone,” Morrey offered, and Chris dialed the number of Sir William Gillanders’ office in the U.N.O. building in New York.

“United Nations Exploration Agency. Director’s Office,” a girl answered.

“Hello, Janet,” Chris said, recognizing the voice of Sir Billy’s secretary. “Is the Chief in?”

“Mr. Godfrey! Yes, he’s in, and won’t he be glad to hear from you! Hold on and I’ll put you through.”

“Chris!” the Director’s voice boomed a couple of seconds later. “By all that’s wonderful! I’ve been torn between letting you finish your leave and getting you back here. Only an hour ago I’d decided to get Janet to try and find you. Can you come back?”

“That’s what I’m ringing for, Billy,” Chris chuckled. “Morrey and I have decided we’re fed up with our holiday, so we’re both coming back to work. Is that all right?”

“Get here as soon as you can, Chris,” Sir Billy said, his voice now sharp with anxiety. “We have all Hell let loose.”

“Is it the Triangle business?” asked Chris.

“Sure. What else? Now cut the cackle and get on your way. See you in a few hours.”

The Director ended the conversation abruptly, and Chris, who knew him better than most, could tell how tense his Chief must be. Normally Sir Billy would have gone on chatting and asked about how he had spent his leave, about mutual friends, and about a certain Miss Sue Howard.

“That was a short call,” Morrey smiled. “How’s the Chief?”

“Worried. Very worried, I’d say,” Chris answered thoughtfully. “He was going to recall me, so we’d better get moving. You do want to come as well, don’t you, Morrey?”

“Sure. If there’s anything going on, I want to be in on it. Besides—if it’s anything to do with this blessed Triangle, you try and keep me away.”

“Then will you fix up our flights while I let Sue know what is happening?”

A wide grin spread across the face of the tall American at the mention of the girl’s name. So Chris really was friendly with her. Well, she was a nice lass, and Morrey wouldn’t have minded if he’d been the one chosen for her special friendship.

“What’s that silly grin supposed to mean?” demanded Chris, his colour slightly higher.

“Oh nothing. Nothing at all,” Morrey replied innocently. “Do give Sue my love when you see her.”

“I’ll do nothing of the sort,” Chris—now grinning too—replied. “You get cracking on that phone. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

“O.K., O.K. Shall I pack your things?”

“Thanks, Morrey,” Chris said appreciatively. “That will give me more time.”

“More time for what?” asked the American, and the knowing grin was back.

“You mind your own business,” Chris snorted in mock anger, and he marched out of Morrey’s flat.

To tell the truth, he’d miss Sue. He’d met her for the first time when investigating strange happenings in Guernsey. There had been repeated reports of UFO sightings, and Sue had been the first to meet the Beings who had arrived on earth. Since then she and Chris had become firm friends and spent as much time together as possible when he was on leave in Britain. They were to go to the ballet together that evening. Now he’d have some explaining to do. He hoped Sue would understand.

Sir Anthony Blackham was a famous surgeon, and as his secretary Sue Howard always had plenty to do. Even so, she found



the occasional moment to dream of the evening's performance. She hadn't seen Coppelia for years. Was Chris a ballet fan, she wondered. Or would he be bored? They were going to a restaurant afterwards. What should she wear?

When the astronaut arrived at the consulting rooms, she was more than a little surprised.

"Chris!" she burst out. "Is there anything the matter?"

"No, no, Sue. There's nothing the matter. At least—not with you or me. But there's something I must tell you."

"Sit down, Chris. The boss has a patient, so I have a few minutes. What is it?"

Chris drew a deep breath.

"I've got to go back to New York. Something's happened, and the Chief wants me back."

"Oh, Chris! Your leave isn't half over yet. Then it's a good job we're going out tonight. When will you be back?"

"I don't know. But I'll not be able to go with you tonight. Morrey and I have to catch a plane this evening."

"Oh, Chris, it isn't true, is it?" Sue burst out, tears springing to her eyes. "You don't mean it seriously, do you?"

"I'm afraid so. Did you hear the news this morning? You did? Well, it's because of those disappearances that Morrey and I have to go back. Sorry, Sue."

The girl smiled as bravely as she could. Then a sudden thought struck her.

"You won't have to go into that Triangle yourself, will you, Chris? You won't have to do anything dangerous?" she asked.

At any other time Chris would have laughed. Not do anything dangerous? His whole life had been filled with danger and adventure. One cannot roam the solar system without danger. Chris had had more than his share of the perils of space exploration.

"I may have to go into the Triangle," he replied quietly. "It seems that the United Nations is taking the whole idea of it very seriously now that Miss Moore and Mr. Maxwell are its latest victims. But I promise I won't get into any unnecessary danger."

“Chris, Sir Billy did half promise that he’d get me a job with U.N.E.X.A. if I wanted it,” Sue said desperately. “Will you remind him?”

“Of course I will.” Sue had been the famous surgeon’s secretary even before he moved to London from the Midlands, but Sir Anthony had given her a spell of leave to help Chris, Morrey, and other friends to undertake a dangerous task at the special request of Sir William Gillanders. She had shown great courage in doing a job for U.N.E.X.A. that only she could do. The Director had been very grateful and had told her so. Sue longed to have a more exciting job. If she could persuade Sir Billy to remember his promise, then she would be nearer to Chris and might have adventures as well.

“I’ll twist Billy’s arm,” Chris promised, “and I’m sure Morrey will help me if I need it. Well, Sue, I must be going now. Sorry about tonight, but in my job you know how it is.”

“I wish I could come to see you off,” Sue sighed, “but the boss has a heavy case-list today, so there isn’t a chance. Take care of yourself, Chris, and don’t forget that arm-twisting.”

As he was going back to his flat Chris felt bad about letting Sue down over their night out. She’d taken it very well, and he was grateful to her. She did seem to understand the difficulties of his job as Sir Billy’s Deputy. Well—if he could persuade his Chief to find her a job at U.N.E.X.A. it would be the least he could do.

Morrey had finished packing for both of them when Chris reached his flat.

“I thought you were never coming. Our plane leaves in fifty minutes. We shall only just make it.”

When they were in the taxi on their way to Heathrow, Morrey asked about Sue.

“Well, you can guess how she felt about tonight,” Chris sighed, “though I must say she took it rather well. Look, Morrey,” he went on quickly, “Billy promised to get her a job in our Agency. Remember? I’m going to remind him of it as soon as I see him.” “All right, old chap, I’ll back you up. I’m sure Janet could do with some help.”

There were few other passengers on their plane. It was a U.N.O.

jet, and used only by officials and special visitors to the United Nations. Chris recognized some of them, and Morrey others. But there was an atmosphere of strain as they streaked across the Atlantic towards Kennedy Airport.

Everyone seemed to be avoiding the one subject that was filling the news media—the disappearance of the President and the Prime Minister. Normally one would have expected to catch snatches of comment on any other subject that had hit the headlines, but everyone seemed afraid even to mention this one. Yet that dark Triangle wouldn't go away just because no one talked about it, Chris told himself.

After a time Morrey dozed and Chris went forward to the cockpit. He knew both the pilot and the co-pilot, as he had flown with them many times before. They motioned him to an empty seat behind them.

“I've been recalled because of the Triangle affair,” Chris explained after he'd exchanged greetings with the two men. “Is there anything new on the radio?”

Captain Lakin, the pilot, signed to his assistant to take over the controls. Then he turned to Chris.

“It's a bad business, Mr. Godfrey,” he said in a low voice, as if anxious not to be overheard, “and it's rather scary. Some fresh bits of information have come through. There's been absolutely no sign of the plane nor any trace of wreckage. It seems that the pilot, an old friend of mine, reported trouble with his instruments. Then the plane went completely off radar. They have just broadcast an official directive from the United Nations forbidding any commercial ships or aircraft to approach within a hundred miles of the Triangle.”

“There's something coming through for you personally, Mr. Godfrey,” the co-pilot interrupted, and he was silent for a moment as he listened to the voice in his head-phones.

“You're to meet Mr. Hale and Mr. Smyslov in the reception lounge, and then you are all to go at once to your Director's office,” he said. Chris thanked him and also Captain Lakin. So Tony and Serge were being brought in as well, he thought to himself as he made his way back to his seat. They were old friends with whom he

had shared many perils in Space, along with Morrey. Among astronauts they had come to be regarded as the four inseparables, though Chris hadn't been able to go on every Space venture recently. Since he'd been promoted to be Sir Billy's Deputy, he'd been almost office-bound. But he did use his influence to escape whenever possible.

It seemed that whatever was going to be done about that frightening Triangle, the four old friends would again be working together.

## CHAPTER 2

Sure enough in the vast reception lounge at Kennedy Airport, Tony Hale and Serge Smyslov were waiting for their friends.

Tony was a cheerful young man with a perpetual grin and an insatiable appetite. Though he hadn't been very successful at school, he'd turned out to be one of the finest mechanics in the employ of U.N.E.X.A. Many times Tony had been the one who had saved their space-ship when his more academic friends had been helpless.

Serge was a dark, slight, thoughtful Russian, whose brilliant mind was much appreciated by his friends and employers. Tony, for one, never ceased to marvel at Serge's knowledge of astronomy and gift for mathematics, for he could solve in a flash a problem that would have taken the mechanic Weeks to work out.

The four friends greeted each other boisterously. Together they had faced death many times. Together they had explored every corner of the solar system. Together they had made more spaceflights and had more experience than anyone else under Sir Billy's command. Little wonder that when the frightening problem of the Bermuda Triangle had been thrust upon him, the Director had decided to call in this well-trying quartet.

A big black limousine was waiting for them. It had a uniformed chauffeur and carried the U.N.E.X.A. flash. As they drove along the four young men talked eagerly together, but carefully avoided the subject that was uppermost in their minds.

"See anything of Sue while you were in London?" Tony asked Chris with a wink.

"Oh, just a little," Chris replied. He still hadn't quite got used to his companions' teasing about his friendship with the girl. Which, of course, made them do it all the more.

"She was real mad with him for cutting short his leave," Morrey volunteered with a grin. "He'd promised to take her to the ballet, and he let her down."

"Morrey, you know it wasn't like that," Chris protested uncomfortably. "Sue understands what our job entails. Besides"—

brightening—"I've promised to remind Billy about his promise to her."

"That he'd get her fixed up out here? That would be great," exclaimed Tony. "Then we could all take her out. If you let her down, I'm sure she'd find me good company."

"You talk too much," Serge smiled at the mechanic. "Can't you see how uncomfortable you are making Chris?"

Which remark made Chris still more uncomfortable. He was glad when their journey was over.

Sir Billy's greeting was both hearty and sincere, though Chris could detect the strain under which his Chief was labouring.

"Am I glad to see you, Chris! You too, Morrey. Good of you to agree to cut short your leave and to get here so quickly."

"Chris has got himself into trouble with his girl friend," laughed Tony. If looks could have killed, he would have fallen dead.

"Ah, yes. How is Miss Howard?" smiled Sir Billy. He was well aware of the growing friendship between his Deputy and the young lady who had helped them so much in Guernsey.

"She's fine," replied Chris uncomfortably. "She sends you her regards."

"Thanks. Well, now, you four! You all know why you're here. The disappearance of the President and the Prime Minister, together with the rest of the passengers and crew, has brought matters to a head with a vengeance. Both countries—the whole world—is humming with the news, and the demand for action can no longer be resisted. It seems that our rulers are at last being forced to investigate the mystery of the Bermuda Triangle. U.N.E.X.A. has been entrusted—I nearly said 'burdened'—with the task."

"Sir Billy, there's something I must get off my chest before we begin," Tony, to everyone's surprise, interrupted. "I just don't believe that there's anything mysterious about this Triangle of yours. Oh, I know a lot of ships and planes have vanished in the area, but I'm sure there's nothing spooky about it. Extraordinary electrical and meteorological conditions, about which we know nothing, there may be. No one's going to tell me that all the accidents are not due to some natural causes."

“You may be right, Tony, or you may not,” Sir Billy said seriously, “but I suggest that our best attitude would be to keep an open mind. Since this last affair all ships and aircraft have been ordered to avoid the area—not without some opposition, I must add.”

“But surely no one seriously believes any of the wild theories that have been tossed about,” Tony persisted. “I’ve even heard it suggested that Beings from Space are using the area to collect and take away samples of humans and their technology.”

“Yes, that does seem to be the theory most in fashion at the moment,” the Director admitted. “Yet other people, like you, Tony, are convinced that it is the strange physical conditions that can occur in this particular zone, that have caused so many casualties.”

“But how do people who insist on a natural explanation account for everything?” asked Morrey. “Why should entire ships vanish without leaving even a scrap of wreckage? And, in other cases, why have all humans been missing from an empty ship and only animals left aboard?”

“I don’t know,” admitted Tony, “but remember that ships and aircraft vanish all over the world. People don’t put forward wild ideas every time something happens.”

“That’s true,” the American admitted, “but from what I’ve read, there have been far more disappearances in this Triangle than anywhere else on earth.”

“I suggest we do as the Chief says,” Chris interrupted. “Let us approach the problem with an open mind. Now, Billy, what do you want us to do?”

“I’d like you, first of all, to learn all you can about the occurrences in the area,” the Director replied, “avoiding, of course, sensational theories and exaggerated accounts. Then you might like to talk to people who have seen strange sights there and have come back to tell the tale.”

“Very well. We’ll do anything you say,” Chris replied on behalf of them all. “When do we start?”

“I knew you would say that,” Sir Billy smiled with relief, “but one thing I must say to you. Don’t take the situation too lightly. Even the most sceptical person would, I think, have to concede that some

extraordinary conditions exist in the Triangle, conditions about which we know very little. Also there are these disappearances, which have undoubtedly taken place over many years.”

“I don’t think I’m likely to vanish,” laughed Tony, “and I’ll say right now I don’t believe in these spook stories I’ve heard. I’m quite sure there is a perfectly natural and scientific explanation for everything that has happened.”

“I hope you’re right,” Sir Billy said heavily, “and as a scientist I tend to support your view. But I must insist on your acting with the utmost caution.”

He pressed a bell on his desk and his secretary, Miss Pedley, appeared quickly.

“Janet,” the Director said, “get these chaps that folder on the Bermuda Triangle. I want them to take it to their rooms to study the contents.”

The girl flashed a smile at the four astronauts and then went out. Morrey cleared his throat and spoke.

“Er—I think your Miss Pedley looks very overworked,” he observed. “Don’t you think she could do with some help?”

The others looked at him with surprise. Then Chris’s face became a study. He knew what his friend was going to suggest.

“I hadn’t noticed,” the Director replied. “She hasn’t said she has too much work.”

“She wouldn’t—not our Janet,” Morrey grinned, “but take it from me, she ought to have an assistant.”

At that point light began to dawn on Serge and Tony, and wide grins spread over their faces. Chris became even more uncomfortable.

“Hey! What’s going on?” demanded Sir Billy.

“Go on. You tell him, Chris,” Morrey said.

“Yes, you tell him,” Tony and Serge urged.

For once in his life Chris felt at a complete loss for words. He struggled to frame his request to Sir Billy while his Chief looked at him curiously, and waited.



“Oh—er—it’s just that I—we—wondered if there was any chance of Sue, Miss Howard, getting a job over here,” he managed to say.

“Yes. You know you promised her one,” Tony burst out.

“So I did,” Sir Billy replied, a twinkle not far from his eyes. “I remember that our Miss Howard is the very efficient secretary of a well-known dentist.”

“Surgeon,” corrected Chris.

“Ah—yes. A surgeon. Well, U.N.EX.A is in debt to her for her very courageous actions on its behalf,” the Director said solemnly. “I’ve no doubt Janet can find her plenty to do. Let’s see what Janet has to say, shall we?”

He rang the bell on his desk and a moment later Janet appeared.

“Er—Janet,” Sir Billy began, “could you do with an assistant? Chris—Mr. Godfrey—has a friend who is most anxious to come and work for us.”

“Do I want an assistant? You must be joking, Sir William. Do you know how many hours’ overtime I have to put in every week?”

“All right. All right,” Sir Billy said hastily. “I just wondered how the idea of an assistant would appeal to you. How do you think you would get on with her?”

“If she’s a friend of Chris’s—sorry, Mr. Godfrey’s—I’m sure I would get on fine with her. How soon can she start?”

“Not so fast, Janet,” the Director smiled. “We have yet to see if Miss Howard will accept the job. Then I suppose she will have some loose ends to tie up in London. Can you phone her, Chris?”

“I think I can find time to do that,” Chris grinned happily. “I’ll tell her to get over here just as soon as she can.”

The four friends were staying in the U.N.O. building, and Chris’s room was kept permanently ready for him. As Deputy to Sir Billy he often had to spend the night working for U.N.E.X.A, so all that he needed was already there. The other three soon had their baggage unpacked, after which, by arrangement, they met again at the restaurant.

“Have you phoned Sue yet?” asked Tony as they waited for the meal to be served.

“Heavens, No!” smiled Chris. “It’s two a.m. in London. Sue wouldn’t thank me for disturbing her at that hour.”

“Rubbish,” Tony insisted. “She’d be glad to hear from you at any time.”

“Nevertheless, I shall phone her at a more reasonable hour.”

There was a pile of reports for the four young men to study, many of them marked SECRET. They were all accounts of strange events that had occurred within the Triangle. Some of the reports had never been published, others only in part, for it had been felt that full publication would create a panic.

Chris and his friends settled down to study the mass of papers, and the more they read the more alarming the situation appeared to be. They had, of course, already heard numerous reports of ships, aircraft and submarines vanishing without trace. They had also known of the strange tricks time seemed to have played in that forbidding area. But these confidential reports were far more alarming than those they already knew. As they read on the four became graver.

“I still think there’s some natural explanation,” Tony burst out, flinging down his pile of folders. “It’s just too absurd to contemplate any other.”

“Is. it?” Serge asked quietly. “I don’t think so. What has happened in the Bermuda Triangle has all the signs of extraterrestrial activity. How else could so many men and materials cease to exist?”

“Whatever the cause, we have to try and find it,” Chris said firmly, “and we won’t help ourselves if we get fixed ideas before we start.”

“Yes, but there’s no harm in discussing various possibilities,” Morrey suggested. “We needn’t favour any of them until we’ve visited the spot.”

“Then perhaps we shall all disappear,” suggested Tony derisively. “At least we will know the answer. Or will we?”

“You don’t take this Bermuda Triangle affair at all seriously, do you, Tony?” Morrey demanded warmly.

“I know hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people have vanished within it, including the President and the Prime Minister. Oh yes, I

do take it seriously, but I'm not prepared to believe in the supernatural," the mechanic declared firmly.

"I'd like us to study these reports and see if any clues strike us," Chris intervened before the argument could develop further.

"If we work in the Triangle what precautions can we take about not disappearing ourselves?" asked Serge.

"That I don't know," Chris confessed. "We'll see if Sir Billy or his boffins have come up with any ideas when we meet them tomorrow."

"I wouldn't mind disappearing if only I could be sure I could come back," Tony said. "If we didn't get back to report our work would be wasted, wouldn't it?" he added teasingly.

"No one has ever reappeared," Serge reminded his friends.

"And some people who haven't actually vanished have had very strange experiences. I think we should concentrate on their reports.

"What interests me," he went on, "is the strange effect the Triangle seems to have on time. You remember two early incidents. In one, a pilot was in trouble through apparent instrument failure. He sent out an S.O.S. call on his radio, but then managed to get back to his base. On arrival he was told that a distress signal had just been received and he was requested to join in the search. It was only when he was given details of the message that he realized that it was his own, which had only just been received. .

"Then on another occasion a passenger plane had electrical trouble, seemed to be enveloped in some form of thick mist, with the pilot losing all sense of direction for a few minutes. Here, too, the plane managed to land safely. But every clock and watch, including all those worn by the passengers, was ten minutes slow when compared with the correct time when they landed."

"Are you suggesting that something peculiar happens to time?" asked Tony incredulously. "Some time-warp or other?"

"I'm not suggesting anything," Serge replied quietly. "I'm just pointing out something very remarkable."

## CHAPTER 3

“Sir Anthony Blackham’s rooms,” Sue Howard said into the phone.

It was another call from a patient asking for an appointment. She reached for the large desk diary to see when she could fit in the consultation. The phone crackled a little and then a totally unexpected voice came on the line.

“Hello, Sue. How are you?”

Sue nearly dropped the phone.

“Chris! How wonderful! Where are you? Is there anything the matter?”

“Calm down,” the voice at the other end of the line chuckled. “I’m fine, and I’m calling you from New York. Sue, how would you like to come and work for Sir Billy?”

“What? What did you say?”

“I said—now listen carefully—there’s a job over here, working for Sir William Gillanders, Director of the United Nations Exploration Agency, if you want to take it.”

The girl was speechless for a few seconds.

“Are you serious, Chris? You say I could come and work for Sir Billy? What would I have to do?”

“Very much the same as you are doing now. Sir Billy’s secretary, Janet Pedley, is always complaining about having too much work to do for one person. You would help her. What do you say, Sue?”

“Oh, I don’t know, Chris,” Sue managed to say. “You’ve taken my breath away. When would the job start?”

“Just as soon as you can pack and get over here. I presume you will have to give your boss some notice?”

“Yes. A month,” Sue replied. She still couldn’t quite believe what was happening. It would be great to work in New York. She’d see more of Chris—and the others, of course. But where would she live? She didn’t know anyone except Chris, the other three, and Sir Billy himself. As if reading her thoughts, Chris answered her question

before she could ask it.

“Janet Pedley, the girl you would help, would like you to share her flat,” he said. “She’s a great lass, and I’m sure you would get on well together. Can I tell the Chief you’ll come?”

“Very well,” Sue heard herself answering. Her heart was racing. She had never anticipated having to make such an important decision at a moment’s notice. She hoped she was doing the right thing. Still—she’d be near Chris.

“I’ll see Sir Anthony as soon as he’s finished with his patient,” she promised. “He won’t be very pleased.”

“I know he won’t like losing a paragon like you,” Chris laughed. “I’ll call you at the same time tomorrow, so get cracking, girl.”

Sir Anthony Blackham didn’t like losing his secretary. When Sue told him she had been offered a job as assistant secretary to Sir William Gillanders, he was more than a little surprised. But when Sue, breathlessly, went on to tell him that Chris Godfrey had phoned her from New York about the situation, he understood. He was not unaware of the friendship between his Miss Howard and the young Deputy Director of the United Nations Exploration Agency.

“You will help me to get someone else in your place, won’t you?” the surgeon asked.

Sue promised that she would, for she knew a number of very competent girls who would jump at the job. So it was agreed that as soon as she had found and trained a suitable girl to take her place, she would be free to leave. She was grateful to Sir Anthony for being so understanding.

The Coast Guard Authorities responsible for that area of sea now popularly christened the Bermuda Triangle were reluctant to call off the search. Yet everything possible had been done to find out what had happened to the Presidential plane with its crew and distinguished passengers. Submarines had been called in to scour the sea-bed for wreckage, but absolutely nothing had been found. At last it had to be generally admitted that the plane and people had ceased to exist.

The press, of course, was full of theories to explain this astounding event, some even suggesting that a foreign power had, with evil intent, kidnapped the two prominent politicians. Accusations were thrown backwards and forwards with increasing violence. Denials seemed to do nothing but fan the flames. Questions were asked in many parliaments, and even the General Assembly of U.N.O. was the scene of hostile questioning. The only reply that anyone could give was that the matter had now been handed over to U.N.E.X.A. for urgent investigation.

Sir Billy Gillanders was under ever-mounting pressure to get results, but he refused to be hurried. The Triangle Affair had been simmering for very many years—and probably would have continued to do so had it not been for this latest and most sensational event.

Chris and his friends were anxious to get into action, but the Director was not prepared to risk anyone's life if it could be helped. What he did was to call a meeting of the top scientists in his Agency, so that they could work out a line of action.

It was apparent, right from the start, that there were two conflicting opinions. Everyone now had to accept that the ships, planes and their passengers no longer existed, and that it was no ordinary catastrophe that had occurred—otherwise there would have been evidence of what had happened. The complete absence of survivors or wreckage must be due to something outside ordinary human experience.

One school of thought believed that the ships, aircraft and people had been removed from our planet by extra-terrestrial Beings. They argued that, among the many planets in the Universe, there must be many—perhaps a million—that are almost identical to Earth and on which intelligent Life could equally well exist. On some of these, at least, there must be civilizations that might be far more advanced than our human one.

Would it not be reasonable to suppose that these Beings would be curious about humans and our way of life? Might they not be taking samples of our people and our technology? Perhaps the Bermuda Triangle was, for some reason unknown to us, a suitable area for their purpose. Maybe they chose their samples at random. Or could it be that they had known that the Prime Minister and the President

would be together, and theirs for the taking?

Further evidence in support of the extra-terrestrial school of thought lay in the strange lights that had been seen in the sky and also in the depths of the sea. It had been proved, beyond argument, that neither had come from any man-made machine. Which all pointed in one direction.

The other school of thought among the assembled scientists was much more difficult for Tony to understand. The supporters of this alternative explanation put forward the view that the disappearances were due either to a warp in time, or to transfers to another dimension. They argued that time was not the steady, remorseless succession of events that all human experience said it was.

Rather, they argued, time was itself really a fourth dimension. To exist, any object had to have depth, height, breadth—and to exist in time. As it is possible to move about in the other three dimensions, it must be the same with time. One ought to be able to move backwards or forwards or sideways in this fourth dimension, and in the Bermuda Triangle there must be an area where this occurred.

As Tony listened to the sometimes heated arguments, he had to confess that he didn't understand more than a fraction of what was being said. To him time had always seemed orderly and immutable. One was born, lived one's life, and then died. Seconds, minutes and hours measured the steady passage of time, stretching eventually into centuries and millennia.

One question Tony had always found beyond him was whether there was a beginning or an end of time. For if there had been a beginning, what was there before time began? And what would there be after it ended? He found it impossible to grasp the concept of time without beginning or end, just as it was impossible to think of endless space.

Could the Bermuda Triangle be like a door that allowed people to blunder through into the fourth dimension? If so, did they continue to exist, perhaps in some distant future or some longgone past?

Sir William Gillanders had repeatedly to direct the attention of the scientists to the urgent and serious objectives of their meeting—to devise some means of finding out what really happened to people

and things in this sinister area. Was there not some means of ensuring that a person who vanished might come back to reveal what had happened? Or at least communicate from wherever, or whenever, he was?

Perhaps a personal, high-powered radio transmitter might ensure a message getting through. But could such a message travel through time? It could, of course, journey through space, though it might take many years on its journey, depending on how far away the extra-terrestrial Beings had taken their captives.

“But that supposes that someone is willing to enter the Triangle, carrying the transmitter, and seeking to be transported,” one scientist suddenly burst out.

There was a horrified silence in the room. It was true that someone must carry the transmitter into the Triangle and risk being taken away, probably never to return. No one could be expected to face this, so unless another bright idea was put forward the whole gathering was a waste of time. Sir Billy adjourned the meeting until next day.

“What do you think, Chris?” Morrey asked as the four friends sat in a quiet corner of the common room. They had had their evening meal and were now talking together. Other groups were gathered in different parts of the room, discussing, no doubt, the same dreadful problem.

Chris Spoke thoughtfully.

“It seems to me that this task must be carried out in a ‘step by step’ approach. Just as we took one small step at a time in venturing into Space, so I think we must do the same with the Triangle.”

“You remember,” he went on, “that the very first step into Space was the launching of artificial satellites, followed by orbital manned flights. Then came flights around the moon, leading to the actual landing by Neil Armstrong on July 21st, 1969. You see, each step provided information necessary for the planning and execution of the next step. In this way the risk of the unknown is reduced as much as possible.”

“Then what do you suggest is the first step in unravelling the mystery of the Triangle?” asked Serge.



“Obviously it must be for a volunteer to venture into it, deliberately seeking to disappear. He could make maximum use of his portable radio, and might even be able to get back to us some vital information that would lead to the planning of the second step.”

“Whew!” gasped Tony. “That would want some nerve. Fancy—someone going into that horrible place expecting to be whisked off and never come back! Though I still believe there’s nothing spooky about it,” he added hastily.

“How effective do you think a radio would be?” Morrey asked.

“I don’t know,” Chris confessed. “This would be one of the most important things we should have to find out. The volunteer would have to give a running commentary on all events in the hope that he could describe what was happening.”

“What radio set had you in mind?” asked Tony.

“The little set we’ve used before. It worked well on Mars. We were able to speak directly back to Mission Control. Yet it is small enough to fit into the palm of the hand.”

There was a sudden tension in the other three, and they looked at Chris with staring eyes. It was Tony who voiced the dreadful thought that had struck all of them.

“You—you’re not volunteering to go into the Triangle, are you?” he gasped.

“Of course,” replied Chris, surprised that they should ever have doubted it. “Someone has to do it, and U.N.E.X.A. has the job. So, as Deputy Director, I claim to be that person.”

“But, Chris,” spluttered Morrey, “you can’t do it! Suppose you vanish and can’t come back! It—it doesn’t bear thinking about”

“Then at least I should know the secret of the Bermuda Triangle,” Chris laughed. “No, I’ve thought a lot about this. We’ve had a good run and been in some pretty tight situations. This may be different from anything any human has faced voluntarily before. But if the mystery of the Dark Triangle is to be solved, if these disappearances are to be halted, someone has to allow himself to be snatched away. Can you think of anyone better able to do the job than I am?”

With sinking hearts Chris’s three friends realized that the Deputy

was determined to carry out his intention. He would be the first person to go into that awful Triangle deliberately seeking to be taken. He was prepared to sacrifice his own life in order to find out more about this fearsome area.

Guessing what they were thinking, Chris went on as lightly as if he were discussing a Moon Walk.

“What I should do,” he said, “is to cruise about in the Triangle, either in a boat or plane, until something happened. I should keep up a full running commentary on anything I saw. Whoever was recording me would be able to pick up some information. Likewise we could have a whole battery of instruments telemetering their stuff back to a control centre. During and after any incident I should try to keep broadcasting, and I shouldn’t part from my transmitter. Then—who knows ?—I might be able to speak from another world or another time.”

These young men had been inseparable through thick and thin. Peril had not parted them, nor had danger divided. Was one only of their number to be spirited away? This quartet—was it to be forever destroyed?

It was not! As one, Serge, Tony and Morrey declared, “We are coming with you!”

And in spite of all the arguments Chris could use, nothing could shake them.

“Very well,” said Chris, secretly overjoyed, “we’ll tell Sir Billy in the morning.”

## CHAPTER 4

Sir Billy looked very strained when he saw his Deputy next day, and he confessed to Chris that this Bermuda Triangle business was worrying him more than anything else he could remember. “The possibilities are so strange and immense,” he said, “that they could mean the end of our cosy little civilization. Read these papers that have come in during the night.” Chris looked at the pile of reports that his Chief pushed over.

They were all accounts of resolutions passed by parliaments and assemblies all over the world, demanding instant action over the Triangle. There were press reports of indignant politicians thundering dire threats against U.N.E.X.A. if this wretched Bermuda business wasn’t cleared up right away, and the missing President and Prime Minister brought back at once.

The Deputy threw the papers down in anger.

“The silly little men!” he exploded. “Who do they think they are? Passing resolutions like that from the safety of their armchairs or benches, from the safety of their comfortable surroundings. What do they want us to do? There isn’t a single constructive suggestion among the lot of them.”

“I know,” the Director sighed. “But Life was ever thus. Sometimes I feel like retiring and getting away from it all.”

“Oh no you don’t,” Chris said hastily. “You’re not going to let me in for this kind of thing—at least not yet. I’ve come to have a talk with you, Billy. Shall we have a coffee while we both calm down after these wretched things?”

It might have been an accident that Chris, on his way over to the coffee machine, caught the pile of papers with his sleeve and knocked them into the waste paper basket.

The coffee was hot, and neither of them spoke as they sipped it carefully. Billy’s cup was almost empty before he said anything.

“I can guess what you’ve come about, Chris,” he said. “You tell me if I’m right. You want to go into the Triangle.”

Chris grinned. How well his Chief knew him!

“Right first time,” he admitted. “And not only me. Tony, Morrey and Serge say they are coming with me.”

“Hold on a bit, Chris,” Sir Billy said, putting his cup down on his desk. “Who has said anything about anyone going into that Triangle? Certainly you won’t go in. We may ask for a volunteer if we decide that it is necessary. But don’t think you are going in.”

“I guessed you’d say that,” Chris sighed, “so it seems I’ll have to resort to blackmail. Either you let me, and the others, volunteer to enter the area under investigation—or I resign here and now as your Deputy and also from U.N.E.X.A.”

“Hold on a bit,” said the Director, visibly shaken. He could see that Chris was serious.

“Look, Billy,” Chris went on, “it’s obvious that the first logical step in unravelling the mystery of that wretched Triangle is for someone to go into it well prepared, and to record everything that happens. I’m going to do just that.”

“But you might be whisked away. You might disappear for ever, as so many others have done.”

“So what?” said Chris. “I know the risk, and I’m willing to take it. So are the others. Billy—someone’s got to vanish and try to communicate from the other side, wherever that may be. How else can we find out what has happened to all those people?”

“So you and the others want to enter the Triangle and deliberately seek to vanish?” asked Sir Billy. “You must be mad.”

“No. Just logical,” Chris smiled. He was sorry to put his friend in this dreadful position, but he saw no other way in which to start their investigations. There had been too many armchair theories already. The time had now come for a planned and practical approach.

“What alternatives have we got?” he demanded.

“I think we ought to send in some automatic probes in the form of pilotless planes and ships. They could radio back reports on conditions just as easily as a person,” the Director said.

“But not so fully or with any description,” the Deputy insisted. “You know unmanned space probes are limited in their value. Otherwise we should never have sent men into Space. I reckon that

the same applies with the Bermuda Triangle. You'll have to get human volunteers to disappear deliberately, and hope to learn something from them."

Sir Billy was the first to admit the limitations of automatic probes. Whilst they could report a wide variety of conditions, they were unable to do something that only people can do—exercise judgement. Not until human beings had actually landed on the moon and some of the planets, had it been possible to learn what they were really like. Chris's arguments were very strong—indeed, unanswerable. But who would agree to send a human into such a terrifying unknown?

Seeing Sir Billy's troubled look, his Deputy went on relentlessly.

"If we'd never been prepared to take risks, we'd never have got anywhere in Space," he pointed out. "It is the price we have to pay for extending our knowledge. However, in this case it isn't merely the pursuit of knowledge that is our driving force. We have in the Bermuda Triangle a very serious challenge. We must, we simply must, find out more about it. So I don't see any alternative to your agreeing to let us four volunteers venture into it, even allowing for the possibility that we may be whisked away."

It was an agonizing decision for the Director to make. He was under tremendous pressure to do something about the Triangle. People everywhere were terrified by its very name now that the President and Prime Minister had vanished within it. The only way to give them heart was to be seen to be taking active steps. And what more active steps could one imagine than for volunteers to expose themselves to the unknown forces that apparently existed in that dreaded area?

Yet Chris and the other three were his close friends. They had worked with him for many years and there had developed a mutual respect and affection. Chris, as his Deputy, was particularly close to Sir Billy. How, then, could he possibly agree to sending these four young men to their deaths, or even worse?

"It's no use, Billy," Chris said with some compassion at his Chief's terrible dilemma. "It's got to be done. Humans, properly prepared and equipped, have got to venture in. Tony, Serge, Morrey and I think we can do the job as well as anyone. Don't you agree?"

“But—but all four of you? If I do agree to send in a man, why not just one?”

“Because the others simply won’t agree,” Chris smiled. “I confess I had the same idea, but when I told them that I was volunteering to go into the Triangle alone, they kicked up an almighty fuss. You see, Billy, we’ve always been together. We’ve faced many dangers together. And we’d like to face this one together.”

“All right,” the Director sighed, “but if anything happens to you I shall have it on my conscience for the rest of my life.”

“Rubbish!” Chris grinned happily. “If more people vanish, and if the panic about the Triangle grows, then if you’d done nothing about it that would be something to have on your conscience. I’ll go and let the others know that our mission is on.”

The others were not surprised when Chris told them he’d persuaded Sir Billy to agree to their entering the Triangle. If they volunteered to try to discover the secret, how could he refuse? That it might mean that they would vanish from earth forever didn’t worry them unduly. For had they not escaped death in Space more times than any of them could remember? Perhaps they had been spared for just this task.

“When are we going?” Tony, ever impatient, asked.

“Oh, there’s quite a bit to do and to plan before we make our first venture,” replied Chris. “Most important is to devise some certain means of communication.”

“No one has been able to do that yet,” Serge pointed out.

“True, but then those ships and planes had only ordinary radio sets. We’ll take apparatus that can transmit over a wide range of frequencies, from V.H.F. to long wave,” Chris told his companions.

“Can I make a suggestion?” asked Tony.” It is that we also use laser beam communication.”

The young mechanic was referring to the latest development in transmitting messages, whereby a signal is sent along a laser beam. Now that means had been found of keeping the beam perpetually focused on the receiving aerial, there seemed to be a great future for this novel means of sending signals.

“I expect Sir Billy will include that in our equipment,” replied

Chris. "I'll certainly see that he does."

Maybe whatever—or whoever—it was that prevented messages from ships and aircraft being received after they had disappeared, would not affect this powerful means of transmission. It was worth a try.

"There's still another means of communication," Serge said suddenly. "What about telepathy?"

The others looked at the Russian in surprise.

"None of us is telepathic," Morrey pointed out.

"How do you know that?" asked Serge. "Oh, I know that we have never received or sent telepathic messages, but every human being can do so to a greater or lesser degree. Some people have this ability to a considerable extent."

"Well, we haven't much time to practise the art. We can't develop a music-hall act so quickly."

Serge took him up sharply.

"Telepathy is not a music-hall act," he declared. "It is a scientifically established fact. There are innumerable cases of people being able to communicate in this way. E.S.P. has been proved beyond argument."

"What is E.S.P.?" asked Tony.

"It stands for 'Extra Sensory Perception'," Chris told him. "It means having an ability beyond our five ordinary senses."

Turing to Serge, he said, "Your idea ought to be considered, but how would it work, seeing that none of us have any experience of it?"

"As far as I know, it's just a matter of finding someone attuned to receiving our mental transmissions," replied Serge. "I believe everyone has someone, somewhere, with whom they can communicate mentally. It's just that the two people so rarely meet each other."

"Then there's precious little chance of us meeting our communicators," Morrey sighed, "or I'd be all for trying it."

"Let's see what Billy says," Chris suggested.

It was very late that evening when the Director sent for them to come to his office. Chris was already there when the other three arrived. Sir Billy came to the point at once.

“Since you four are foolhardy enough to want to go into this wretched Triangle, we may as well get moving at once,” he said, speaking sharply to conceal his deep concern for his young friends. “Operations, such as they are, will be planned and carried out from the Cape. All the resources will be used. It is quite conveniently situated and has, as you know, facilities that are available nowhere else. I’d like you to fly there at first light tomorrow. I’ll be along in a few days. I have told the General that you’re coming.”

Sir Billy was referring to General (now retired) Ed Whittle, who, since he had left his post as Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations Forces, had been in charge of the space station at Cape Canaveral. Though the first meeting of the four astronauts with the General had been far from cordial, there had now grown up a strong friendship between them. Tony wondered—irreverently—if the General’s sleek black hair, allegedly dyed, was still as white as it had turned after their last adventure. Or perhaps he’d tried some other colour, for Ed Whittle’s great object in life was to conceal his real age. Yes, it would be good to meet the General again, and to see how he had settled down to his civilian command.

“Chris, I’ll be writing to your Miss Howard, offering her a job as Janet Pedley’s assistant,” Billy said, turning to his Deputy, who blushed slightly. “But of course you’ll be at the Cape when she arrives.”

Chris felt a little guilty that he wouldn’t be in New York when Sue came to take up her new job. He knew Janet would make her feel at home, but it was really because of him that she was coming. One thing he was determined to do. He would ask for a few days’ leave before he ventured into the Dark Triangle.

Sue Howard was disappointed. Every morning she waited eagerly for the postman. Would there be a letter from Chris telling her more about this job in New York? No letter came. Chris had been gone for over a week, and apart from those two short telephone calls, she had not heard a thing. Was everything all right? She had committed herself. She’d given in her notice and was teaching another girl her job. Chris wouldn’t have phoned her twice from New York about



working there if he hadn't meant it, would he?

As day followed day without news she became more and more worried.

"Chris must be very busy," she kept telling herself.

When a letter did arrive from New York she almost wept with relief. It bore the U.N.E.X.A. stamp, and her hands shook as she opened it. Before she could read it, she had to wipe her eyes.

But the letter wasn't from Chris. It was the formal letter from Sir William Gillanders offering her the job of assistant to his personal secretary. He requested that she should let him know when she would be ready to fly to America, so that he could reserve a seat for her on the regular U.N.O. plane.

The letter was written in formal terms, but with it was also a hand-written note from Sir Billy saying how pleased he was that Susan would be coming out to work for him. She was to let him know the moment she arrived at the U.N.O. building.

Janet Pedley had also enclosed a note. She too welcomed Sue, saying that she was looking forward very much to meeting her. She'd heard so much about her from Chris and the others that she felt she already knew her. She hoped Sue would share her flat—at least for the time being, until she had settled down.

Of course Sue was delighted to receive these letters, but oh, how she wished there had been one from Chris. Just a short note would have done. Still—she supposed he was very busy, or maybe he was away somewhere on U.N.E.X.A. affairs. Anyway, she'd be in America herself in less than three weeks' time.

## CHAPTER 5

Though the four astronauts had flown to Cape Canaveral hundreds of times, they never ceased to get a thrill as their plane approached the vast space port. They landed at Kennedy Air Force Base a few miles away, and were driven at once along the flat tarmac road to their destination.

As they sped along in the large black air-conditioned limousine, they scarcely noticed the avenue of rockets which usually attracted their attention. This was a display of every type of rocket from the early kinds right up to the modern monsters that had put workshops and space stations into orbit. Replicas of their own familiar ships glistened in the hot sunshine, but the quartet were wrapped up in their own thoughts, and they remained almost silent during their journey.

“Have you thought how we shall go into the Triangle?” Tony asked after a long silence. The question was one that had been occupying the Deputy’s mind at that precise moment. It was strange that Tony should have asked it just then.

“We have the choice of aircraft or boat,” Chris answered. “I’m inclined to favour a boat, because it would mean we could stay in the area for as long as we wished. Also there would be no need for anyone to be with us, as there would on a plane.”

Morrey was about to point out that he was perfectly able to fly most types of aircraft, but Chris anticipated him.

“I know Morrey could pilot us,” he said, “but I think it would be better for all four of us to concentrate on observation and communication.”

“We ought to have a cabin cruiser of some kind,” Tony remarked. “I’ve always wanted to sail the seas in a yacht.”

“A ship would probably be less vulnerable to natural hazards,” Serge observed.

“I think I’ll tell General Whittle we’ll travel by boat,” Chris smiled. “All I hope is that he doesn’t want to come with us.”

The General welcomed them cordially. Though he was now a

civilian, no one dreamed of calling Ed Whittle by anything but his military title. Over all that vast space port the Manager was, to its thousands of employees, “the General”.

Greetings over, the General at once became serious.

“This is a different kind of assignment from any we’ve handled before,” he said, “and we’ve no experience to guide us.”

“Would you think that we should concentrate initially on pure reconnaissance?” asked Chris. “Then plan the next move after that?”

“That is certainly a sound military principle,” General Whittle concurred. At Staff College we always used to say that a battle was won or lost by the quality of the preliminary reconnaissance. What do you propose?”

“Sir Billy told you we’ve volunteered to enter the Triangle? Goodwill, we propose trying to encounter the forces that have caused the disappearances. Then we hope to relay as much information ‘to you as we can. If we don’t get back ourselves then something you may learn from us might help you with the next volunteers.”

“I think you are four very plucky young men,” General Whittle said. I’ve been reading up all the reports, and the situation is very serious. No one of all the thousands who have vanished has ever returned to tell the tale.”

“That’s why we’ve got to use every possible means of communication,” Morrey declared.

He explained all their ideas, and the General nodded his agreement until Morrey mentioned telepathy.

“Great Scott!” Ed Whittle burst out. “You can’t be serious? Were not Charlatans here, you know. I’ve never heard of such a thing.”

“Of course you haven’t, General,” Serge agreed smoothly, but then we mustn’t neglect any form of communication, however unusual. Telepathy has been established as a respectable science, and quite a number of people have the ability to send and receive mental messages from a great distance.”

“Well, I’ve never come across anyone who could myself,” General Whittle said. “Can any of you do the trick?”

“It isn’t a trick,” Serge maintained. “It’s quite genuine. Certain human minds have the facility to send out and receive thoughts. It’s said that every human has some slight ability, but in a few it is very strongly developed. It is merely a matter of bringing together two people with this power.”

“So all you have to do is to find someone who is telepathic with one of you, and your problem is over,” the General said sarcastically. Well, I prefer radio, T.V., and laser.”

“But you do agree, don’t you, General, that every possible means of communication must be tried?” Serge persisted.

“Have it your own way,” the General said with resignation, “but don’t expect much help from me.”

“Who knows? We might even find someone who can read your thoughts,” Tony said cheekily.

Chris gave the young mechanic a sharp look. You don’t speak to retired Commanders-in-Chief like that! But Ed Whittle didn’t seem to have noticed, so Chris hurried on.

“We’ve been discussing the means of entering the Triangle,” he said, “and we favour a boat as against a plane. This would give us almost unlimited time to remain in the area, and a boat doesn’t have so many electrical instruments as a plane to be affected by unusual magnetic or electrical conditions. Then again, in a number of cases the boat itself has remained intact, and only its human passengers have been taken away. We could leave recordings behind us if, by any chance, we were taken.”

The General shook his head in admiration of such sheer courage. Here they were, planning this excursion, and calmly expecting to be whisked away by some unknown force—never, as far as one knew, to return. He himself had a splendid record of military courage, but for him the enemy had always been tangible. In this case the “enemy” was completely unknown, perhaps didn’t even exist. On the other hand it might be that humans were now encountering something outside any previous experience. The General swallowed hard. He’d rather face a whole army singlehanded than the sinister unknown forces that seemed to be operating in the Bermuda Triangle.

“After lunch we’ll get down to discussing the type of boat you

want and its equipment,” he said briskly, anxious to conceal these very uncomfortable thoughts.

During lunch the four astronauts met a number of the scientists who worked at the space port. Word had evidently got around that this intrepid quartet were shortly to venture into the Triangle, and the scientists, quite a few of whom the astronauts knew well, talked to them on every subject under the sun except the frightening task they were about to undertake.

Later that afternoon a number of the top men in the radio communications department of the space port were earnestly discussing some new equipment the four would have to take with them. Apart from transmitters that would cover a multitude of wavelengths, the new laser equipment was causing some excitement. A suitable satellite was almost ready to be placed in a geo-stationary orbit above the Triangle. That meant that the satellite would be at just the right height for its speed to match exactly the rotation of the earth beneath it, so that it would always be over virtually the same spot on the earth’s surface—the Triangle. Wherever Chris’s boat was, it would be able to send a laser beam signal to the satellite, which would then reflect it back to the receiver at the Cape.

Another proposal was that a tape recorder should be enclosed in a thick block of lead, so that it would be protected from any conceivable electrical disturbance. It was also suggested that the boat should carry a small transmitter which would send out a continuous signal. This would be monitored constantly by the Cape, and would enable the position of the boat to be plotted exactly.

“Whew!” breathed Tony when the conference was over. “Our boat is going to be a proper little box of tricks, isn’t it?”

“We’ll certainly have a lot of equipment to get used to,” Chris agreed. “I wonder when we shall see our boat?”

It was not until three days later, when the Director himself arrived at the Cape, that the astronauts learned that a forty-foot ocean-going cabin cruiser had been obtained for them, and was at that moment on its way down the coast to Cape Canaveral. Tony could hardly contain his impatience to see their new vessel.

“You chaps have got to think of a name for this boat of yours,”

General Whittle laughed.

“By the way, Chris, Janet and I have both written to Miss Howard,” Sir Billy said. “Now I’m waiting to hear just when she’ll arrive.”

A pang of guilt struck the Deputy. He ought to have written or phoned Sue before now, but he was so wrapped up in this assignment of theirs that the days had slipped by.

“I’ll phone her tomorrow,” he said rather self-consciously. “Perhaps she’ll be able to tell me her arrangements.”

“I suppose you’ll want to be on hand when she arrives?” Billy smiled. “Well, I guess we can give you a couple of days leave.”

A couple of days? That wasn’t much. He’d have to explain to Sue that he was going to enter the Triangle, and he could guess what her reaction would be.

Working out the time difference, Chris put through a call at three o’clock in the afternoon, London time. He was surprised to hear a strange voice answer, but he guessed at 01106 that it must belong to the girl whom Sue was training to take over from her.

“Chris Godfrey speaking,” he said. “May I speak to Sue Howard?”

It sounded as if the girl at the other end had dropped the phone in surprise, for there was quite a clatter on the line. Then Sue’s voice came on, high-pitched with excitement.

“Chris! Is it really you? Where have you been? How are you? Where are you phoning from? You haven’t been ill, have you? Why haven’t you written?”

The questions poured out until Chris interrupted.

“I’m quite fit, thank you, Sue, and I’m terribly sorry I haven’t been in touch with you before. I’ll explain everything when I see you. Now, have you got that date fixed yet?”

“Yes. I’ll be arriving on the sixteenth. I think the plane gets into Kennedy Airport at about nine o’clock in the morning. Will you be there, Chris? Oh, do try and meet me.”

“It’s a promise, Sue. I’m sorry about not writing or ‘phoning, but you’ll see how it is when you get here. I’ll let Sir Billy know of your arrangements. Janet is all ready for you, too.”

“Will you have some more leave soon, Chris? Remember I’ll know very few people.”

“Well, I’m having a couple of days when you get here. After that—well, we’ll have to see,” he replied uncomfortably. How could he tell her, yet, how dire the future seemed?

“Only two days? It isn’t much. Still—I suppose you’ll have far more time off when this job is over. Then I’ll make you show me a lot of America. You will, won’t you, Chris?”

“I’ll see as much of you as I can,” he promised. “I might even fix up a trip down to the Cape for you. See you on the sixteenth, Sue.”

Sir Billy and Chris had to make a quick trip to New York on the following day. It was mainly to give a confidential report to the Secretary General of U.N.O., who wished to address a closed session of the United Nations on what was being done to find President Maxwell and the Prime Minister.

“I’ve been thinking about this telepathy suggestion of yours,” Sir Billy began as their plane flew northwards from the Cape.

“Not mine. Serge’s.”

“Well, Serge’s then. The difficulty as I see it is to find someone who can exchange thoughts with one of you four. I propose to make an experiment with the aid of television. What I suggest is that we brief a professor of psychology from Houston University, whom I know, to conduct it. We can keep confidential the real reason why we wish to find someone who can communicate.

“Each of you in turn,” he went on, “can go before a camera with a prepared message in your minds. Viewers will be invited to write in if they think they have picked up anything from any of you, and the professor will tell us if he thinks anyone has really succeeded. We must see to it that the message you try to transmit will not be too simple.”

“But we shall not have a T.V. camera on the boat,” Chris pointed out.

“There’s no reason why you shouldn’t. Indeed, it could be very interesting for us to be able to look in if you see anything unusual. Yes, I think we’ll rig one up for you.”

While they were in New York Sir Billy contacted Professor

Blomberg, an old friend lecturing at Houston. The professor was interested in the proposed experiment, and offered to co-operate in every possible way. When would Billy like him to come to the city?

“I’ll have all four of the astronauts back here about the twelfth of the month, Leon, if you could spare a few days about then. You can? Good. Then I’ll contact the networks, and try to get their co-operation.”

While this conversation was going on, Chris wondered which of them would find a suitable “receiver”. His money would be on Serge.

By the time Sir Billy and his Deputy had cleared up their business at U.N.E.X.A. and had returned to the Cape, the boat had arrived.

“She’s a beaut!” Tony burst out ecstatically as soon as they met. “She’s blue and white, she has cabins for six people, and she can do twenty knots.”

“I don’t think we want her for racing,” Chris smiled, though he told himself that a burst of speed might some time come in useful.

“Have you thought of a name for her?” asked Sir Billy.

The three astronauts looked at each other. Again it was Tony who spoke.

“What about *Columbus*?” he asked. “After all, we shall be going into unknown territory, shan’t we?”

“Very well,” the Director smiled. “We’ll get the boat people to paint that name on her.”

The next few days were hectic. Crowds of technicians were crawling all over *Columbus*, installing radio, T.V., and laser equipment. A whole forest of aerials sprang up, till Tony declared that she was going to look more like a porcupine than a boat. One of the cabins was stripped to accommodate extra storage batteries. Chris and the others spent much time in getting used to all the equipment, not least to the tape recorder in the thick leaden casket.

“Right! Everything’s going fine,” Sir Billy declared. “Now we’ll go back to New York for a few days and await the arrival of Miss Howard.”



Gosh! Chris thought. Sue will be here in three days. I hope the Chief will remember he's promised me at least a couple of days' leave after she arrives.

Back in the City Professor Blomberg met the quartet, and they discussed the experiment which was to take place next day. They were due to go before the cameras at ten o'clock in the evening, which was peak viewing time. An announcement had already been made over all the T.V. networks, for they had all agreed to take the programme. Viewers were invited to send in a postcard if they picked up anything from one or other of the astronauts.

When the time came they went, in turn, before the lights and cameras. Just before they went on, each was given a message which Professor Blomberg took out of a sealed envelope. Each of them concentrated his mind on the particular message that had been given to him, whilst staring intently at the lens of the camera for a full minute. Then the messages were collected by the professor, who sealed them in another envelope which he put in his wallet. It would be interesting to see if any of the viewers had picked up any of the four messages. The professor was looking forward to his postbag over the next few days.

## CHAPTER 6

Sue's plane landed right on time. It was the first time she had been to America, and she was feeling more than a little nervous. Still—Chris had promised to meet her, so everything would be all right.

Not only was Chris waiting for her in the arrivals lounge, but there were others, too. Serge, Morrey, Tony, Sir William and a dark-haired girl a few years older than herself. Sue knew instinctively that this was Janet.

She raced to Chris and gave him an affectionate hug. He picked her off her feet and swung her round and round. Then she kissed her other three friends warmly. Sir William she greeted more sedately, but the Director insisted on his kiss as well as the others. Then she faced Janet, and the two girls gazed into each other's eyes.

A strange thing happened. These two, who had never seen each other before, knew at once that they were going to become very close, that they were, so to speak, on the same wavelength.

"Come on. Let's get to the car," Sir Billy said briskly.

"We're taking you here first," he explained as they arrived at the U.N.O. building, "so that you can see where you will be working. Then Janet can have the rest of the day off to get you settled into her flat."

"I hope you'll like it," Janet said.

"Oh, I know I will. I can almost picture it, somehow," Sue declared. "Tell me, is the kitchen blue and the living-room green?"

Janet looked at her new assistant in surprise.

"Why, yes. But how did you know?" she asked.

"Oh, I just felt it," Sue replied in some confusion.

The lift—"We call them elevators here," Tony laughed-whisked them up to the thirtieth floor. Then they took another elevator up another three floors. With Sir Billy leading the way, the little procession went quickly down a long corridor until the Director flung open a door on the right.

“Welcome to your new office, Susan,” he said, stepping aside.

How different this was from Sir Anthony’s rooms in London. There was a breath-taking view of New York from a vast window, and for a moment Sue was quite silent as she absorbed the panorama of the city. It was as if she were in a plane once more.

She picked out the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building from the towering circle of skyscrapers, while Tony came to her side and named a dozen more.

Far below she could see the river with its heavy traffic of boats of all sizes, and nearer, helicopters seemed to be fluttering about like dragonflies. At last she tore herself away from the superb view and turned to face a smiling audience.

“You’ll soon get used to it,” Chris assured her, “but I admit it’s a bit startling at first. Now, if Janet is going to take you home, I’ll ring you this evening.”

Sue looked quickly at Sir Billy, who nodded.

“Certainly you girls can get off now. The car is still waiting for you in the underground parking lot, so off you go,” he said.

When they had left, the Director turned to the four astronauts.

“Professor Blomberg wants to report,” he said. “Ready to see him?”

They trooped into Sir Billy’s own office, and there was handshaking all round.

“I’m afraid there’s little to tell you,” Blomberg began as he fumbled in his briefcase. “So far we have had one thousand and twenty-seven replies, but no one has come up with an accurate answer. I’ve analysed the replies on the following basis. The best report was just under twenty per cent correct for Mr. Smyslov. Four replies were fifteen per cent correct—one for each of you. Eighteen replies were ten per cent correct, most of them for Mr. Smyslov. Then there were twenty-seven replies with five per cent or over correct. This time Mr. Hale scored best. I think we can ignore anything under that.”

“So you don’t think you’ve located anyone who is really telepathic with any of us?” Chris asked.

“Frankly—no. Less than twenty-five per cent isn’t good enough. Of course more replies are coming in, but I’m not very hopeful,” the professor confessed.

When he had left, Sir Billy and the astronauts sat silently for a moment.

“It looks as if we shall not be able to use your idea, Serge,” the Director said. “Certainly not with the results so far. Unless someone comes ‘out of the blue’ who can pick up the thoughts of one of you, you’ll have to rely on old-fashioned radio, T.V., and laser.”

“It is a pity,” said Serge slowly. “I am sure that there is someone, somewhere, who can communicate.”

“Well, you haven’t much time to find out,” the Director reminded them drily. “Remember you three are off back to the Cape tomorrow. Chris will be following two days later.”

“I’m picking Sue up at eight o’clock tonight,” said Chris. “I’m taking her out for a meal and then showing her around town.”

“Does she know anything?” asked Morrey innocently.

“Gosh, no. I haven’t said anything to her yet, of course. I’ve only just decided to ask her out. I’d better phone the flat at once,” Chris exclaimed.

“You’d better,” Sir Billy grinned, “and I’ll bet she’ll ask what she ought to wear.”

Considering her long journey and the strain of a long day, Sue looked remarkably well and was flushed with excitement.

“Janet and I are just like sisters already,” she said happily. “We get on so well together, it’s almost as if we were twins. We think very much alike.”

“Good—as long as your thoughts are on me this evening,” Chris laughed.

The meal was good and leisurely. Chris had broken it to Sue that he would have to return to the Cape two days later, but she couldn’t bring herself to ask the question that was haunting her. At last, as they were drinking their final cup of coffee, it came out.

“Chris, you’re not going anywhere near that Triangle, are you?”

He put down his cup. "Yes, Sue. All four of us are going into it, on a boat."

Her hand flew to her mouth. "But, Chris! Something might happen! You—you might vanish like the others!"

"I know, Sue. I know all the dangers. But I've thought a great deal about it, and I don't see any other way of investigating all those mysterious events. Someone's got to venture in to find out, at first hand, what's happening. Tony, Serge and Morrey insist on coming along to hold my hand," he ended with an attempt at a smile.

There was little said between them after that. Sue knew how devoted Chris was to his job. On countless occasions he had risked his life by venturing into the unknown, and it was no use telling him to let others take this latest risk.

"See you at the office tomorrow," Chris said with an attempt at cheerfulness as their taxi pulled up outside Janet's flat.

"Won't you come in for a moment?" asked Sue. She was very near to tears, and Chris could see it.

"Better not, Sue. Thanks a lot, but you'll want to turn in early. Remember you start work tomorrow," he said. "See you then."

"He's going into the Triangle," Sue told Janet a few minutes later.

"I know, and you were wise not to try to dissuade him, I know how you feel. But you wouldn't go on admiring him if he found an excuse to run away from what he clearly feels is his duty."

"But, Janet, he'll probably be whisked away like all the others and I—I mean we—will never see him again," Sue wailed. "Now, I know just what you're going to say. You're going to tell me that if astronauts had always run away from danger man would never have set foot on the Moon or planets, aren't you?"

"Yes, and you were going to reply that now Chris had surely done enough and had faced more than his share of dangers," said Janet seriously.

The two girls looked at each other. Though they had never met until a few hours before, it was amazing how they knew what each other was thinking. For a few moments neither spoke. Their thoughts seemed to say all that was needed.

“O.K. We’ll go to bed,” Sue said at last, for she had correctly read her companion’s mind. “You’re quite right. I feel desperately tired.”

Sue felt much happier next morning. What Janet had said—she couldn’t remember if Janet had spoken the words or whether she had guessed what her new friend was thinking—was true.

Chris must go with the others into that horrible Triangle. She knew that he would have all the assistance that the world of science could give him, and, unlike all the previous victims, he would be prepared for, and expecting to meet, the unknown forces.

Sue’s first morning at her new job was not arduous. Janet explained how the office was run, but again the uncanny link between the two girls was apparent. Sue felt that she was already familiar with the office and its routine. It was as if she had worked there before.

Sir Billy did not appear till mid-morning. After enquiring how Sue was getting on, he hurried into his own private office and closed the door. On his desk was a further pile of reports, including information that the continued absence of the British Prime Minister had caused a crisis in the governing party about a successor. The American legislature too was in a state of turmoil through the absence of its President. Also a light aircraft, which had accidentally flown over the forbidden area, had vanished like so many before.

A new and disturbing report mentioned that another area, off the west coast of New Zealand, was becoming notorious for disappearances of ships and aircraft. At first these losses were put down to natural accidents, but their similarity to events in the Triangle was too strong for this explanation to stand up for long. It seemed that, denied their prey in their usual hunting ground, the unknown forces had begun to operate in this new area. Chris must see these reports.

“Let me know when Chris gets in,” the Director asked Janet over the phone. He knew his Deputy had gone to see Professor Blomberg, to find out if he had had any success in his quest for a telepathic link. Ten minutes later the phone buzzed. This time it was Sue’s voice which told Sir Billy that Chris had arrived.

“All right. Ask him to bring in coffee for both of us,” the Chief

replied.

Chris reported that the professor had made no progress. A further batch of replies to the broadcast had proved as unsuccessful as the first. It seemed that Serge's suggestion wasn't going to be practical. They would have to abandon the idea.

"What do you think of those?" Sir Billy asked, nodding towards the reports on his desk. Chris was silent for the next ten minutes as he rapidly read through them.

"It seems that we have no time to lose," he said simply, as he put down the last report.

"Well, I hear your boat is almost ready, so you can be off within a few days—if you're still going ahead."

Chris grinned. "You know I'm still going ahead," he said, "and so are the others. So the sooner we get into action, the better."

"Very well," Sir Billy said dully. He believed he was about to lose his young Deputy, and it lay heavily on his heart. "You'd better take this afternoon off and show Susan round the shops."

"Ugh!" Chris grimaced. "Not that I don't want to take Sue around. But shops! I loathe them!"

"You'll learn," Sir Billy smiled. Then his smile faded. Perhaps Chris hadn't the time left to acquire such tolerance.

It was as Chris was taking Sue around some of New York's most dazzling shops that their conversation drifted back to the impending parting.

"We shall be all right," Chris assured her with rather more confidence than he felt. "We're taking along with us every possible scientific gadget and means of communication—except, of course, Serge's telepathy. The prof. doesn't seem to have come up with anyone suitable who can 'receive' any of us. Sue, my legs are aching. What about tea and cakes in the roof restaurant?"

The girl was very silent as they waited to be served. Up to a few moments before she had been bubbling over with happy comment on all the wonderful things she had seen, though Chris suspected that this was really to conceal her feelings about his dangerous venture. Now she looked wrapped in troubled thought, and Chris had to tease her to get her attention.

Sue left her tea and cakes untouched, which made Chris wonder if she was ill. He questioned her with some concern.

“No. I’m all right,” she answered with a forced smile. Then she spoke her thoughts in words that tumbled out over each other.

“Chris, you know that as soon as we saw each other Janet and I got on very well. It was as if we had always known each other. Well—it’s more than that. It seems that we know what each other is thinking. Chris, I think that Janet and I are telepathic. Can Professor Blomberg test us?”

“Steady on, Sue. I’m certainly glad you hit it off with Janet. It would have been very awkward if you hadn’t, considering you are sharing a flat and an office. But as to being telepathic—isn’t that taking things a bit too far?”

“I don’t know. But I’ve a feeling that we are. Can you fix up a test with the professor?”

“All right. But what’s the point, Sue? Even if you and Janet are telepathic, where does that get you?”

“Don’t you see, silly? If Janet and I can provide this extra channel of communication, I shall come with you into the Triangle. Now, don’t say ‘no’, or I’ll never speak to you again.”



## CHAPTER 7

The results of Professor Blomberg's tests were remarkable. He established beyond doubt that Sue and Janet had a wonderful facility in reading each other's thoughts. Even over a distance of some miles it seemed that mental messages could flash between them with an uncanny degree of accuracy.

"I've never come across anything quite like this before," he reported to Sir Billy and Chris.

"But where does this leave us?" the Director asked. "What we need is someone who can communicate with a member of the boat's crew."

"You'll not believe this," Chris said, "but Sue wants to know if she can come along with us on the boat, so that she can provide the extra link."

"Great Scot!" the Director exploded. "Is she mad? Doesn't she know the risks?"

"She knows the risks all right," Chris replied quietly, "and she insists that she's fully prepared to take them. Believe me, I've done my utmost to talk her out of the idea, but Miss Susan Howard is a very determined young lady. She is applying officially to become a member of the crew of *Columbus*."

It was a perfect day when the four young men and the girl set off in *Columbus*. A cloudless blue sky was above, and a flat calm sea below. If anything, there was a slight mistiness in the distance, but the weather experts had warned the crew to expect this heat haze.

A silent crowd of friends had watched the boat chug away from the quayside, and many of them wondered if this intrepid quintet would ever return, though there had previously been much joking and backslapping to conceal the tension that they all felt. Sir Billy's handshake had been as firm as usual, but Chris had detected a tremor in that final clasp.

Everyone waved as the quay fell away. Even after the shore was but a line on the horizon the little group remained still and

thoughtful on the deck of *Columbus*, for the boat was running on its auto-pilot. It was Chris who broke the spell at last.

“Come on, all of you,” he said. “We’ve work to do.”

The tableau broke into action, Sue, barely able to suppress her excitement, made for the galley, for she’d already been appointed head cook. Tony went into the radio cabin and settled down to play with the masses of special equipment that had been installed. Serge went on to the bridge and took over the navigation of the boat, while Morrey began to record the ship’s log on the tape machine.

Seeing all his companions fully occupied, Chris paced the deck thoughtfully. When would they see anything unusual? How long would it be before they had something to report? They must be constantly alert for the first sign of anything strange, and they must keep in touch with the Cape every second of the twenty-four hours, so they would have to fix up a duty rota.

Sue, of course, would not be expected to share in the watch, for she would need to concentrate on keeping in touch with Janet through her unusual powers. The four men would take turns, two on and two off, every six hours. Of the two on duty, one would be sailing the boat and the other would be in constant touch with the Cape by radio, T.V. and laser. Chris decided to tell Tony to fix an alarm bell on the bridge so that everyone could be roused at the first sign of anything unusual.

The others agreed to his plan, though Sue did protest at not being allowed to share in the rota.

“It will take you all your time to keep us fed,” grinned the ever-hungry Tony.

So they settled down to the routine of their duties, and by the time darkness fell they were some hundred and fifty miles out in the ocean. Morrey was in the radio cabin and Chris on the bridge when Sue came and stood beside him. For a time neither of them spoke. Then the girl let out a deep sigh.

“Isn’t it beautiful?”

The distant suns shone brilliantly in the velvet blackness overhead. Waves lapped gently round the boat. The engine purred quietly.

“I’m glad you’re with us,” Chris said. “I didn’t want you to come at first, but now you’re here, I’m very happy.”

“Oh, Chris, I’d have been terribly worried if you’d left me behind. If anything happens it won’t be so bad if we’re in it together.”

“See that?” Chris said, pointing to the brightest point of light above them. “That’s Jupiter, the largest of all the planets. Over there—the one with the red tinge—is Mars.”

“To think you’ve been to those planets! You must tell me all about them.”

“Let’s have a turn about the deck. I can put the boat on autopilot.”

They called in to see Morrey before taking their stroll, and the American reported that all systems were working well.

“Want me to send your regards to anyone?” he asked Chris.

“Yes. See if you can raise Sir Billy. If not, I’ll talk to the chap on duty,” Chris replied.

The Director was off duty, so Chris declined to disturb him. After all, there was nothing much to report. He told the duty operator to let Sir Billy know that all was well when he came to the office next morning.

“Have you managed to get any thoughts over to Janet?” Chris asked Sue.

“No need,” the girl smiled. “Janet is fast asleep. I exchanged thoughts with her just before she went to bed. She said all their fingers are crossed for us, and they wish us a safe return. What a lovely night it is.”

They watched the creamy wake stretching away behind the boat. The gentle lap of the waves was very soothing, and it was hard to think that somewhere danger was lurking. Nothing could be more peaceful than this gentle scene, but suddenly there was a splash on the other side of the boat.

“What’s that?” asked Sue, startled.

“Let’s see.”

They walked quickly across the deck and looked over the rail. About a hundred yards away something flashed out of the sea and

then fell back, making a splash similar to the one they had heard a minute before.

“What is it, Chris?”

Before he had time to reply there were several other splashes, some quite close to *Columbus*.

“Relax, Sue,” Chris smiled. “We have some dolphins for company.”

“Dolphins? Oh, I know. There were some brought to our local Municipal Baths when I lived in the Midlands. People paid to go in and see them do their tricks. They were wonderful.”

“Yes, they are rather wonderful creatures. They are highly intelligent, of course. It is said that we don’t realize how intelligent they are. They can speak to each other by sound, and also by some means like sonar, which we know little about.”

“I remember those dolphins back at home. They were made to jump through hoops and do all manner of things. It was a shame, really. Yet they seemed to like it, for there was always some juicy fish at the end of each performance.”

“Yes, it does seem wrong to make these highly intelligent creatures perform tricks for our amusement. I wonder what the people who do this would think if the position were reversed?”

“You mean—if dolphins made a man do tricks?” Sue asked, wondering whether to take Chris seriously.

“Yes, that’s about it,” Chris smiled. “You know, I’ve always thought that we’re pretty mean to animals. We cage them up in zoos and keep them behind bars. Oh, I know we have safari parks where animals are much freer. But we’ve taken them away from their natural homes and way of life.”

“But some kinds of animals are dying out in their natural homes,” Sue pointed out. “It’s only by keeping them in zoos and safari parks that the species can be kept alive.”

“Oh, I know,” Chris sighed. “Usually it’s the encroachment of Man that has caused their species to dwindle in the first place. Look! There’s quite a school of dolphins following us.”

Sue looked and saw a score of the blue-grey shapes swimming

easily alongside. Occasionally one, or several, of the dolphins would leap several feet out of the sea and then splash back.

“They seem to enjoy doing that,” laughed Sue as she leaned over the rail watching the creatures. It was not hard to believe that these dolphins were highly intelligent. She wondered if anyone had ever been able to understand their language.

Suddenly, as if by some command, they all went away. One moment the sea seemed full of the playful creatures, and the next they had all disappeared. They saw no more of them that night.

“Better turn in now, Sue,” Chris said a little later. “Could you make a few sandwiches for Morrey and me when we take a midnight snack? Tony and Serge will want a bite too, when they take over.”

“It’s all organized,” Sue smiled. “That is—if there’s anything good enough to satisfy Tony.”

When she’d gone Chris gazed round. It was hard to believe that there was any peril in this balmy night. The moon had now risen, and he looked at it as an old friend. It was wonderful to know that, at that very moment, more than five hundred people were housed in the vast Moon Base, and that it was proposed to expand it considerably.

He fetched a pair of binoculars from the bridge and spent more than half an hour scanning the sky and sea. There was nothing unusual. Nor did the instruments on the bridge reveal a thing out of the ordinary.

Morrey was pleased when Chris called in at the radio cabin. It was a strain to have to talk almost continuously over their communication links when there was nothing of interest to report. Still, it was all part of the exercise of maintaining constant contact, so he persuaded Chris to take a turn.

All the Deputy could say was that things were quiet and calm. There was no sign of any magnetic or meteorological disturbance. To make his message last longer he described the visit from the school of dolphins, and how they suddenly left. Then Chris and Morrey ate the sandwiches that Sue had made for them.

Later they were relieved by Tony and Serge, but once in his bunk

Chris found it hard to sleep. He still wondered if they had done the right thing in letting Sue come with them. She seemed to be enjoying the experience, and if nothing happened she would be able to look back on a pleasant holiday. But would that be too much to hope? Would the Bermuda Triangle live up to its sinister reputation? Or had the unknown forces decided to operate on some other part of the globe?

“Wakey! Wakey!”

It was Tony’s voice. Chris shot up in his bunk to see the grinning face of the young mechanic above him.

“What is it, Tony?” he gasped. “What’s happened?”

“Relax. Nothing’s happened,” Tony laughed, “except that it’s time for you to come on duty. Morrey is already on the deck.”

With a groan Chris swung himself over the side of the bunk. He could have sworn he hadn’t slept a wink.

“So it’s been all quiet?” he yawned as he began to dress. “Nothing at all to report?”

“Not unless you count 21 visit from some big fish,” replied Tony. “They were leaping around the boat for some time. Quite some performers they were.”

“They were dolphins,” Chris explained. “We had a display by them during our watch. They seem to like us and this boat.”

Tony went on to report that all the communication channels were functioning O.K. There had been a slight break in the laser beam, lasting no more than one and a half seconds, and only routine messages from the Cape all night.

The crew of *Columbus* were settling down to their own routine. When they had reached a point three hundred miles from land they turned and began to head north-west. The sea remained calm, the sky almost cloudless. They had little to report back to base—just a few shooting stars and the regular escort of dolphins. It was on their third day at sea that Sir Billy said something interesting.

“These dolphins you keep reporting—they have been reported three times before by ship’s crews just before they vanished. Not that I think there’s any significance in it, but we’ve fed all past reports into a computer, and the print-out called our attention to

this.”

“They seem very playful,” Morrey radioed back, and well drilled. We’ll try and get their next performance on the T.V. camera.”

The opportunity soon came. Serge was on deck when the sea creatures appeared. Quickly he had the camera focused on them, and the Cape reported the receipt of clear pictures.

“Anyway—they keep you from being bored,” one wit radioed back.

Chris knew what he meant. It would be impossible to keep his crew at full stretch for many days without boredom setting in.

Soon this idyllic existence of leisurely cruising in the sunshine would begin to pall.

Sue was in frequent mental contact with Janet, who was now installed with her Chief at Cape Canaveral. It wasn’t the first time that she had had to accompany Sir Billy to the space centre, but now she was there in a dual capacity. Not only had she to help the Director, she was also a means of keeping in touch with events on *Columbus*.

One day she found Sir Billy studying some photographs. A stranger was standing beside his desk and the Director introduced him as Bernard Latore, the eminent marine biologist. The pictures they were studying were stills of the dolphins that had been swimming alongside *Columbus*. They had been made from the television pictures sent out from the boat.

“Definitely different,” Mr. Latore repeated. “These cetacea are different from any I’ve seen before. Compare these two prints. This is a dolphin, a member of the Delphinidae family, the one usually seen. Now, this other print is of the mammals the crew of *Columbus* saw. Notice the bulge above the eyes. It is far more pronounced in the *Columbus* dolphins than in any other I’ve ever seen.”

“What does that mean?” Janet asked, bending over the prints.

“Well, certainly the brain seems far more developed in the *Columbus* dolphins,” the biologist replied. “I’d like to examine one more closely.”

“So they would be even more intelligent than ordinary dolphins?” asked Sir Billy.

“Undoubtedly. From what appears to be the size of the brain they could have quite fantastic mental powers,” Mr. Latore answered.

Suddenly Janet straightened up. Her face went pale and her hand flew to her mouth.

“What’s the matter, Janet? Are you ill?” asked the Director.

She didn’t seem to hear.

“There’s—there’s something happening aboard *Columbus*,” she gasped.



## CHAPTER 8

Sir Billy grasped Janet's arm roughly. He hadn't entirely believed in this strange form of communication, though he'd had to admit that, in the test made by Professor Blomberg, it had seemed pretty convincing. But was it reliable?

"Pull yourself together, Janet," he ordered. "Tell me what's happening."

"I—I can't," the girl said in great distress. "It's all jumbled up."

"Stay with her, Latore," Sir Billy snapped. "I'll be away only a few minutes."

But even before the Director could leave his office the telephone jangled insistently. He picked it up.

"Director speaking," he barked.

Then he listened. Once or twice he seemed about to ask a question, but didn't

"All right," he said at last. "Thank you. I'll come at once."

He slammed the receiver down and looked strangely at Janet and the biologist.

"All forms of communication with *Columbus* have been cut," he told them. "Even the laser beam."

Janet sprang to her feet in dismay. So she had been right! Something was happening to her friends out in that horrible Triangle. If the radio, T.V. and laser had been cut off, perhaps only she would know what was happening. She must calm down and see if she could pick up Sue's thoughts.

Sir Billy was in a terrible dilemma. Should he send out a plane to seek the missing boat? Thanks to constant monitoring of the vessel's position, it was possible to pinpoint to within a hundred yards the spot where all communications suddenly ceased. However, the Director hesitated. On a number of occasions aircraft and ships which had been sent to search for missing planes or boats had themselves vanished. Much as he was concerned for the safety of *Columbus* and her crew he questioned whether he had the right

to expose more people to danger. He must try every possible means of establishing contact before sending in volunteers to search.

*Columbus* was chugging along placidly. Tony and Serge were in their bunks while Chris and Morrey occupied the bridge and radio cabin respectively. Sue lay on the deck in a bright red bikini, taking advantage of the warm sunshine. Alongside, the usual school of dolphins swam steadily.

Sue sat up sharply, her sun-glasses slipping off. She suddenly felt cold, as if something had blotted out the warm rays of the sun. She looked up.

There was certainly a cloud. Though the rest of the sky was as clear as it had been since their voyage started, right above them was a thick grey cloud that seemed to have appeared out of nowhere.

“Chris,” she called, “I think we’re going to have a storm.”

Even as she spoke the cloud was getting thicker and darker. It was descending on the boat.

Morrey and Chris almost collided as they rushed on deck.

“There’s no—” the American began. Then he stopped as he saw the grey cloud.

“What is it?” gasped Sue.

“Don’t know,” Chris answered more abruptly than he’d intended. He was thinking that in many previous accounts of events in the Triangle a grey cloud had been mentioned. Then Morrey remembered his own news.

“All communication channels have gone dead,” he said.

“Try and get something down on tape,” Chris snapped. “Sue, rouse the others.”

While the girl went below to awaken Tony and Serge, Morrey rushed back on to the bridge where the tape recorder and its leaden casket were kept. He switched on and began to pour into it an account of the cloud and its appearance. Within seconds, it seemed, Tony and Serge came scrambling up on deck, followed by Sue, who had paused to put on a dressing-gown because of the chill.

Chris stared at the cloud intently. At first it seemed like any other, except that it had appeared so suddenly when the rest of the

sky was clear. But now he noticed that it seemed to be in constant motion, banks of it moving one way and then another, sometimes concentrating in a thick mass, sometimes dispersing. But there was one central mass that seemed to be stable and denser than the rest.

“It’s—it’s really beginning to happen,” gulped Tony. “We’re up against it now.”

Sue crept closer to Chris, and the four astronauts gathered round her. Morrey had a microphone on a long lead from the recorder, and was continuing to describe what was happening. He hoped that, if they were all taken away, at least his words would be left behind so that other researchers could know about the cloud and perhaps plan the next step.

“I feel a bit peculiar,” whispered Sue, and Chris looked at her anxiously. To tell the truth, he was beginning to feel rather strange himself. So were the others. Perhaps the cloud, wisps of which were now around them, had an intoxicating effect. Their heads began to swim, and Morrey valiantly mentioned this in his recording. Then he swayed. One by one the five young people sank to the deck and lay still.

There was no shortage of volunteers to crew the search helicopter when Sir Billy had, with mixed feelings, authorized it to take off as soon as possible. Perhaps his overriding duty was to find out what had happened to *Columbus*, and to glean any information possible about the cause of events in the Triangle.

Janet was distraught. She’d picked up Sue’s thoughts and recorded everything that had come over. She managed to receive a fairly detailed description of the cloud. Sue told her about its strange movements, even though there was a complete lack of wind around the ship. Then Sue’s thoughts became confused. A moment later they were completely incoherent, for she had lost consciousness and her thoughts were like jumbled dreams.

“At least she’s still alive,” Janet consoled herself. If Sue had died, her mind would have ceased to function and all mental communication would have ended.

The helicopter crew knew exactly where to find *Columbus*, and sure enough they spotted the vessel moving steadily along on its

autopilot. There was no sign of life aboard, so two members of the crew were quickly lowered to the deserted deck and they confirmed that no one was there.

One of the crew members took over the bridge to steer the boat back to port, while the other searched the boat for clues.

He found the microphone and the cable leading down to the tape recorder, which was still running. When he went into the radio cabin all the apparatus seemed to be in order. He tested it out and had no difficulty in speaking to the Cape.

“Is there any sign of a cloud?” someone at the Cape asked urgently, but the crewman replied that there was no cloud as far as he could see.

“Very well. Bring the boat home,” was the final order.

Chris was regaining consciousness. It was a very gradual process, and not at all unpleasant.

The first thing he realized was that he was still alive and was lying down on something very soft. It felt as if he were just coming round from a very deep and comfortable sleep, and there was no hurry to wake up. He felt very relaxed, his body filled with a sensation of well-being. He wanted to stay like this for ever.

How long he remained in this semi-conscious condition he didn't know. He heard nothing to disturb him, and he kept his eyes closed. There seemed no reason to open them. It was lovely lying like this. It was far more comfortable than lying in that bunk.

Bunk? Very slowly the wheels of memory began to turn. Yes, he'd recently been lying in a bunk. But when? Then he remembered other people. He had some friends. Ah—they were Morrey, Tony and Serge. And there was this new friend of his, Susan. They had all been in a boat together, hadn't they? He recalled blue skies and hot sunshine. Then a dark cloud came and blotted everything out. Yes—that was it! The five of them had been sailing in a boat for some reason, when the wretched cloud had come along.

But he was not in a boat now, was he? It didn't feel like a boat. There was no movement, no sound of the engine, no sound of Sue, Morrey, Serge or Tony. He opened his eyes.

As his mind began slowly to function once more, he realized he was lying on a soft bed of some kind, and appeared to be inside a windowless room. He turned his head. On other beds each side of him lay the unconscious forms of his companions. They appeared to be uninjured and sleeping normally but deeply, as he'd done himself.

He couldn't see where the light was coming from. There seemed to be no particular source, but it glowed all over the room. It was very pleasant lying there. All the energy seemed to have been drained from Chris's body. The bed was comfortable and the light soothing. Only after some minutes of wrestling with the picture of his unconscious friends did he make an effort to sit up.

He did so easily. There were none of the after-effects of normal sleep. Now his body responded readily as he became more awake. He sat bolt upright and then swung himself from the bed.

He walked, lightly as a dancer, to each of the other beds. How peaceful, happy even, his companions looked in their sleep. He would make no effort to rouse them from their pleasant slumbers, he would look around on his own.

Again he moved lightly and easily. In sheer pleasure he gave a little leap—and rose nearly three feet into the air. Then he knew at once. They were in some place where gravity was low, perhaps only three-quarters of what was normal. So they were certainly not on earth.

Chris had been many times on the moon, on Mars, and in space stations. He was very familiar with conditions of low or zero gravity. But he'd always known where he was and precisely what to expect. Now he had no idea where he and his companions were. Nor did he know anything about conditions, except what he could see in this room.

If they were indeed on a planet with lower gravity, they must have been transported to another solar system. Someone—or something—had taken them off their ship while they were unconscious. How or why, he'd no idea. This could well be what had happened to so many people in the Triangle in the past including the Prime Minister and the President.

He wandered round the room, which was rectangular and fairly

large. Three of the walls and the ceiling were a pleasant blue colour. The fourth wall was grey and of a different texture. Chris went close to it and peered at it intently. He fancied it was slightly translucent. It could only be his imagination, but he thought he saw something move on the other side of the grey wall. He had a strange feeling that someone was watching him through it.

He turned to his companions, sleeping on their comfortable beds. Should he try to rouse them, or should he let them sleep on and awake naturally? He decided to leave them alone for the moment, and started to examine the room more closely. The light seemed to come equally from the ceiling and the three blue walls. As he walked slowly round he could see no door. How they could have entered this room he had no idea. Neither the blue walls nor the grey one had any sign of an entrance. But surely there must be one somewhere, or how could they—or their beds for that matter—have got inside? What was more to the point, how would they get out?

A sound from Serge took Chris quickly to the Russian's side. Serge was gradually wakening, and Chris stood near until his friend opened his eyes.

“Wake up, Serge,” he called. “We’ve all been asleep.”

Serge sat up and gazed around in surprise.

“Where are we?”

“I don’t know,” Chris admitted, “but my guess is that we are no longer on earth, but on a planet in another solar system. The gravity here is a little less than on earth, as you’ll soon discover.”

“So—we were taken from the boat after the grey cloud came down on us?”

“Seems like it. I feel none the worse. Do you?”

Serge agreed. As he swung himself from his bed, he too noticed the lower gravity.

“What is this room we’re in?” he asked.

“I don’t know. I can’t find any door in it, so how we got inside I haven’t a clue.”

Serge walked over to the grey wall.

“I thought for a moment I could see through it,” he said slowly,

“but I must be wrong.”

“I thought the same some time ago,” Chris confessed. “It seems to be slightly transparent.”

Before they could go closer to the grey wall and peer through, Sue woke up, and Chris and Serge hurried to reassure her. Tony and Morrey soon woke too, and the five young people explored the room together.

“So whoever took us from *Columbus* didn’t do us any harm,” said Sue, “but why have we been put in this room? It’s like a prison.”

“I can’t see how we got in or can get out,” Tony reported, for he, too, had been going carefully round the walls. Suddenly he stopped in front of the grey wall and put his face close to it.

“I can see something moving,” he gasped, and the other four joined him.

“I’m scared,” Sue confessed, and Chris held her hand to give her courage.

“I don’t think we’re going to be harmed,” he told her. “We’ve been brought here quite painlessly and we’re none the worse.”

As they peered through the grey wall, a change began to take place. Slowly the wall became less opaque. In a few moments they could all see through it more clearly. And what they saw was the most astounding sight they had ever beheld.

## CHAPTER 9

A few yards away stood three creatures, staring at them intently. Sue had difficulty in stifling a scream as she saw the strange Beings that faced them.

They were standing upright and looked about seven feet tall. Their faces were not human, but more like those of the dolphins that had been following their boat. They had large eyes at the sides of their heads, and pointed snout-like faces. A big mouth seemed to give them a perpetual smile. They were wearing loose robes, mostly of pearly grey.

Their skin was smooth and blue-grey in colour, but there the likeness to dolphins ended. For these Beings had arms and legs instead of fins. Their limbs were ridiculously short by human standards, and terminated in stubby little fingers and toes.

“What—what are they?” gasped the girl.

“I don’t know,” Morrey confessed, “but they look half men, half fish.”

“Who ever heard of a fish having arms and legs?” asked Tony. “Besides—they’re all walking and not swimming.”

“Yet their likeness to dolphins is too great for it to be mere chance,” Serge observed thoughtfully.

“I wonder if they will communicate with us,” mused Chris. “Let’s wave to them.”

He waved a hand backwards and forwards several times, and one of the Beings actually waved back with a stunted arm and small hand.

“I don’t suppose they could hear us if we spoke to them,” Morrey said doubtfully. “They look very intelligent. And they are wearing clothes.”

“Well, if they are the Creatures who have brought us here from the Triangle I should say they’re highly intelligent,” Tony pointed out. “They must be far more advanced, technically, than we are.

“But why have they got us caged up here?” asked Sue. “Why are



they staring at us as if we were animals in a zoo?”

“I suppose we’re interesting specimens,” smiled Chris in an attempt to lighten the atmosphere. He was afterwards to remember this phrase.

“What would Janet say if she were here?” Sue wondered, and she began to think of her friend, so very far away.

Now the three Beings had come closer to the transparent wall and were looking at their captives—for Tony maintained that this was just what they were.

“Are they really smiling at us, or is that just the way they are made?” wondered Morrey.

One of the Beings came right against the wall and made a noise. Strangely enough the grey wall did not deaden the sound, and it was now quite transparent.

“He’s trying to say something to us,” whispered Sue. She had just told Janet all that was happening, for wherever they were, there seemed no difficulty in getting mental messages through.

Now the sound that was coming through the wall certainly had meaning, and, to the utter astonishment of the five, they understood the sounds.

“Have no fear,” said the nearest of the strange Beings, in a slightly squeaky voice. “We mean you no harm.”

“You—you speak our language!” Tony blurted out.

“Of course. We speak all languages,” the Being replied. It then spoke in Serge’s native tongue, and the astounded Russian answered.

Chris, as the leader of the five humans, then spoke.

“Who are you? And why are we here?”

“You are in Sembria and we are Sembrians. You are here because we are interested in your species and your way of life, which we have been studying for a long time.”

“Is that why you took us from earth? You have taken many of our people before?”

“Yes. We have quite a number of humans here. They are very

Well and happy—as we hope you, too, will be,” the Sembrian replied. “You will find life here much more pleasant than on your earth.”

“But we want to go back home,” declared Tony.

“That you cannot do,” the Sembrian said, “at least for a time. You will remain in this room for a little longer, then you will be able to enter the rest of this building. Eventually you will be free to live in parts of our world that we have set aside for humans.”

“Why are you keeping us here against our will?” demanded Morrey. “You kidnapped us.”

“That is the same question that all you humans ask when you first arrive,” the Sembrian replied. “We tell them—as I tell you—that if, eventually, you still wish to go to the place you are pleased to call Earth, we will return you. However, you must know how many of your kind have chosen to return.”

“What is going to happen to us meanwhile?” asked Chris quietly.

“We shall do our best to keep you happy here,” the Sembrian assured them. “We shall teach you about ourselves as we learn about you. Now, if you will all go into the next apartment you will find a meal which, I hope, will be to your liking.”

Tony was about to point out that they couldn’t go into any other room, when they all caught sight of something startling. With a slight swish a rectangular opening had appeared in one of the walls, and beyond it they could see a larger room.

“How did that get there?” the young mechanic exploded. “I swear it wasn’t there before.”

The grey wall had become opaque again, and it seemed that their first encounter with the Sembrians was over. Curiously and cautiously they walked towards the opening.

The room was certainly larger than the one they had just left. It had the familiar three blue walls and one grey one, but what most caught their attention was the well-laden table in the centre. On it was a variety of dishes, and the smell was very appetizing.

“At least they don’t intend to starve us,” the mechanic declared. “Shall we eat?”

Five chairs, not unlike those that were in use at the canteen at the Cape, had been provided. Led by Tony, Sue and the others drew the chairs up to the table, and began to eat.

The food was certainly delicious, and the five began to relax as they enjoyed the meal. Only Serge felt a trifle uneasy. He couldn't help feeling that they were being watched through the grey wall.

"Gee! That was good!" Tony exclaimed as he pushed his empty plate away from him. "How do these Sembrians know what we like? I wonder what they eat."

"Fish, probably," laughed Morrey. "That's what dolphins eat on earth."

"But these aren't like dolphins," Sue pointed out. "They have arms and legs."

"And they speak all human languages," added Serge. "I wonder what this place is like outside. How long do you think they will keep us caged up?"

"That's anyone's guess," replied Chris. "We shall have to see what happens."

Janet was still in great distress. Sir Billy had relieved her of all secretarial duties and told her to take things quietly.

"But how can I when such strange things are happening to Sue?" she protested. "I'm frightened."

"Calm down, Janet," Sir Billy soothed. "We are depending on you as our only line of communication. You will be able to send and receive more clearly if you are calm and quiet."

From the first the telepathic messages had been taken seriously. All other contact with the crew of *Columbus* was broken. It was useless, the Director pointed out, wasting time on the T.V., the laser, or radio, for this equipment was still intact on the boat. Only the occupants had been spirited away.

As soon as *Columbus* reached the Cape it was examined minutely. Everything was in order, everything functioned. The most important discovery was the tape recorder with its messages intact.

It was a tense little gathering of Sir Billy and a few of his top

advisers who listened to the play-back. When Morrey's voice described the grey cloud that was descending from a clear sky, and when he reported the strange movements within it, the listeners were struck by the exact likeness to the telepathic messages reported by Janet Pedley.

"At least that proves that the link between the two girls is a real one and not imaginary," Sir Billy said heavily. "It is all we have left."

So the utmost attention was given to Janet's reports that she was now in touch again with her missing friend.

"Where are they? What are they doing? How did they get there?"

The questions showered on Janet, and she promised to do all she could to find out.

Sembria? No one had ever heard of it. It must be the name of a planet in some distant solar system. Yet the messages between the two girls seemed to pass backwards and forwards instantaneously. Light and radio waves move at a definitely known speed. Telepathy seemed to travel at infinite velocity.

Sue's mental picture of the Sembrians had her distant audience gasping. The marine biologist, Bernard Latore, was particularly intrigued.

"Terrestrial dolphins were originally land creatures," he explained, "but then they returned to the sea. Though they are air-breathing mammals with a well developed brain, their further evolution seems to have been halted. Had they not returned to the water they could well be like these so-called Sembrians. They would have developed arms and legs, and no doubt their intellects would also have expanded."

"More so than man's?" someone asked.

"It seems like it. They may have been evolving for millions of years longer than humans," Mr. Latore replied.

"So to them we could be quite primitive creatures," Sir Billy said thoughtfully. "Maybe that is why they have taken so many of us from the Bermuda Triangle—so that they can make a study of us."

"They're eating now," Janet reported, "and they seem to be enjoying the food. Sue says Tony has excelled himself."

“That young man always had a great appetite,” the Director said with a faint smile.

“I wonder when we shall meet the Sembrians face to face,” mused Sue. “There’s so much I’d like to ask them.”

The others too were eager to know more about the dolphinlike Beings and their technology. The very thought of it was bewildering. Already they had experienced an unknown means of space travel, had been in a novel kind of room with a wall that became transparent, had walked through a door that hadn’t been -there a few minutes before. And what had happened to all the other humans that the Sembrians had taken over the years? Had none of them wished to return?

While the five young people were talking earnestly together another door appeared in the “dining-room”

“I wish I knew how they did that,” breathed Tony, “but let’s see where it leads to.”

The others followed him, and found themselves in a corridor with five conventional doors leading from it. Without hesitation Tony pushed open the first of these, and a completely furnished bedroom was revealed. It contained much the same furniture as a similar room on earth, even to a large wardrobe. Sue’s curiosity led her to open the wardrobe door, and she discovered quite an array of clothing, light, and of many colours.

They visited the other rooms one after another, and all were the same.

“I suppose these are for us,” Morrey said. “I wonder if the clothes fit.”

Sue still wore the wrap over her red bikini that she had hastily put on aboard *Columbus*, and she was anxious to find something else to wear.

“We may as well get into the clothes our hosts have so thoughtfully provided,” smiled Chris. “You choose which room you’ll have, Sue.”

“I’ll have the one in the middle so that I can have two strong men on either side of me,” the girl laughed. “They can protect me.” It was

surprising how carefree they all felt.

Chris and Morrey occupied the rooms either side of Sue, while Tony and Serge took over the outer ones.

They all spent an interesting half-hour exploring the contents of their respective wardrobes, each of which seemed to contain a dozen or so multi-coloured pyjama suits. Sue examined the material of hers. She'd never seen anything like it before, but it seemed to be some kind of very flexible plastic.

When they had changed they congregated in the dining-room. The table had been cleared and on it were books and old magazines, evidently obtained when ships or aircraft had been seized in the past.

"How do I look?" asked Sue as she twisted round for her companions to see. Her "pyjamas" were of a brilliant, almost luminescent, green.

"You look great!" grinned Morrey. "Though I did like you in your bikini."

"Cheek!" laughed Sue, and she flashed a description of their gear to Janet, who faithfully reported it to Sir Billy and his colleagues. When Sue asked Chris if he could identify the material, he was unable to do so, but guessing why she asked he told her to tell Sir Billy that he'd try to bring a sample when they returned to earth.

Returned to earth? He had no idea when that would be. There was so much, so very much, to learn, and he wanted to meet President Maxwell and Prime Minister Moore, to ask how they were faring in this amazing land.

Chris turned to look at the grey wall. What compelled him to do so he had no idea, but the other four all felt the same impulse. They wandered over to it.

A small band of Sembrians were now visible through it. Whether any were the same as those they had seen before none of the party knew, for they all seemed alike to human eyes.

"You have eaten well?" asked one of the Sembrians. "That is good. We wish you to be happy here."

"But when will you take us back to earth?" Tony asked. He was really in no great hurry to go back, but he felt he had to ask the

question.

The Sembrian spokesman looked at him.

“We have already told you, but we wish you to stay here for a short time. If, then, you wish to return to the life you have been living on your planet, we will send you back.”

“Fair enough,” replied Tony. “But when are we being let out of this cage?”

“Soon, now. Very soon. We wish you to become accustomed to us gradually. We are very different from you, and we have no wish to alarm you by exposing you to such a strange world as ours all at once.”

Chris felt he could believe this Being. In spite of their strange appearance in human eyes, the Sembrians seemed cheerful and friendly. Perhaps it was natural that they should wish to learn more about human beings. In a way it was what we do ourselves when we capture birds and animals to study in depth.

“We already know a great deal about your civilization from other humans,” the first Sembrian went on. “But we have a feeling that you five, unlike any others, sought to be taken by us. You exposed yourselves in what you call the Bermuda Triangle so that you could go the way so many others had gone. Is that true?”

## CHAPTER 10

The other four looked to Chris to give the reply, and he saw no reason not to tell their captors that they had come seeking information about other missing persons, to discover how their disappearances had occurred, and why. He had a feeling that the more they co-operated with the Sembrians, the more they would learn about them and their way of life. Though they were so different from men and women, he found himself liking them.

“Yes, it is true,” he replied calmly. “For many years we have been distressed because so many of our people, our ships and our aircraft have completely vanished from that area. A few weeks ago two very important people disappeared, and the governments of earth decided that something must be done to find out what was happening. The task of my friends and myself is to seek out the causes of these events. We have done so, and now we have met you and you have brought us to Sembria.”

“You are very brave,” the Sembrian said, and his perpetual smile seemed to broaden. “We mean you no harm. It is true that we have taken you away from the evil world in which you lived. When you know more about ours you will not want to return.”

That’s hardly likely, Chris thought to himself, though he didn’t say so to the others. Yet he had to admit that if all the people who had previously been taken to Sembria had been given the same choice, none had chosen to return. This must be an idyllic world. But what about his duty? His job? His friends? No matter how marvellous Sembria proved to be, he would have to go back to report. Though, of course, there was no hurry.

“When are we going to meet you face to face?” asked Morrey.

“Soon. Now you have become used to our appearance we see no reason for further delay. We wanted to make sure that you would not be frightened by us or do anything foolish before we moved among you,” the Sembrian said. “Now, will you tell us your names.”

Chris made the introductions, which the Sembrian acknowledged courteously.

“We do not have names as such,” he said. “We use numbers.



Every Sembrian, at birth, is given its own individual number, and we are known by that number throughout our lives.”

“I wouldn’t like that,” Sue declared. “I think numbers are horrid.”

“They are not so bad when you get used to them,” the Sembrian smiled. “My number, or name if you like, is 468.”

“I am 412.”

“I am 826.”

The other Sembrians seemed anxious to introduce themselves also.

“Of course,” 468 went on, “our full numbers have far more digits than three, but it would be rather cumbersome to use them all. My full number is 89211468. This is only used on very formal occasions. My friends all call me 468.”

“I see,” Tony laughed. “We have nicknames. You have nick-numbers.”

“They seem to be getting on quite well with the Sembrians,” Janet told her Chief. “They don’t have names but use numbers. They seem to be very friendly.”

“I hope our Chris and Company don’t get too comfortable in Sembria,” Sir Billy said thoughtfully, “or they won’t wish to return. That would be disastrous. Think how much we can learn from them about the Sembrian world when they get back.”

“For the moment Sue seems quite relaxed. I’m not getting any agitated vibrations from her as I was before,” Janet said.

Sir Billy made a mental note. He must do all he could to prevent the sirens of Sembria persuading his young men and the girl not to return to earth. But how? He looked at Janet thoughtfully.

“468, when can we leave this place?” Chris asked. “I think we’ve become accustomed to you and we’d like to mix more.”

“Good. Then you shall,” 468 replied, and his mouth stretched even wider in obvious pleasure. “We always let our guests become used to us gradually. That is the reason for the grey wall. We use it

to introduce ourselves to you slowly.”

“How did you make the door appear, and where did the food come from?” asked the ever-inquisitive Tony.

It was the Sembrian numbered 826 who answered.

“The food was prepared and placed in the eating-room by other humans while you were occupied in the smaller room in which you awoke. As for the door, it was always there, and we will show you how to open it.”

“First we will come in to you,” 468 said. “In that way you will get used to close contact with us.”

“Would you like us to come in now?” asked 412.

“Why not?” laughed Morrey. “Come in and make yourselves at home.”

With 468 in the lead, the three Sembrians walked forward, and immediately an opening appeared in the transparent grey wall. The watchers gasped as the Sembrians entered the room.

“How did that happen?” breathed Tony.

412 told them that there were certain areas in all walls that were activated and opened up when anyone approached. There was nothing to stop them moving out of that room if they knew where the openings were.

The Sembrians wore loose robes—almost like Roman togas, Chris thought—of grey. Their skins were blue-grey and shiny. There was a slight smell about them—seaweed, Tony decided, though it was not at all unpleasant. They looked much alike, but there were slight differences between them, so the humans soon learned how to identify them.

468 appeared to be the spokesman. Though still marvelling that he could speak, and speak English, the astronauts and the girl felt able to talk to him freely. He showed no sign of irritation at their countless questions, and cheerfully replied to all of them.

At the outset it became clear that Sembria had a highly civilized population, and that their knowledge in certain sciences was far in advance of human conception. There were, of course, male and female Sembrians, and 468 told his fascinated listeners that the

females of Sembria were given odd numbers, while the males had even ones. Tony immediately thought of a few cracks he would address to Sue when the opportunity arose. They lived together in small units, and when a baby was born it was cared for by all the family. The climate of Sembria was warm and pleasant, and there were no seasons as we know them.

“You humans have been given quite a large area in which to live,” 468 told them. “You may meet other humans and wander about within the area as you will. But you are not permitted to go beyond its boundaries.”

“Many of us Sembrians like to come and visit your area,” 412 added. “You will live in conditions as good as, if not better than, you do on earth.”

Sue at last felt bold enough to ask a question that had been puzzling her.

“You are very much like creatures we call dolphins,” she blurted out. “Why is that?”

“Because we are similar to your dolphins,” 468 replied pleasantly. “We must have evolved in a parallel way, on earth and on Sembria. Then we chose to spend our lives on land, while our cousins on your planet returned to the sea. Your dolphins are the creatures with whom we have the closest affinity—closer than with any other on your earth.”

“There were lots of dolphins always swimming alongside our boat,” Sue said. “Did you know?”

“Of course,” 468 smiled back. “We talked to our terrestrial cousins and they told us about you and your ship—as they have done on other occasions in the past.”

“But the dolphins couldn’t tell you about aircraft,” Morrey exclaimed.

“Oh yes they could,” 468 answered. “They have senses which you would not appreciate. Your sonar is a primitive form of it. They are able to give us all the information we need about your aircraft as well as ships.”

“Now perhaps you will excuse us,” 826 said. “We will send you in a meal. Tomorrow you will be able to come out into the area where

your fellow humans live.”

“There is just one thing,” cautioned 468. “Your meal will be brought in by other humans. May we request you not to speak to them yet. We would rather you gain your impression about our land first hand. Do you mind?”

“Not if that is your wish, 468,” answered Chris. “But we’d like to speak to them later.”

“By all means. Now we bid you goodbye. We will see you tomorrow,” 468 said, and the three Sembrians courteously took their leave.

About half an hour later a door opened and in came two women carrying trays. They were dressed in the bright pyjama-like clothing that all humans seemed to wear in Sembria. They smiled silently and put down the trays. Then, equally silently, they went out again.

“Let’s see what we’ve got,” Tony burst out as soon as the two women had gone. His eyes sparkled as they went over to the table. “Gosh! This is as good as a posh hotel. Let’s get cracking.”

They all enjoyed the meal, even Sue.

“I’ll be putting on weight if we’re here very long,” she sighed.

They talked together for an hour before deciding to go to their beds. The light in the room had gradually become dimmer, though there was no means of knowing whether this was caused by mechanical or natural means.

Next morning—*was* it morning?—all five awoke within a few minutes of each other. They all felt wonderfully refreshed and completely relaxed.

“I’m looking forward to today,” Morrey declared “We should have our first peep, at the outside world of Sembria.”

“I wonder what we shall get for breakfast?” pondered Tony. “Is there a bell anywhere that we can ring for service?”

“Hey! You’re wearing a different suit, Sue,” Chris remarked. “Wasn’t it green yesterday?”

“Of course I’m wearing a different outfit. With a wardrobe full of suits of such gorgeous colours, who’s going to wear one colour for long? Like it?”

The colour she had chosen was electric blue, or at least that was how Chris would have described it.

“You look great!” Morrey laughed, and even Serge clapped politely as Sue twisted round to display the suit.

The same two women appeared silently. Again they placed trays on the table and went without anything more than smiles.

“Toast, marmalade, fruit salad, cream. “Tony ticked off the various items. “Come on. What’s keeping, us?”

Janet had arranged her own life to follow Sue’s. She took her rest when her distant friend went to bed. As soon as Sue awoke, fresh mental pictures came flooding into Janet’s mind. She was aroused by images of the wardrobe and its contents and the attractive suit Sue had chosen for the day. She recorded everything on the tape machine which never left her. Even the Contents of the breakfast table were faithfully reported.

“It’s very pleasant here,” was the main theme of Sue’s messages back to earth.

The astronauts and Sue had barely finished their breakfast when 468 and their other two Sembrian acquaintances appeared.

“Have you slept and eaten well?” asked 468 courteously.

He was assured that they all had.

“So now you are ready to venture outside?”

The eager reaction of his listeners was sufficient answer. He led them through the doorway in the grey wall, and for the first time the live humans stepped out into the air of Sembria.

It was quite warm. No wonder the Sembrians wore loose robes and had provided their human guests with light clothing too. It was all that was needed in this summer-like warmth.

The astronomer in Serge noted that the planet’s sun seemed a little larger and more yellow than our own. It gave a bright, but not harsh, light.

They were in a large open square surrounded on three sides by

one-storey buildings similar to the one from which they had just come. They saw many other humans going in and out of the buildings or just walking about.

“Is this where all humans live?” asked Morrey.

“We have a number of places like this in different Parts of our planet,” 826 replied. “They are specially designed for your people to make their surroundings as much like their natural home as possible. We live some little distance away.

Other Sembrians were dotted about, many of them talking to the humans, and Chris caught snatches of several languages. Some of the Sembrians called greetings to 468 and his colleagues by making strange clicking noises. It seemed that this was just one of the ways in which their hosts communicated.

All the humans seemed cheerful and happy. There were quite a number of children among them, and these were playing together just as they would on earth.

“Can’t we say ‘hello’ to some of these people?” Chris asked, for he’d noticed that their escorts were keeping them well away from other humans.

“Not just yet, if you don’t mind,” replied 468. “But soon, very soon.”

“Very well, if you say so,” Chris said with a shrug. It would have been very easy to call across to some of them, but he had no wish to give offence to their hosts. After all, they were being treated very kindly, and their comforts couldn’t have been cared for more. Life on earth wasn’t nearly so pleasant or relaxing as it seemed to be here on Sembria. Perhaps it was something in the air that had this effect.

The others, too, were beginning to feel very happy in their new surroundings. In spite of their strange appearance, the Sembrians seemed a very friendly race, only too anxious to make their guests feel comfortable.

“It’s strange,” Sue told Janet, “that we no longer regard ourselves as the captives of the Sembrians, but as their honoured guests.”

Sir Billy wasn’t too pleased to hear this. “Let them know that

their friends want them back quickly,” he said.

Soon they were politely escorted back to their quarters, where another excellent meal awaited them. 468 and the other Sembrians left, promising to return later. More than two hours went by before they came back.

“Would you like to meet some of your fellows?” asked 826. “We think you may be ready to do so.”

“We’d love to,” Chris answered on behalf of them all. “Lead us to them.”

The Sembrians led Sue and the astronauts to a small knot of people seated in comfortable chairs, basking in the yellow sunlight. The humans looked at Chris and his friends without much interest. 468 introduced the five young people to the others, who seemed to be mainly Americans, judging by their accents.

“We’ll leave you to get better acquainted,” the Sembrian said. Then he and his two companions waddled off on their short legs, their loose robes flapping as they went.

“What part of New York do you come from?” Morrey asked one of their new acquaintances who had mentioned that he was called Joe.

“New York?” Joe muttered with a puzzled look. “I—I don’t know.”

“But surely you’re from New York? The Bronx, perhaps?” Morrey persisted.

“I don’t remember,” Joe replied lamely. “None of us remember where we came from.”

“How extraordinary!” exclaimed Chris. Imagine forgetting something like that! He knew that they had all come from Cape Canaveral, that he’d lived in England and was born in a place called —

He realized he’d forgotten the name of the town where he’d lived and gone to school. He’d always prided himself on his memory. It was essential for his job. Yet here he was—couldn’t even recall the town of his birth. He’d be forgetting the name of his country next!

“None of us remember anything about our lives before we came here,” Joe explained, and others who now came crowding round

confirmed this. “You’ll soon forget everything, too,” Joe added. “It doesn’t matter, for you started a new life when you came to Sembria, and you’ll never want to leave it. Never.”



## CHAPTER 11

Chris wasn't the only one who found his memory of life on earth becoming hazy. Tony, Morrey and Serge no longer thought very much about their lives before they found themselves in Sembria. Their recollections of the past were fading by the minute. Only Sue felt uncomfortable and restless. Janet, sensing what was happening, sent her thoughts winging across Space.

"You came from England. You're Sue Howard. You were caught up in the Bermuda Triangle," Janet kept repeating. "You belong to earth, you and the others. You must try and get back here again."

The Sembrian day was approximately equal to twenty terrestrial hours. Because the planet's axis was at right angles to the plane of its orbit round its sun, day and night were always of equal length. By the time two Sembrian days and nights had passed the astronauts had completely lost their memories of earth and their desire to return to it. Perhaps it was something in their diet, or in the balmy Sembrian atmosphere. Certainly all four were affected—as were all the humans who had come to Sembria before them.

Janet's frantic efforts to keep Sue aware of earth took a great deal out of her. Often after a concentrated spell of mental effort she would be exhausted and limp, and she didn't know how long she could carry on.

Sir Billy, whilst sympathizing with her, had no alternative but to keep up the pressure. She was his only hope of maintaining a tenuous contact with his distant team, and restoring the astronauts' memory of earth, their reason for being on Sembria, and their will to return home with their knowledge.

After two days of constant pressure from Janet, Sue made an appeal to Chris, the astronaut whom Sir Billy thought she could influence most.

"Chris," Sue said, "didn't we come from earth? Haven't we got other friends somewhere?"

They were sitting in comfortable chairs, sunning themselves and chatting idly with the new acquaintances they had made. Tony was

asleep, no doubt from the after-effects of another hearty lunch. Chris turned languidly towards the girl.

“What are you talking about, Sue?” he asked with a puzzled frown.

“Why—I have a strong feeling that, not long ago, we lived somewhere else, somewhere called earth. Can you remember anything about it, Chris?”

The effort of memory made Chris’s frown return.

“Wait a bit. I do seem to recall something. Where was it you said we came from? Earth? Yes, I have it. Sembria is one planet, and earth is another. And you say we lived on earth before we came here?”

“Yes, I’m sure that’s it,” Sue answered eagerly. “Do you remember Sir Billy?”

Chris was about to shake his head, but one little corner of the curtain that was blocking out the past from his mind was lifted.

“Sir Billy? Yes. Yes, I think I do. Wasn’t he a tall man with grey hair?”

“Yes, that’s right. Can you recall what he did?”

To please Sue Chris made a valiant attempt to remember the past. It was strange how everything had been blotted out.

“Wasn’t he in charge of something?” he asked uncertainly. “I seem to remember lots of people. There was a girl, a friend of yours?”

“That was Janet,” Sue said. “She is my very close friend. Come on, Chris. You remember how we all went to—to Cape Canaveral?”

But Chris shook his head. It was beginning to ache under the strain of the effort he was making.

“Don’t press him any more,” Janet’s message came urgently. “You’ve made very good progress. Sir Billy says leave it for a spell.”

Next day Sue tried once more, and gradually Chris remembered everything. The five of them had sailed through the Triangle, there had been a grey cloud and they had all lost consciousness. Then they awoke to find themselves in Sembria. Here, because of something in the air or their diet, they were made to forget the past.

Only Sue, because of her mental link with Janet, had just managed to escape the same fate. She had helped Chris to regain his full memory and now they must work together on the others.

In Florida Sir Billy and his advisers were overjoyed to hear of this success. It was indeed good news that Chris was now fully alert to the position. But would he slip back again? Surely not now that he knew what had happened.

“Tell Chris not to let the Sembrians know, yet, that he has recovered his memory,” the Director urged Sue through Janet.

Another secretary came in and handed Sir Billy a slip of paper. He glanced at it, and the lines on his tired face deepened.

“As if we hadn’t enough to worry about,” he sighed as he passed the message on to the others. “Two more oil wells closed down. That makes over forty in the last week!”

“Don’t let the Sembrians know,” Sir Billy had said. It wouldn’t be easy, thought Chris, for their hosts—or captors—were highly intelligent and possessed unknown powers. Then there was the question of retaining his memory. He must eat. If it was something in the Sembrian food that caused the past to be blotted out, he didn’t see how he could avoid the same thing happening again. Still—he’d try hard.

Now that Chris had shaken off the drug-like effect of Sembria, he found life there very dull. There was only Sue whom he could talk to, for Tony, Serge and Morrey were content to laze about and enjoy a life of listless ease. The other humans, too, seemed very content with their lot, having neither memory of, or desire for, earth. It would be an impossible task to arouse more than a few from this universal stupor.

To make sure that he didn’t slip back into his former languor, Chris urged Sue to keep a close watch on him, and they talked constantly of friends and events on earth. The Cape co-operated by sending, through Janet, news of terrestrial affairs. So it was that Chris learned of the deepening fuel crisis as more than half of the world’s oil supplies became exhausted. He seemed in no danger of

losing his memory again, and he formed the opinion that the Sembrian food was effective only when captives first arrived.

“For we are captives,” Chris told Sue quietly in one of their many private chats together. “We’re just like animals in a safari park. Oh, I know we have every care and comfort. But that is to keep us fit so that the Sembrians can watch us and be entertained by us.”

“What a dreadful thing to say,” the girl protested. “After all, they’ve been very kind to us and we want for nothing.”

“True. Like the animals in zoos on earth, we want for nothing—except freedom.”

The task of arousing the other three was a difficult one. It had to be done carefully to avoid the notice of the Sembrians, for 468 and his companions frequently waddled among the humans in this particular area, observing and questioning all the time.

“There isn’t much that they miss,” Chris muttered, but he didn’t think that their captors suspected anything as yet.

Serge was the first to show any response to the quiet efforts of Chris and Sue. Gradually the Russian began to recall events before coming to Sembria. Under their urging he remembered their boat, the Cape, and Sir Billy. Tony was next to be aroused, followed quite quickly by Morrey. Within four days of Chris’s first recovery of his memory, all the astronauts could recall their previous life and the events that had brought them to this strange land.

Janet, Sir Billy, and his top advisers at the Cape were overjoyed. The first, perhaps the most important, step had been taken towards saving something out of the Bermuda Triangle situation. Now, if only Chris and his team could contact President Maxwell and Prime Minister Moore, they might be able to arouse them also. The question would then be—would the Sembrians keep their promise and return their captives to earth?

“We must find them,” Chris said urgently to his friends at one of their secret discussions. He was referring to Mr. Maxwell and Miss Moore, whom none of them had yet seen. Having to behave in a languid and casual manner, to prevent the Sembrians from

suspecting anything, would make their task more difficult. But it was obviously vital to find the two politicians before putting the Sembrian promise to the test.

Fortunately, Morrey and Chris had been introduced to the American President before his disappearance from earth, and Sue had seen Miss Moore frequently. The faces of both were quite familiar, thanks to television and the press. It shouldn't be too difficult to recognize them if they were in this same area, or compound as Morrey called it.

So Sue and the astronauts began wandering farther afield. They went in two groups and always arranged to meet back at their bungalow at a given time. One thing they soon found out. There was an invisible fence of some sort all around the area.

It was first discovered by Tony, who went blundering into it. He was ahead of Chris and Sue, while Morrey and Serge had gone in another direction. Suddenly Tony let out a yell and began rubbing his head vigorously. Chris and Sue went up to him in concern to ask what was the matter. He didn't know what had happened, except that he'd suddenly bumped into something he couldn't see.

He stretched out a hand wonderingly and then he touched something. An invisible barrier was in front of them. Running his hands over it, he found it was smooth and extensive. Neither he nor Chris could discover any limit to it, for they ran their hands along it for hundreds of yards in each direction. Always the smooth, invisible wall kept them within the compound where the Sembrians had confined them.

"So we are prisoners after all," Tony muttered. "Yet they treat us well enough. I don't understand it."

"Don't you?" Chris asked. "Isn't it the same thing that we do to animals?"

"I hope they don't do to us what we sometimes do to animals," Sue gasped. "Sometimes we're quite cruel to them. We use them for experiments."

She shuddered at the memory of some of the accounts that she had read.

The five wandered quite a few miles in search of the two

prominent people they wanted to find. They found that the extent of their compound was considerable. No one could say that they were confined in a small area. But always they came up against that invisible wall that kept them from moving over Sembria at will.

They met 468 and other Sembrians quite frequently, but they were careful to conceal the fact that their memories had returned. Until they could find Mr. Maxwell and Miss Moore they must let their captors think that they were quite content with their lot.

They also met some female Sembrians, who were smaller and slightly lighter in colour than their male counterparts. All were called by odd numbers, and Tony and Morrey declared that one, 1107, had taken quite a fancy to Serge, for they were constantly meeting her. The Russian denied the allegation hotly until he saw that his friends were only teasing him.

It was quite by accident that the astronauts and Sue found the two people whom they sought. One day, wandering about apparently aimlessly, they saw a little crowd of two dozen or so humans. This was an unusual thing in itself, but even more strange was the sight of someone in the centre who appeared to be making a speech. They had never seen this happen on Sembria before, so they joined the crowd.

“That’s him!” Morrey whispered to the others. “That’s President Maxwell!”

Now the others could see that the orator, in spite of his colourful Sembrian clothes, was indeed James Maxwell, President of the United States.

“I expect speech-making is in his blood,” Sue observed quietly to Chris. “I wonder what he’s on about?”

They went closer, and heard the President say:

“My friends, we must meet and talk together very often. We do not know how or why we are here, but we may as well enjoy our lives—and each other’s company. Let us greet each other as fellow humans, let us share each other’s pleasures, let us seek to enjoy our lives here to the full.”

There was a murmur from his listeners, and one of the Sembrians approached as the President droned on.

“There’s Miss Moore,” whispered Sue, pointing to one of the humans. “I’m almost certain that’s she, though of course she looks very different in those clothes.”

When the Sembrian had moved on Chris and his friends drifted towards the President. Maxwell eyed them curiously. Sue was sure now that the woman with him was Miss Moore.

“My name is Chris Godfrey,” the Deputy said, introducing himself to the President. “May I ask what is yours?”

“James Maxwell,” the other replied. “I am pleased to meet you. I haven’t seen you before, have I?”

“No. We haven’t been here long. But you speak very well, Mr. Maxwell. Are you used to making speeches?”

“I—I don’t know,” Maxwell answered with a frown. “It just seemed right for me to speak to these people. By the way, this is a friend of mine, Lucy Moore.”

The five shook hands with the British Prime Minister. When Sue had last seen her on earth, and when her face appeared on T.V., she’d always looked slightly harassed, no doubt because of the responsibilities of office. Now she looked serene and without a care in the world. No wonder so many people found life in Sembria very pleasant.

“Can you remember nothing of the past?” Chris asked urgently. “Don’t you remember a place called earth, from which we all come?”

Both Maxwell and Miss Moore looked puzzled.

“We must have come from somewhere,” the Prime Minister replied uncertainly, “but I can’t recall it.”

“You both came from a distant planet called earth, the home of all humans. You were both very important people there,” Morrey told them. “We remember all about it, for we have only just come to Sembria.”

He thought it best not to confuse them by revealing that it was Sue’s telepathic link with Janet that had brought back their memories.

“Tell us more about it,” President Maxwell said, and to avoid the

attention of the Sembrians they strolled about casually.

In quick sentences Chris and Morrey explained to the two politicians that they were the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Britain respectively, that they were urgently needed back home, and that the Sembrians had promised to return them to earth if they so wished.

“We’d better break up now,” Tony suggested. “There are some Sembrians coming towards us.”



## CHAPTER 12

“Let’s feed Sue with some personal details about them,” Sir Billy said.

He was delighted at the progress that his astronauts were making. If they could remind James Maxwell and Lucy Moore about close members of their families, it might help the process of memory recall. Within a couple of hours Janet had flashed to Sue details of the President’s wife and his two sons, and about Miss Moore’s aged mother and twin brother. Next time Chris and his friends took a stroll, they looked for the two politicians and quietly revealed their knowledge.

It was effective. Mr. Maxwell and Miss Moore remembered their relatives, and something about their lives on earth. President Maxwell turned to Miss Moore.

“Weren’t we at a conference?” he asked her. “Something to do with oil?”

The Prime Minister wrinkled her brow in the effort to recollect. Chris and the others waited patiently and anxiously.

“Ah, yes. That was it,” Miss Moore replied. “But it wasn’t only to do with oil. It was energy generally, wasn’t it?”

“You’re absolutely right,” Morrey said, and he went on to tell them of the serious energy crisis that had developed on earth. Daily more oil wells were drying up and coal mines closing down. Nuclear power stations were unable to cope with their vastly increased load. Gasoline was strictly rationed. (“Petrol, you mean,” Tony interrupted in a stage whisper.) Life in big cities and in industry was grinding to a standstill.

“You were at a World Conference about the crisis,” Morrey concluded. “On your flight home you passed over the Bermuda Triangle. You vanished and were brought here by the Sembrians.”

“But why do they do it?” asked Miss Moore. “What do they intend to do with us?”

“As far as we can judge, they have brought us here just to study us,” Chris answered. “They treat us well, but they keep us confined

in compounds like this. We are penned in by an invisible screen, and we are the objects of curiosity.”

“They treat us well just as we care for animals in zoos,” Sue pointed out. “Except that we perform dreadful experiments on animals.”

Miss Moore shuddered. It was fortunate that Sembrians didn’t imitate humans in their treatment of animals to that extent. Or did they? It was a chilling thought.

“The Prime Minister and the President have recovered their memories,” Janet reported with excitement. “Haven’t Chris and the others done a good job?”

“I think it is you and Susan who have done the best job of all,” the Director smiled. “Without you two nothing like this could ever have happened. Now they must tackle the Sembrians and request that they be returned to earth.”

There was something indefinably different in the appearance of 468, 412, 826, and the other Sembrians. When he first saw them Chris decided that this would be as good a time as any to tell their captors that they now wished to return home. But there was something in the way they approached, some slight change of expression on their faces, that warned the humans that there was going to be trouble.

The Sembrians stopped a few yards away from the humans. Though their faces still wore the dolphin-like grin, Sue thought that it was far less of a smile and more of a leer. Again it was 468 who was their spokesman.

“You will come with us,” he said crisply. “We are taking you away.”

“Wait a moment,” said Chris. “I have something to say. All of us wish to return to earth. You said that this would be done if we wished it.”

The Sembrians looked at the humans strangely—angrily, Tony thought, though it was difficult to judge emotions from their features. Then Mr. Maxwell spoke.

“I am informed that you undertook to send us back to earth if we wished to go,” he boomed. “Then I demand, in the name of the United States of America, that you do so at once.”

“Do you all want to go back to your miserable earth?” asked 412.

One by one the seven humans affirmed that they did.

“So now what about it, fellows?” asked Morrey, more jauntily than he felt.

While they had been speaking Tony noticed that the Sembrians had gradually formed a ring round the seven. Perhaps it was because this action had alerted Tony that he saw the next movement the moment it began. Several of the Sembrians produced strange-looking weapons from beneath the folds of their clothes and pointed them at their captives.

That was enough for Tony. Without thinking, he made a dive between the legs of 826 and one of the other Sembrians. 826, thrown off balance, fell to the ground, while Tony scrambled to his feet and raced away towards the nearest bungalow. Before the Sembrians or his fellow humans could recover he'd disappeared inside.

468 snapped something to his fellows and two of them ambled off in pursuit of the fugitive. Then the Sembrian turned to the remaining six humans and pointed his weapon at them.

“Murderers,” thundered the President. “Murderers and liars!”

“Steady, sir,” Chris cautioned. “They may mean us no harm.”

It was Miss Moore who walked boldly towards 468.

“Put that thing away,” she said to the Sembrian. “We’re not going to run away.”

“You could not run far,” 468 replied smoothly. “Your young friend will be caught and brought back. Now move forward in that direction.”

The Sembrian pointed to the open countryside beyond the compound, and waved his weapon. Other Sembrians edged in more closely.

“I’m not moving until you tell us where you are taking us, and for what,” declared President Maxwell. He folded his arms and adopted

a defiant stance.

“Don’t be silly, James,” Miss Moore urged. “They probably mean us no harm. Perhaps they are going to keep their promise and send us back to earth.”

“I don’t think so,” the President said firmly. “They would have told us so right at the outset. And why have they got weapons?”

“Move along,” 468 urged, and again his weapon was pushed forward.

Morrey went to stand beside his President.

“We are not moving until you tell us why,” he declared.

Now all the Sembrians were pointing weapons at the six humans, but it was only 468 who brought his into use. He made a quick movement of his stubby fingers, and then swept the weapon over Chris and the others. Sue bit back a scream. Were they all about to be killed?

It seemed that they were not. Instead they all felt a peculiar numbness both in body and in mind. They could no longer run away, even if they had wanted to. But—even more strange—they no longer wanted to. Docilely they began to walk where the Sembrians directed, up a slight rise.

What has happened to us, Chris wondered, and what is going to happen to us now? Part of his mind seemed to have been affected by some sort of radiation from 468’s weapon, but only part of it. He still remembered all past events, his life on earth, and what had happened on Sembria right up to the moment when 468 had blasted them with his gun. Yet all will-power seemed to have gone.

With 468 in the lead and six other Sembrians forming an escort, the little party walked away from the bungalows, leaving other humans looking at them with little or no curiosity.

Chris wondered what had happened to Tony, but he felt numb all over from the effects of the weapon. He could do nothing but amble forward towards the invisible barrier. As they reached it one of their escort reached out and began fumbling with something they couldn’t see in the invisible wall. A doorway must have opened, and the whole party passed through it. Whether the Sembrian had to repeat the process to close the gap, Chris was unable to see. Then,

after walking a few hundred yards and breasting a small rise, he saw a very curious machine.

“You will get inside,” 826 said.

Led by Miss Moore, the humans walked up a ramp into what seemed to be a vehicle of some kind.

It was about thirty feet long and tubular in shape except for pointed ends. There were rows of portholes along each side, and the whole reminded Chris of the inside of the cabin of a small jet liner. 468, with other Sembrians, followed them inside. Then, without anyone seeming to work any controls, the vehicle began to move smoothly.

The acceleration was quite gentle, but within a few seconds they were skimming along very fast a few feet above the ground. Features outside the portholes flashed past in a blurr, and quite soon, deceleration began. The humans looked out—and saw themselves in the heart of a Sembrian city.

It was, of course, completely different from a town on earth. Most of the buildings had only a single storey, only one towering up to perhaps ten floors. There were few windows in the low flat buildings, and few doors.

“Will you please leave the car and follow me,” 468 requested. The grinning mouth gave no clue to his real attitude.

This time Sue led the way. As they were leaving the vehicle Chris saw several similar ones skimming rapidly and noiselessly along. He had no idea of their means of propulsion.

They entered a building and looked around. They appeared to be in a large hall, with a bathing pool in the centre.

“You will come this way,” ordered 468, and he led the way to a smaller room leading off the main hall.

There is something about a hospital, whether it be on earth or on Sembria, that advertises itself to a stranger. And this was undoubtedly a hospital. Sembrians clothed in white robes were passing backwards and forwards, and a number of them eyed the humans with interest. But there was something about their scrutiny that gave Sue a chill.

468 showed them into a number of rooms like operating theatres,

each having equipment like nothing any human had seen before.

“This is just to let you see that we are well equipped—even by your standards,” 468 added with a touch of sarcasm. “Now you will each enter one of these smaller rooms and change your clothing for these loose white gowns.”

“Why? What are you going to do?” stormed President Maxwell. “I demand to know.”

468 waved his gun suggestively.

“Though we are much more advanced than you are, we still seek more knowledge, and you will help us to obtain it,” he replied smoothly. “Now will you proceed to your cubicles?”

Whatever the nature of the gun or weapon that the Sembrian had used on them, the main effect was clear. It had made them completely docile. Even the President’s haughty words were empty. He, like the rest, walked slowly to the small single rooms that were waiting for them.

“Now you are to take off your clothes and put on the gowns you will find,” 468 reminded them. “We shall be back for you shortly.”

Tony was easily able to outstrip the two Sembrians who came in pursuit. With longer legs and muscles that had been conditioned by the stronger gravity of earth, he streaked to the nearest bungalow and ran behind it while the Sembrians were still a good hundred yards away. Then he slipped behind the next building, and then the next. Cautiously he peered round a corner in time to see his pursuers halting in uncertainty.

He put a few more bungalows between the Sembrians and himself, and then felt safe enough to look across to where his friends were being shepherded away by 468 and the others. He saw the Sembrians make for a point in the invisible wall, and he noted the exact spot very carefully. Even at that distance he could see, in the clear atmosphere of the planet, one of them fumbling mysteriously in mid-air. Then the whole party went forward again—through an opening, Tony guessed.

Soon the two Sembrians gave up their task of trying to catch the escaped human and hurried back to follow their fellows. From the

way Chris and the others had allowed themselves to be led away Tony concluded that something had been done to them. Knowing the power of the Sembrians, he wasn't surprised. Only he, now, had the will to resist their captors. And resist them he would. His great desire was to follow his friends and to see what happened to them.

Sue had told Janet everything that happened up to the moment the Sembrians surrounded them and Tony made his getaway. Then Sue's thoughts became confused and Janet was unable to get a clear picture of what was going on.

"I'm very much afraid for them," she told the Director. "I have a feeling that something dreadful is about to happen."

Each of the six humans remained passively in his or her own cubicle. Each put on the white gown as instructed. Like operation gowns, Chris thought, but it meant little to him. How long they rested on the couches in the cubicles, they had no idea. Maybe they dozed.

Serge opened his eyes to see the others being led to a large hall which seemed to be equipped like an operating theatre. A Sembrian urged him to rise from his couch and follow the rest. Slowly, he complied.

A number of Sembrians, wearing brilliantly white gowns and face masks, stood around chatting. 468 was also there.

"What's happening? What are you going to do?" asked President Maxwell, but there was no resistance in his attitude.

"We, like you on earth, are constantly seeking to gain knowledge," 468' explained. "Like you on earth, we use lower creatures—yourselves—to help us gain this knowledge. Just as you experiment on all sorts of living creatures, we are going to experiment on you."

"But this is diabolical," the President burst out.

"I expect that is just what your animals feel," snapped 468.

"Our experiments are necessary," Miss Moore protested. "They are to test drugs and diseases."

"And to test cosmetics and aid commercial interests," 468

pointed out. “Most of your vivisection operations would be unnecessary if you would only go to the trouble of developing other means of performing your tests. I suspect it is laziness, or in some cases sheer love of cruelty, that causes you to torture animals on such a vast scale.”

“I have never agreed with vivisection,” Miss Moore said haltingly, but 468 swung round on her.

“Neither have you done anything to prevent it,” he said sharply. Then he went on.

“One thing we do not do on Sembria. We do not breed humans in vast cages so that we can skin them to make clothing. Oh yes, your skins would serve very well and would no doubt be quite fashionable. But we waste time. Will each of you get on to an operating table. You may choose which one for yourselves.

Now they could see that there were seven gleaming tables, surrounded with masses of complicated apparatus. Masked Sembrians stood by each table. .

“It’s horrible, horrible,” sobbed Sue as a Sembrian urged her forward.

“You are about to undergo the same treatment that you yourselves mete out,” 468 replied smoothly. “Surely you can’t object to that?”



## CHAPTER 13

Tony cautiously left the shelter of the bungalows, and made his way towards the place where the Sembrians had taken his friends through the barrier.

He could see no more Sembrians at the moment, and the humans round about seemed uninterested in his movements. He walked forward, arms outstretched. There it was! He felt the smooth barrier that imprisoned them. Cautiously he moved towards the spot where he'd seen the others pass through it, but there was no break in the invisible wall.

He ran his hands over the surface, and then, as he was about to give up in despair, he felt a small knob. As he fumbled with it, he felt it move. Perhaps this is how the Sembrians had made their exit. It was. A little to the right he felt the opening. He stepped through.

Though there was no visible difference in the scene, there was an indefinable feeling of freedom. He knew he was outside the compound and free to move wherever he wished in Sembria.

Tony looked around. There was no sign of the Sembrians or his friends, but he knew which way they had gone. He strode forwards up a gentle rise in the ground until he came to the top. Then he looked down the other side—and drew in a sharp breath. In the distance he could see a cluster of buildings, glinting in the yellow sunlight. That must be where the Sembrians live, he told himself. It was there that his friends had probably been taken, but it seemed a great distance away. It would take him hours to walk to it, and he wouldn't be able to reach it before nightfall.

Then there came a slight sound from the distance. It was a swishing noise, and grew rapidly louder. Tony was amazed to see a long, cigar-shaped object approaching. He fell flat on the ground, thankful that a small hummock gave him some protection.

The strange object came to a halt not far away, and Tony saw it settle on to the ground. Then an opening appeared and a number of Sembrians came waddling down a ramp that had been let down from the opening.

So this was a vehicle! This peculiar object, which seemed to

operate on an air-cushion like a hovercraft, was a Sembrian method of transport. It seemed to have brought a dozen or so of the creatures of this world from their distant city to the human compound.

“Like trippers going to a zoo,” Tony thought to himself.

He watched the new arrivals walk up to the barrier, and he guessed that, whilst it could not be seen by human eyes, it must somehow be visible to the Sembrians. He saw them stop by what he assumed was the opening through which he had escaped. They paused and seemed to be discussing something intently. No doubt they had found that he had left the doorway open. The Sembrians seemed disturbed at their discovery, and two of them turned back to the vehicle which had brought them, whilst the rest went into the compound.

Tony, crouching low, ran forward to the vehicle and scrambled inside before the Sembrians noticed. He squeezed down between two of the seats at the far end, praying that neither of the Sembrians, now coming up the ramp, would choose to sit near him.

Fortunately they sat at the other end, and the vehicle began to move smoothly—apparently of its own accord, for neither of the Sembrians was driving it. Some little time later it slowed down and came to a halt. The doorway opened and the ramp went out. Down waddled the Sembrians, leaving Tony in the empty vehicle.

After a few seconds he crept forward and peeped through the opening. He must be in the middle of a Sembrian city, for there were buildings all around. Looking to see that there were no Sembrians near, he ran down the ramp and crouched below it. In front, not far away, was a long low building, and he was just in time to see the two Sembrians with whom he had travelled enter it. He crept into the building in their wake.

The disappearance of the Prime Minister and the President no longer dominated the press, radio and television. Instead the energy crisis was the main concern of all the media. Even the meagre amount of petrol or gasoline that the ration books allowed was no longer available. Private cars had almost vanished from the roads. Now trucks and lorries were becoming rare, and food was scarce in

the cities because of the difficulty of bringing it in from the countryside.

Many people were astonished and dismayed at this sudden escalation of the energy crisis. They had forgotten the warnings of the geologists, who now felt a gloomy satisfaction. They had been predicting for some time that such a thing would happen. As more and more oil was extracted from the oil-bearing layers beneath land and sea, they declared that there would come a time when there was no longer sufficient pressure to force the last dregs of oil up the wells to the surface.

Some geologists went further. They predicted that because so much oil had now been extracted there would be a series of severe earthquakes as the land, or sea-bed, was no longer supported by the liquid mineral beneath. In fact, it was the occurrence of these 'oil-quakes', in areas never before affected, that announced the arrival of the crisis.

Emergency measures were put in operation in most advanced countries. Decrees were issued cutting down the use of electric power. Places of entertainment were all closed, and domestic use of energy was limited to two hours in each twenty-four. Industry was at a virtual standstill, even though frantic efforts were being made to expand nuclear power and to develop solar, wind and tidal power.

But all this would take time—and there wasn't much time left for a power-hungry civilization. Horse-drawn vehicles appeared on the streets, and even bicycles were at a premium, many a really old machine being brought out from toolshed or attic.

In some countries numbers of houses had been built to use solar power for lighting, cooking and heating. However, these were but a tiny fraction of the dwellings that depended on more conventional sources of energy. If there were a hard winter ahead many people would die, either from the cold or from starvation. The prospects for the future were bleak indeed. Nothing but Strong and vigorous action would help the situation. And this was where the President and the Prime Minister were being missed.

Work at U.N.E.X.A. was affected, for the staff were restricted like everyone else in the use of power. Radio, telex and T.V. communication was severely out, which made life very difficult for

Sir Billy and his staff.

"Fortunately we don't require any electricity for your link with Susan," the Director said to Janet in a feeble attempt to lighten the atmosphere. But none of them felt lighthearted, for the messages from Sue were infrequent and confused. All Janet could get from her friend was an impression that she was in a large room with many Sembrians present.

Actually the building to which Chris and his companions had been taken was not a hospital but a research centre, being devoted to medical research. On Sembria disease had been eliminated, but the desire for further knowledge about how living creatures functioned was insatiable, as 468 explained to the humans.

"A worthy object, I think you'll agree," he concluded.

"Where do we come in?" demanded President Maxwell. They all dreaded the answer.

"We are investigating the differences between the human body and our own," the Sembrian replied. "We are particularly interested in the heart and lungs. From some of you we shall take the heart, and from the rest your lungs. It should be very informative."

"Then you're going to kill us in cold blood?" Miss Moore stammered.

"Not at all," and this time it was 412 who spoke. "You will be put to sleep and will feel nothing. Unlike many of your own animal subjects, you will not be conscious during the experiments. But we waste time. We shall start on the two females. The rest of you will wait in your cubicles until it is your turn, when we will fetch you."

How Tony avoided discovery, he never knew. There were no shadows in which to hide. As in all Sembrian rooms, it was impossible to tell where the light came from. Perhaps he wasn't noticed because all the Sembrians present seemed to be gathered in a small crowd, and concentrating on what was going on in their midst. Tony watched curiously, and then his heart gave a great leap. Right in the centre of the Sembrian crowd were his friends, together with the Prime Minister and the President.

One of the Sembrians, whom Tony recognized as 468, appeared to be talking to them. The mechanic was surprised to see that his friends were no longer dressed in the bright clothing they had been wearing when he saw them last. Each was now clad in a white gown. Tony was too far away to hear what was being said, but he could see that his friends were very agitated.

Then he noticed what could only be an operating table! It was surrounded by complicated-looking equipment, and the Sembrians were obviously showing it all to his friends. The sight of this table, and the white gowns that Chris and the others were wearing, sent a shiver down Tony's spine. The Sembrians were going to operate on someone, and the horrible thought struck him that the operation would not be for the benefit of the humans, but for the strange Beings who were going to perform it. The Sembrians were going to experiment on his friends!

Though they were all quite conscious, they were not resisting, so part of their minds must have been affected in some way by the Sembrians. Well—his hadn't, and Tony was determined to do all he could to save his friends and the two politicians. He couldn't just do nothing while Chris, Sue and the others were carved up on that sinister table!

He watched them all go back to their cubicles, while the Sembrians were busy round the operating table. If he could creep into their cubicles perhaps he could arouse them from their stupor just as Sue had done before, and lead them out to escape into the open Sembrian countryside. This would at least give them time to plan their next move.

The nearest cubicle was Serge's. When Tony crept soundlessly into it, he found the Russian lying listlessly on a couch. Serge showed no surprise, but Tony grasped his arm roughly.

"Come on, Serge, let's get away from here. Get that white gown off while I go and rouse the others."

"It's no use, Tony," Serge replied listlessly. "We've got to go through with it. There's no escape. They've promised they won't hurt us."

"Just as they promised to take us back to earth if we wished to go. Don't trust them, Serge. Get dressed properly and come with me."

But the Russian made no attempt to move, and in spite of all Tony's urging he still lay passively on the couch, awaiting his fate. Tony gave up, and crept into the next cubicle. But he found Morrey in the same apathetic condition, and so were all the others, including Mr. Maxwell and Miss Moore.

Without their co-operation it would be impossible to save them. How could he prevent the Sembrians from carrying out their cruel intentions? There was no way he could do it by force, so he would have to try persuasion.

But surely they wouldn't want all seven humans for their experiments. Wouldn't one suffice? After all, he was the most expendable of them all. Suppose he offered himself to the Sembrians for whatever they wanted to do—provided that they released Chris and the others?

Whether the Sembrians would return them to earth as they had promised was another matter. For the moment his main concern was to save them, and he knew that if he delayed his courage would fail him. With a silent prayer for help, he came out of his hiding-place and walked grimly towards the knot of Sembrians around the operating table.

Would there be a General Election in Britain? Everyone was asking the question, but no one knew the answer. Officially Miss Moore was still the Prime Minister. She had not resigned, nor had her government been defeated in Parliament. There was no positive proof of her death.

In America the situation was a little different. Senator Mrs. Doubleday, the Vice-President, had taken over in the absence of President Maxwell. The presidential election was not due for another two years, so the government of the United States was less affected by these mysterious events than was Great Britain.

Some M.P.s at Westminster thought that Miss Moore's party should choose a new leader, and that Parliament should be dissolved so that the country could elect a new government, but others, loyal to Miss Moore, resisted the idea. And so the arguments became ever more heated as the days passed and the energy crisis deepened.

It had been the decision of Sir Billy, backed by the Security Council, that the information obtained by Janet should not be made public. As far as the world was concerned President Maxwell and Miss Moore had vanished from the Triangle in the same way that many hundreds had gone before. Fewer than a hundred persons knew that the two were still alive on a distant planet, and everyone was preoccupied with the energy crisis. Already there were signs that order was breaking down.

## CHAPTER 14

The chattering among the Sembrians stopped abruptly as Tony marched towards them.

“I want to speak to 468,” he said, with more boldness than he felt.

“Should you not be waiting in one of the cubicles?” one of the Sembrians asked politely. “Please return there at once.”

“Not on your life,” Tony replied with determination. “I want 468.”

Would the Sembrians attack him physically or would they spray him with one of their strange guns? His heart was beating rapidly as he waited.

Then 468 appeared from somewhere. He took a long look at Tony.

“Well,” he demanded, “what do you want?”

Tony swallowed hard.

“Look here, 468,” he began, trying to hide the fear that was nearly choking him, you promised that you would return us all to earth if we wanted to go. Well, we all do. But you’ve done something to the others that has affected their minds, and now it looks as if you’re going to operate on them. None of them is ill, so It seems as if you’re going to do it out of sheer curiosity. You are a wicked race—absolutely wicked.”

He paused, aghast at what he’d said. But he believed it to be true, so he might as well say it—even if it was the last thing he said. 468 looked at the mechanic sternly, his smiling dolphin face cold and angry.

“What right have you to judge us?” he demanded. “Your own race has a long record of broken promises. And why should we not experiment on you? We shall not cause you nearly as much suffering as you yourselves inflict. What have you to say to that?”

Tony took a deep breath.

“You may be right, but I ask you to spare my friends. Even if you won’t send them home, at least don’t harm them. If you want



someone to cut up, do it to me and let my friends go free.”

There was a great commotion among the Sembrians, and Tony could hear them clicking away to each other in their own language. Then 468 spoke again.

“When we perform our experiments on your friends, they will not feel anything, because we have paralysed part of their brains. But we have not done this to you. If we operate on you, you will feel much pain until you die. Is this what you want?”

“I want you to send the others back—or at least set them free,” Tony cried desperately. Unless the Sembrians made up their minds quickly he knew his courage would fail. 468 had said that Chris and the others would feel no pain before they died. Why should he not join them and all die together?

But no! He mustn't even think of such a thing, he told himself angrily. His offer to the Sembrians was that he would stand in for the others even though he would be fully conscious. He could do no more.

“Very well,” said 468. “We will no longer carry out our experiments on your friends. But they must remain here to watch us perform them on you.”

What a horrible thing to do, Tony thought. But it was no more than humans do to animals. Someone had told him that conscious animals were often kept in their cages in laboratories, awaiting their turn on the operating table.

“Then please don't make them fully conscious till afterwards,” Tony pleaded. He didn't want the others to be aware of what he was doing.

The Sembrians clicked together again. Then one who was wearing a face mask said, “We waste time. Let us fetch the other humans so that the experiment may begin.”

So Chris, Morrey, Serge, Sue and the two politicians were fetched from their cubicles to watch while Tony, now wearing an operating gown, was placed on the table.

“Can I say goodbye to them?” he asked with a dry throat, but he was pressed down on to the table and a strap fastened tightly across his chest. He just managed to wave a hand in farewell before the

Sembrians surrounded him. »

Tony shut his eyes. His mind flashed back over his adventurous past. He recalled how he first met Chris and then the other astronauts, and later Sue Howard. The close association—it was more than ordinary friendship—that had developed between them seemed to make his sacrifice worth while, always provided that the Sembrians did no harm to his friends. Tony closed his eyes and waited for the first sharp prick of the scalpel.

The human audience were forced to watch the preparations. They had been told that they were not to be operated upon—at least for the time being—and their sluggish minds realized that it was Tony, whom they seemed to remember seeing not long before, who was now lying on the operating table, with two Sembrians strapping him down. But hadn't Tony escaped? Yet here he was, a victim of their captors just as they were. It was all very confusing.

It was Chris to whom Tony was, perhaps, closest of all, and it was Chris whose mind grappled hardest with the situation. He and the others were dressed in white gowns, and he recalled that they had all been going to take their turn on the operating table. Why, then, was it that Tony lay there instead?

It seemed to Miss Moore that they were about to witness a human sacrifice—carried out not by some prehistoric priest, but by highly civilized beings. Should not their civilization be measured by the degree to which they would deliberately inflict pain on others? Because humans were of a lower order than the Sembrians themselves, surely this did not give their captors the right to experiment upon them?

Lucy Moore drew in a sharp breath, for by these standards the civilization from which she had come, and in which she played an important role, was no better than that of the Sembrians. Humans experimented on animals, while Sembrians experimented on humans. President Maxwell was thinking on almost exactly similar lines.

Now the surgeons seemed about to start. Tony lay still, eyes tightly closed. 468 and the other Sembrians urged the humans closer. Sue felt her knees go weak, and she tried to turn her head away. She couldn't bear to see what was about to happen to her good friend Tony. She shut her eyes and kept them closed—for ten

seconds, then twenty. All the time she expected to hear exclamations of horror from her companions, and perhaps a cry from Tony. But she heard nothing. Even before she opened her eyes she could sense a change in the atmosphere.

When she did look around she saw that the Sembrians who had been about to operate on Tony had taken off their facemasks. The straps had been removed and he was struggling to sit up. All the other humans showed their emotions plainly, and Miss Moore was weeping openly.

When 468 faced them, his face wore the wide grin they remembered before these terrible events began.

“You may now relax completely,” he said. “We are not going to hurt your friend or any of you. We never intended to. All we wished to do was to impress something indelibly on your minds.”

“You—you were not going to experiment on us after all?” gasped Serge. Like the others, he was weak with relief.

“No. Never. You see, when you had recovered your memories of earth and wished to return, we decided that here was the opportunity we had always been waiting for. Never, in the centuries that we have been taking samples from your planet, have we had people of such importance,” 468 replied.

“We have always been appalled at the way you use creatures lower than yourselves for painful experiments,” said 826. “When we knew we had a President and a Prime Minister among our ‘guests’, we decided that the time had come for us to try to change things on your earth. To bring home to you very forcibly what your animals must feel, we have put you through the same experience that many of them have to endure. But we stopped before we caused you any physical pain.”

“I don’t understand,” Chris managed to say. “You tell us you never meant us any harm. Yet you made us believe you were going to experiment on us while we were still alive.”

“We believe you have a word to describe this practice,” 826 told them. “It is ‘vivisection’.”

Tony had now swung himself to the ground and was recovering rapidly.

“Gee! That was a close one,” he managed to say with a pale grin. “I really thought my time had come.”

“It was your young friend here who persuaded us to change our plan slightly,” 468 informed the humans. “Originally we intended to have each of you in turn on the operating table as if we were about to start experimenting upon you. We should not, of course, have proceeded. Yet you would each have had a shattering experience, even though a small part of your brain is still numbed by our guns. Tony, who hadn’t been so affected, came forward and pleaded with us to use him and let you others go free. It was a wonderful gesture.”

“Oh, shucks!” Tony said uncomfortably. “You shouldn’t have told them.”

“So that’s what has happened!” breathed Miss Moore. “You are a very brave young man.”

President Maxwell went across to the mechanic and put a hand on his shoulder. Then he cleared his throat, and Chris guessed he was about to launch into a speech.

He hurriedly interrupted, with the question that was most important to all of them.

“Are you going to return us to earth?”

468 and the other Sembrians all fell silent, and the seconds ticked away. Would they never answer?

“Are you sure you wish to return to your strife-torn and polluted planet?” asked 468 at last.

There was no hesitation from any of the humans, and they answered in a chorus of “yes”. Their full memories had now been restored and they remembered all the bad things about their home planet. But for different reasons each of them wished to leave the idyllic life of Sembria and return to earth.

Mr. Maxwell and Miss Moore remembered the acute energy crisis and the conference which had been discussing the critical situation. No one had yet come up with some magic solution. All they had done was to agree on measures to reduce consumption and to embark on a desperate effort to develop new sources.

They both realized that this was not sufficient to prevent disaster,

and so they were anxious to return to their countries as soon as possible.

For the astronauts and Susan, the desire to go back to their jobs and friends on earth was irresistible. Besides, they had been sent to solve the mystery of the Bermuda Triangle, and it was their duty to return and pass on what they had learned.

“You know, do you not, that life is becoming more difficult every day on your planet?” 412 asked. “So much of your energy has been spent on destruction that you are now beginning to pay the price.”

“We had hoped that through the years we have been taking samples of your people we should have seen an improvement,” 826 said sadly, “but you have made very little progress. True, you have made certain crude technical advances, but you are still not really civilized.”

“What you say is true,” President Maxwell admitted, “but earth is our home.”

“Your technology must be very much in advance of ours,” Chris said. “There is so much we should like to learn from you.”

“There is so much we should like to teach you,” 468 replied, “but we fear that you would misuse any help that we gave.”

“If you let us go back, I’m sure Mr. Maxwell and Miss Moore will always remember what we have learned here,” Sue pleaded.

“No doubt they will,” 468 conceded, “but in the present state of your world there is little that they can do. Perhaps this energy crisis through which you are going may teach your people a lesson. If not, we fear for your future, and you would do well to stay here.”

“But we can’t. We must go back,” Morrey declared desperately. “We have a duty to return and do all we can to help.”

“If only we could be sure that your efforts would have some beneficial results there is so much we could do to help you,” 468 told them. “This energy crisis, for example. Its solution is so simple. But how could we be sure that you would not misuse the knowledge we gave you?”

“Can you not see what a cruel and selfish planet you have left?” 412 asked. “We let you experience just one aspect of your activities—the way you treat lower creatures. We hope you will never forget

how you felt when you thought we were about to treat you in the same way.”

“We certainly shall not,” Serge said soberly. “We all nearly died of fright.”

“That is how many animals feel when you so abuse them,” 468 told them. “But enough of this discussion. If you are all really determined to return, we will send you back.”

## CHAPTER 15

Before the Sembrians could say more, President Maxwell spoke.

“What about all the other humans you have taken? Will you return them to earth as well?”

“No, we cannot. All but a few of your species—those within your own compound—have been here for many years. Many were born here and know no other life. We could not agree to expose them to your mode of existence.”

“But those who have been brought here only recently, will you not give them the chance of returning?” the President persisted.

The Sembrians consulted among themselves. There seemed to be some disagreement, but at last they came to a decision.

“We will restore the earth-memories of all the humans in the compound where you found yourselves,” 468 agreed. “They are the only ones who could have such memories. If they wish to go back, then so be it. We will send you all together. We will alter their food so that they no longer forget the past.”

“Fair enough,” the President conceded, “and can we go back and live with them while they are making up their minds?”

“To use an expression from your own country, Mr. President, ‘you sure can’.”

Chris had been thinking. “If it was something in our food that made us forget the past,” he said, “why did we not lose our memories again, as we went on eating it?”

“The effect is strongest at first,” explained 468. “Once you had recovered your memories, it was unlikely that you would lose them again. But how you came to recover them we have never understood.”

Sue explained about her mental link with Janet, and the Sembrians were clearly impressed.

“It’s unbelievable!” gasped Sir Billy.

Janet had come bursting into his office and had poured out the

story of the happenings on Sembria. Sue had recovered, and was flooding her friend with accounts of all that had taken place, ending with the information that they would soon be returning to earth with the President and Miss Moore.

“It’s just too good to be true,” the amazed Director blurted out.

Janet had fled to his room as soon as she could, stopping to speak to no one on the way. At last Sir Billy pulled himself together.

“Janet,” he said earnestly, putting his hands on her shoulders and looking her straight in the eyes, “we must tell no one about this. No one.”

“Very well, sir, if you say so,” the girl replied.

“You see—in the present troubled state of the world emotions are running high. If it were broadcast that the Prime Minister and the President were returning from—well, the dead, so to speak—it could have an incalculable effect. So, Janet, not a single syllable to another living soul.”

The little party of humans, with their Sembrian escort, arrived at the invisible barrier and were led inside. Nothing seemed to have changed since they left. Groups of people, dressed in the bright Sembrian clothes, wandered about aimlessly, only interested, perhaps, in what they would get for their next meal. Chris and his friends went back to their former bungalow, and invited Mr. Maxwell and Miss Moore to join them.

“We are going to leave you for a few days,” 826 told them. “As soon as we have gone, we shall restore the earth-memories of everyone in this compound. We will return in a week to see what the result has been.”

Chris and the others said goodbye to their Sembrian friends, and even President Maxwell shook the stubby hand of 468. Then the Sembrians turned and waddled away. Soon they had passed through the barrier, and the humans were alone.

“What about something to eat?” asked Tony. “I’m hungry.”

“I’m afraid, Mr. President, that Tony has an insatiable appetite,” Chris smiled, and Mr. Maxwell beamed back. Soon, if the Sembrians kept their promise—and none of them doubted that they



would—he would be back at the White House and at the helm of his beloved country. As for Miss Moore, not only was she anxious to get back to Britain, but she couldn't wait to see the face of the Leader of the Opposition when she returned to her duties in Parliament.

The first sign that the Sembrians had returned the earth memories of the other occupants of the compound came at mealtime. One of the women who brought in their food dropped a plate as she carried it to Mr. Maxwell.

"I'm—I'm sorry," she gasped, "but—but aren't you the President of America?"

Mr. Maxwell rose and bowed with dignity.

"Yes, Madam, I am the President of the United States of America," he replied grandly. "Allow me to introduce my colleague Miss Lucy Moore, Prime Minister of Britain."

The news soon spread among the other people in the compound that these two eminent persons were among them, and not long afterwards the callers began to arrive. Soon nearly every member of the human community was gathered outside the bungalow, and Chris estimated that there were over three hundred people present. President Maxwell beamed at the crowd and ordered a table to be brought and placed in front of the gathering.

"He's going to make another speech," whispered Morrey. "He can't help it."

Perhaps there was a twinkle in Miss Moore's eye as she overheard.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the President began from his vantage point on the table, "a most wonderful thing has happened to all of us. We were taken from earth and brought here to Sembria. When we arrived—we know not how—we no longer remembered the land from whence we came. We settled down to life on this planet, which is very pleasant indeed. Some of you have been here for years and you have adopted Sembria as your natural home.

"But I tell you that we all come from earth, and that earth needs us to return. There is a serious energy crisis back home and life is becoming daily more difficult. It is the plain duty of us all to return

and to help in whatever way we can. The Sembrians have promised that they will send back those of us who wish. Any others may remain here. You have a week in which to make up your minds.”

A murmur rose and swelled among the crowd as the President’s words sank into their minds. They could return to the families and friends whom they had left behind, and who no doubt regarded them as dead. They could return to life on earth, made much more difficult it seemed by this energy shortage, or they could remain with new friends and relationships established on this pleasant planet.

“Go your ways,” the President concluded, “and let us meet again when you have made up your minds.”

He climbed down from the table, well pleased at the impression he had made.

“I wonder what they will do,” he mused as he followed Chris and the others back into their bungalow.

It wasn’t an easy question to answer, and among the rest of the human community the debate raged fast and furiously.

“They kidnapped us,” Gwyn Davies bellowed. “They have kept us as prisoners.”

“Maybe, but it’s been the good life for us,” a woman shouted back. “I don’t want to return to work and worry.”

A few others agreed with her, but most of the crowd were uncertain. Some remembered the horrible things on earth. Others recalled the good ones. Only one or two, like Gwyn Davies, were really resentful about being detained on Sembria. When the gathering broke up these disgruntled few followed Davies to his bungalow.

“I tell you they have treated us like animals,” Davies hissed when the door was closed behind them.

“But we have lived well,” one of his friends protested. “We have wanted for nothing—food, clothing, shelter.”

“Neither do the animals in our zoos,” Gwyn argued. “But would you care for a life like a caged animal? That’s what we’ve been getting.”

After a couple of days of argument and discussion it seemed that the human community was still undecided. More than half of them were content to stay on in this pleasant world. Others thought they would like to go back to earth, but were fearful of what they would find. A few—no more than ten—supported Davies and thought they ought to get some form of compensation for their imprisonment. This little group rapidly became a body of conspirators, keeping away from their fellows and working themselves up in a series of secret meetings.

“You know, we could take over this place,” Davies said. “If we could get hold of one or two of those guns of theirs we could reverse the roles and make the Sembrians our servants.”

“But how would you do that?” asked Andrews, a small Londoner hardly bigger than a boy.

“I’ve not played scrum half for Wales for nothing,” Davies said, his eyes glinting. “It would be the easiest thing in the world to bowl over a few of these big fishes and to grab their weapons.”

“Then what would you do?” someone else asked. They all felt that the Sembrians owed them something for abducting them. If they could exact retribution and get back to earth as well, so much the better.

“We’ll bowl over some of these Things and get hold of their weapons. Then we’ll hold them as hostages on our terms. We’ll demand more weapons from the Sembrians, otherwise we will kill the hostages.”

“Would you go that far?” someone asked.

“If we are going to beat these Sembrians we’ve got to be ruthless. And ruthless we’ll be. If any of you want to drop out, go now. But heaven help you if you spill the beans.”

Later that evening, after Mr. Maxwell and Miss Moore had gone back to their own bungalows, Sue told Janet all that had happened. In reply Janet said that Sir Billy had thought it best to keep the news of the possibility of their return absolutely confidential. For the moment earth was in sufficient turmoil about the energy crisis.

“We don’t know how many others will want to come back,” Chris told Sir Billy through Sue and Janet. “Some may prefer the easy life on Sembria, particularly now things are so bad on earth.”

“You can hardly blame them,” was the Director’s transmitted reply. “Sembria doesn’t seem to have the same energy problems as we do.”

“No, they don’t,” Tony thought. “I wonder why that is.”

“They seem to carry their guns under their loose clothes,” Gwyn Davies told his fellow-conspirators when they met next day. “It should be easy, if we take them by surprise, to grab as many guns as we want.”

“What do you think about those two politicians and those people who came here last?” asked Hans Schmidt.

“Easy. We’ll just give them a dose of the gun and then they’ll be as docile as doves and give us no trouble.”

“I wouldn’t be too sure,” someone cautioned.

“No? Then we’ll take the two women as hostages for their good behaviour,” Davies spat out. “Now, this is my plan.”

President Maxwell and Miss Moore met each other on their way to call on the astronauts.

“I’m glad I’ve seen you, Lucy,” Maxwell said. “I’ve been doing some very serious thinking. If we get back home safely I intend to reform the treatment of animals in the United States. Only specimens unable to resume their normal lives should be retained in zoos, and as for experimenting—vivisection—It should be made a serious crime.”

“I’m with you all the way, James,” said Miss Moore. “But do you think we shall be able to get the legislation passed? Many people believe it is necessary to experiment on living animals.”

“Then let those people volunteer to submit themselves,” snapped the President. “Then we’d find out how necessary they really think it is.”

Even his followers would have thought Gwyn Davies was slightly mad if they had known all that was going on in his mind.

If he played his cards with boldness and cunning he could become master of Sembria. By turning the Sembrian weapons on their makers he had little doubt that a band of ruthless and determined men could take over the planet.

Then what? His thoughts raced ahead. Could he not compel the Sembrians to take him and his followers back to earth? And with the help of Sembrian technology there would be nothing to stop him becoming master of earth.

“Chris, what do you think the Sembrians use as their source of power?” asked Tony. He’d been pondering the question ever since he’d learned how bad things were back on earth.

So far he’d seen no obvious source of energy, yet the vehicles in which they had travelled, the cooking of food, the making of clothes, buildings and weapons, must all require it. So must the light that illuminated their bungalows after dark. They had seen no nuclear power stations, no transmission lines, no cooling towers. Yet the Sembrians must get their energy from somewhere. How did they do it? Could their system be used on earth?

“I don’t know,” Chris confessed, “and I can guess what you are thinking. But whether the Sembrians can, or will, help us, is another matter.”

Gwyn Davies and his band were ready to put their daring plan into action. They had conspired late into the night and had worked out in some detail what they would do. They were like men drunk with the dream of the power they would have if their plot succeeded. It would succeed. Nothing and no one would stand in their way. The fact that they might kill mattered little. The first step was to get hold of some of the guns. Then not only could they hold some Sembrians as hostages, they could also dictate to the President and the Prime Minister.

“Here they come,” one of the men called; in the distance three Sembrians were waddling towards them.

“I’ll take the one in the middle, Jake. You knock out the one on the left. Hans, take the one on the right,” Davies ordered. “Now, don’t move till I do. Don’t let them suspect a thing.”

The three Sembrians drew nearer, and one of them was just about to say something when Gwyn Davies moved. Lowering his head, he streaked towards the Sembrian in the centre and took him in the middle with terrific force. It was the rugby tackle for which he was renowned, and the Sembrian fell heavily to the ground and lay still. A split second later his two companions were also lying prostrate while their assailants roughly searched them. With cries of triumph they discovered guns beneath the victims’ clothing.

Davies looked quickly at the weapons. He’d no idea how they worked or what their effect would be. But there was something that looked like a trigger, so he took one of the guns and pointed it at the unconscious Sembrians. He touched the trigger and felt the gun quiver slightly. There was no explosion, but obviously it was sending out a beam of invisible radiation, so he sprayed the senseless Sembrians with it.

“That should keep them quiet for a time,” he growled. “Bring them inside so that the others won’t see.”

His followers, excited at the success of the first step in their campaign, dragged the Sembrians into the bungalow.

## CHAPTER 16

“I wonder what people will do,” Tony said to his friends. “I suppose it may take some of them a little time to make up their minds, particularly now they know that things on earth are pretty dreadful.”

“We’ll move about among them and see if we can learn who is for returning and who is for staying here,” Chris suggested.

When they compared notes later, Sue declared outright that life was too comfortable here on Sembria for many of the captives ever to want to return. A few felt the pull of family and friends, but most had left earth long enough for those ties to have weakened. There was one little party, all men, that Chris couldn’t make up his mind about.

“I don’t like that Welshman,” Sue confided to the others after speaking to Gwyn and his band. “I’ve a feeling he’s up to no good.”

“Rubbish! You’re imagining things,” Morrey laughed. “What could he do? He and the others are perfectly free to stay or return.”

“I don’t know,” Sue admitted. “It’s just something I feel.”

“What are we going to do about that lot?” Hans asked his leader. “Shall we wipe them out?”

“Not yet,” Davies muttered. “Let’s get some more weapons first and then we’ll decide.”

“Watch out. Here come some more big fish,” Jake warned, for 468 and two companions had just entered the compound.

“Same tactics,” whispered Davies. “Now look innocent.”

“Why not blast them with the guns we have?” demanded Hans.

“Because we want to take these three alive and hold them as hostages, remember?” Davies growled.

“Coming for a walk, Sue?” Chris asked.

They hadn’t had much time alone together, but now that their

return to earth seemed assured, they looked forward to each other's company.

"Don't mind us," grinned Morrey with a wink at Tony and Serge, "but don't get lost."

"Cheek!" laughed Sue. "We'd have a job to wander far with this invisible wall all round us."

"Young lady, are you coming with me, or are you staying to argue with these chumps?" asked Chris with mock severity.

"Coming, sir. Coming," the girl laughed. "Lead on, Master."

Chris and Sue were in high spirits. Though they were both longing to get back to the greed and grime of earth, they would always remember this pleasant planet and its strange inhabitants.

Though they had been prisoners they had been treated well—apart from the unforgettable experience of being threatened with vivisection, and that had been necessary to bring home to them the lesson the Sembrians wanted to teach.

Sue and Chris swung along happily in this warm and gentle world. A few other humans were scattered about, but most seemed to have stayed inside their bungalows, no doubt still discussing their future. Outside one of the bungalows eight or nine men were talking together. Sue gripped Chris's arm.

"I'm sure those men are up to no good," she whispered. "Davies is there."

"Come off it, Sue. You're imagining things. Let's enjoy our walk. Look, isn't that 468 ahead?"

Some Sembrians were approaching, and Chris thought he recognized their friend. He waved and the Sembrian returned the gesture. Then an incredible thing happened.

Three of the men who had been talking together ran forward and hurled themselves at 468 and his two companions. The Sembrians had no chance. Taken completely by surprise, they crashed to the ground beneath their attackers, whilst the rest of the men fell on them and tore their guns away. Chris clapped a hand over Sue's mouth just in time to prevent her screaming out.

"Quick! Back here," he whispered as he pulled her behind one of



the bungalows. For a second they crouched there, wondering what was happening.

“It was that horrible Davies man,” panted Sue. “He was the one who led the attack. I knew he was up to no good.”

“You were right,” conceded Chris. “They’ve got hold of the Sembrians’ guns.”

He could see the situation in a flash. With the restoration of earth-memories former characters and ambitions had also returned, and Davies seemed to have lost no time in gathering around himself a band of ruthless conspirators who were determined to seize power. With captured arms they would be hard to combat, but resisted they must be. While Davies and his band were hustling 468 and the other Sembrians into one of the bungalows, Chris and Sue crept away cautiously and returned to their friends. ‘

In a few words Chris told the others what had happened, and just then Mr. Maxwell and Miss Moore came in.

“We must attack them and release our friends,” declared the President. “Let us recruit help from other humans.”

“With respect, sir, that would be useless,” Chris said. “Remember they have a supply of Sembrian guns. We don’t know the capabilities of those weapons, but at least we know they can stun us. We shouldn’t stand a chance if we attacked them openly.”

“You’re right, of course,” the President agreed thoughtfully. Then a slow, grim smile spread over his face.

“You may be surprised to know,” he told the others, “that once upon a time, long before I entered politics, I was a lieutenant in the Marines. I know just how to deal with that mob.”

“Then you can lead us, sir,” Chris replied. “We’ll leave Sue and Miss Moore back here while we go and deal with Davies and Company.”

They had several hours to wait before dark. As the President said, to advance to the enemies’ bungalow in broad daylight would have been fatal. Without doubt they would have lookouts posted to warn them of the approach of either humans or Sembrians.

At last it was quite dark, except for the light from the buildings.

On Mr. Maxwell's instructions the astronauts had put on the darkest clothing they could find, and had even rubbed dust over their faces. Then they all five crept out on their fateful mission.

"Be careful, Chris," Sue whispered as he followed the President, and he replied with a grin and a "thumbs up" sign.

The distance to the conspirators' bungalow was about two hundred metres, but they were able to get cover from several buildings that lay in between.

"They haven't spotted us," the President whispered as they all paused behind the last cover before their objective. Chris smiled to "himself in the darkness. It was wonderful to see how the years and the cares of office had fallen from James Maxwell. He seemed to be actually enjoying their venture, and he moved as lithely as a man half his age.

"We'll crawl over to their bungalow one at a time," he whispered. "No one is to leave this cover until the man in front is safe. I'll go first."

Without waiting for any comment the President of the United States of America, face blackened and quietly humming an old song from the Marines, crawled away on his stomach towards the enemy stronghold. He got there safely, for it seemed that Davies and his crowd were too busy with their prisoners to keep a very watchful guard.

Chris followed the President, and the others came across in turn. At last they were all crouching safely in the dark shadow of the building.

"A diversion and surprise must be the plan of attack," Maxwell told the others in a low voice. "There are two doors to this place, one at the back and the other at the front. I will create a diversion at the front door, while you four attack from the rear. Try to get hold of their weapons."

"But, sir—" Chris was about to protest at the dangerous role the President was proposing for himself.

"No 'buts'. That's an order," Maxwell snapped.

"He's back in the Marines," Tony grinned to himself in the darkness.

“Don’t forget. Concentrate on getting their guns,” the President went on. “It should be easy to grab them in the first few seconds of surprise, so speed is vital. Then get the enemy into one place and hold them there under guard. Pay no attention to the Sembrians at this stage. We cannot afford to. Time to see what’s happened to them after the enemy has been subdued. Ready?”

Without waiting for a reply President Maxwell made his way towards the front door, while Chris and the others crawled to the back one. It was partly open, and light streamed out. Though they couldn’t see what was happening inside, they heard raised voices.

“I’ll tackle the biggest,” whispered Morrey. Knowing the American’s reputation at ball games, Chris gave him the O.K. Morrey’s broad shoulders and bullet head would come in useful.

At that second they heard a bloodcurdling yell from the front of the bungalow. President James Maxwell was in fine voice. During the two seconds of the enemy’s utter surprise, the astronauts poured in and launched themselves at four of the conspirators.

There was pandemonium as the combatants swayed about the room. Chris found himself struggling with Davies. The President had also thrown himself into the fray with enthusiasm, and for a time things seemed evenly balanced. Then, gradually, the more numerous followers of Gwyn Davies began to get the upper hand.

Chris fought desperately with the Welshman, who had dropped his gun at the first fierce onslaught. It lay on the floor, ready to be picked up by whoever was victor in the struggle. Both men were straining every muscle and nerve to reach it. Blood was streaming down Chris’s face from a cut on the forehead, and he could hardly see his opponent. With a supreme effort, he wrenched an arm free, put all his strength into a karate chop to the side of Davies’ neck, and made a grab for the gun. But it was no longer there.

“Hold it!”

It was a female voice. The combatants paused in utter astonishment—and saw Miss Moore and Sue pointing two of the deadly weapons.

“Get over there!” the Prime Minister rasped, waving her gun menacingly.

Davies and his band, panting and bleeding, slunk over to one corner of the room. When Miss Moore was satisfied that all the conspirators were covered, she handed her gun to the President.

James Maxwell, one eye closing rapidly from a blow, grabbed it eagerly.

“Right! Don’t move an eyelid,” he snarled at the captives. “Look for the Sembrians, Chris.”

The astronauts searched the bungalow. One door was fastened, and this Morrey opened with a tremendous charge from a broad shoulder. Inside 468 and two other Sembrians were waiting, and on the floor lay the bodies of the three Sembrians the conspirators had killed.

More than a hundred Sembrians had assembled outside the astronauts’ bungalow. 468 acted as spokesman.

“We shall part in friendship,” he told the two politicians, the astronauts and Sue, “for we have much to thank you for. You saved our lives—and saved our planet from evil men. We shall shortly be returning you to earth, to the place from whence we took you. No other humans have wished to go with you.”

“What will happen to Davies and his fellows?” asked Serge.

“They have already been radiated so that they have lost their earth-memories for ever. Never again shall we allow humans to revert to the base feelings, thoughts and ambitions of earth.”

“We shall continue to watch over your people,” 412 added. “Then, who knows? Perhaps in a thousand years, or ten thousand years, you will have started to progress morally. Until you do, there can never be any real contact between us.”

“It has been a real pleasure to meet you guys,” the President grinned. He was very conscious and proud of a lovely black eye. “We’ll sure remember the lesson you taught us, won’t we, Lucy?”

“We certainly shall,” the Prime Minister agreed. “We shall do all we can to improve human conduct towards animals, both by legislation and persuasion.”

“Until you do improve your behaviour to your animals you will

never improve it between yourselves,” 468 told them. “Now we have something to give you.”

Their other friend, 826, waddled forward and he was carrying a package.

“In this,” he explained, “are details of how you can obtain an inexhaustible supply of power from your Sun, infinitely more efficiently than you do now. This package contains simple instructions on how you can extract solar energy on a scale you have never even dreamed of. It will solve your problem on earth for ever.”

President Maxwell and Miss Moore both stepped forward to receive the package. It was an emotional moment, for it would mean the salvation of human civilization.

“We sure do appreciate this—er—gentlemen,” Maxwell said, “and if any of you care to visit me in the White House, we’ll give you a rip-roaring welcome.”

Miss Moore could see that he was in danger of launching into a long speech, so she interrupted quickly.

“I also want to thank you on behalf of the British people. And I’d like to thank our young friends here, for without them none of this could have happened.”

“Oh, shucks,” whispered Morrey uncomfortably. “She’s getting as bad as our man.”

“We are to send a boat out into the Triangle,” Janet told Sir Billy excitedly. “We are to withdraw all crew and all other craft for a radius of fifty kilometres. Chris and the others will sail the boat back themselves.”

The same boat in which Sue and the astronauts had made their memorable venture into the Dark Triangle lay heaving gently on the glassy sea. Then came the grey cloud, which thickened round the boat. It hung there for nearly an hour, and when it vanished seven astonished humans awoke from their strange dream.

Was it all a dream? No, the President with his black eye and the Prime Minister were there to prove it. So was a very important package that held the key to unlimited power.

Tony started up the engine and Serge turned the boat towards the distant shore. What would they find when they arrived in port?

“Do you think we shall get the anti-cruelty legislation through?” Miss Moore asked James Maxwell as the two watched the creamy wake behind them.

“We’ve got a very powerful ally in that package,” the President said thoughtfully. “No legislation, no package. Unless our civilization alters its outlook completely, it will not be worth saving.”

Chris and Sue were leaning over the rail. Alongside, a school of dolphins gambolled joyfully.

“Tell your friends we’re back safely,” Sue called out to them. How like the Sembrians they looked!

The two young people were standing close together. A strong bond had grown up between them, perhaps because of the perils they had faced. Each was very much aware of the other, even while they watched the dolphins’ display. Then Chris heard a sound. He turned and found Morrey behind them.

“When are you two getting engaged?” Morrey asked in a stage whisper.

Chris drew in a sharp breath. He wondered whether Sue had heard. He couldn’t be sure, but her ears had gone very pink as she stared resolutely out to sea.