

## Paul Anderson

# HIGH TREASON

In three hours by the clock they will be here to kill me. The door will crack open. Two noncoms will step through and flank it, in parade uniforms with stunners at the ready. I don't know whether their faces will wear loathing and righteousness, or that sick pity I have observed on some aboard this ship, but it is certain that they will be pathetically young, because all the enlisted ratings are. Then Erik Halvorsen will stride in between them and come to attention. So will I. 'Edward Breckinridge,' he will say like a machine, and proceed with the formula. Not so long ago he called me Ed, and we were messmates, and on our last leave we went on a drinking bout which must by now have become a part of the local mythology. (This was in Port Desire, but next day we flitted down to the sea, which is golden coloured on that planet, and tumbled in the surf and lay on the sand letting sunlight and thunder possess us.) I don't know what will be in his eyes either. Curious, that one's closest male friend should be so unpredictable. But since he was always a good officer, he can be counted on to play his role out.

So can I. There is no gain in breaking the ritual, and ample reason for not doing so. Perhaps I should not even have dismissed the chaplain. With so much religiosity about, as our universe goes down in wreck, I have painted myself more strongly Lucifer by not spending these last hours in prayer. Will my children hear at school. He wasn't just a traitor, he was a dirty atheist -? Never mind. I am not entitled to a great deal, but let me claim the dignity of remaining myself.

There will also be a kind of dignity in what follows: barbaric, macabre, and necessary. I will march down the corridor between the stiff bodies and stiffer faces of men I commanded; drums will drown the mutter of engines and priest. The inner airlock door will already stand wide. I will enter the chamber. The door will close. Then, for a moment, I can be alone. I shall try to hold to me the memory of Alice and the children, but perhaps my sweat will stink too harshly.

They don't pump the air out of the chamber in cases like this. That would be cruel. They simply pull the emergency switch. (No, not 'they'. One man's hand must do it. But whose? I don't want to know.) An engine will strain against the atmospheric pressure, one kilogram per square centimetre that we have borne with us, along with salt blood and funny little patches of hair and funny little instincts, all the way from Earth. The outer door will swing. Suddenly my coffin brims with darkness and stars. Earth's air rejects me. I fly out. The ship resumes hyper-drive.

For me, then, the universe will no longer ever have been.

But I ramble. It was well meant of them to give me this psychograph. The written word lies, the distorted molecules of a thought-recording tape do not. My apologia can be analysed for sincerity as well as logic. The worlds will be assured that I was at least an honest fool, which could make things easier for Alice, Jeanne, small Bobby who - her last letter said - has begun to look like his father. On the other hand, being no expert in the use of the machine, I will commit more of myself to the record than I like.

Well, keep trying, Ed, old chap. You can always wipe the tape. Though why you should be concerned about your privacy, when you are going to be dead.

Drusilla.

NO.

Go away. Take back your summer-scented hair, the feel of breasts and belly, the bird that sang in the garden beyond your window, take them back, Alice is my girl, and I'd simply been away from her too long, and no, that isn't true either, I damn well had fun with you, Dru, my puss, and I don't regret a microsecond of our nights but it would hurt Alice to know, or would she understand, Christ-Osiris-Baldr-Xipe, I can't even be sure about that.

Get your mind back to higher things. Like battle. Quite okay to kill, you know, it's love which is dangerous and must be kept on tight leash, no, now I'm knee-jerking like one of those Brotherhood types. The soldier is akin to the civil monitor, both trained in violence because violence is sometimes necessary for the purposes of society. My problem was, what do you do when those purposes become impossible of attainment?

You fight. The Morwain will not forget either, certain hours amidst the blaze of Cantrell's Cluster. Part of my defence, remember, Erik Halvorsen? - my squadron inflicted heavy damage on the enemy - but the court martial couldn't follow such logic. Why did I attack a superior force after betraying a planet... a species? My claim is on record, that in my considered judgement the mission on which we had been ordered would have had catastrophic results, but that something might have been accomplished by striking elsewhere. Be it said, though, here to the ultimate honesty of this machine, I hoped to be captured. I have no more death wish than you, Erik.

And *someone* will have to represent men, when the Morwain come. Why not myself?

One reason why not, among others: Hideki Iwasaki. (I mean Iwasaki Hideki, the Japanese put the surname first, we're such a richly variant life form.) 'Yahhh!' he screamed when we took our direct hit. I saw the control turret flare with lightnings, I saw him penetrated, through earthquake shudder in the ship and a whistle of departing air that pierced my helmet, my phones heard him scream.

Then darkness clapped down upon us. The gee-field had gone dead too, I floated, whirling until I caromed off a bulkhead and caught a stanchion. My mouth was full of blood, which tasted like wet iron. As the dazzle cleared from my retinae, I saw the master panel shine blue, emergency lighting, and Hideki outlined before it. I knew him by the number fluorescing on his armour. Air gushed from him, as fast as the tank could replace it white with condensing moisture, mingled with blood in thick separate globules. I thought amidst my pulses, gloriously, why, we're disabled. Totally. We haven't gone on to standby control, we're rudderless in space, the switchover circuits must be fused. We can only surrender. Plug in your jack quick, man, raise Comcenter and order the capitulation signal broadcast. No, wait. First you pass command on formally, to Feinstein aboard the *Yorktown*, so that the squadron may proceed with its battle. But then you're out of action. You'll come home with the Morwain.

Iwasaki's gauntlets moved. He had tools in them. Dying, he floated in front of the smitten superconductor brain and made a jackleg repair. It didn't take long. Just a matter of a few connections, so that the standby system could get the order to take over. I should have thought of trying it myself. That I did not, well, yes, I admit that that was my real treason. But when I saw what he was doing, I shoved myself to him, along with Mbotto and Ghopal, and lent a hand.

We couldn't do much. He was the electronics officer. Besides, as for me, his blood drifted across my faceplate and fogged it. But we passed him what he needed from the tool kit. By the blue light, through the black smears, I saw his face a little drained of everything but sweat and will. He did not permit himself to die until he had finished.

The lights came back on. So did weight. And the view-screens. And the audio inductors. We'd have to get along on tanked air until we could shift to the other turret. I looked into space. The stars were thick here, heartlessly brilliant against black, but sharpest was a flash half a million kilometres away. And: '*¡Por Dios!*' cried the evaluation officer, 'she was a Jango cruiser! Someone's put a missile in her!'

Turned out the *Agincourt* had done so. I hear her captain has been cited for a medal. Is he grateful to me?

At the moment, though, I knew only that Iwasaki had resurrected the *Syrtis Minor* and I must therefore continue to fight her. I called for the medics to come see if they could

resurrect him too. He was a good little man, who had shyly shown me pictures of his good little children, under the cherry trees of Kyoto. But later I heard there was no chance for him. With normal hospital facilities, he could have been hooked into a machine until a new gastro-intestinal tract had been grown; however, warships haven't room or mass to spare for such gadgets.

I plugged myself back into control. Reports snapped through my ears, numbers flickered before my eyes, I made my decisions and issued my orders. But chiefly I was conscious of a background whine in my phones, blood and a little vomit on my tongue. We were not going to be captured after all.

Instead, we fought free and returned to base, what was left of us.

I wonder if military men have always been intellectuals. It isn't in their legend. Rather, we think of headlong Alexander, methodical Caesar, Napoleon stumping across Europe, Malan-owicz and his computers. But shouldn't we likewise remember Aristotle, the Julian calendar, the Code, the philosophical project? At any rate, when you fight across interstellar distances, for commonwealths embodying whole planetary systems, you have to understand the machines which make it possible; you have to try to understand races as sentient as man, but separated from us by three or four thousand million years of evolution; you even have to know something about man himself, lest minds fall to pieces out yonder. So the average officer today is better educated and has done a good bit more thinking than the average Brother of Love.

Oh, that Brotherhood! I wish they could have sat, dirt and self-righteousness and the whole dismal works, in Colonel Goncharov's class.

Sunlight slanted across Academy lawns, lost itself among oak leaves, emerged to glance off a cannon which had fired at Trafalgar, and struck the comets upon his shoulders. I sat and worshipped, at first, for he had won the Lunar Crescent before I was born. But then he asked me to do what was harder.

'Gentlemen,' he said, in that slow, accented Esperanto which was such a joke in our barracks - and he leaned across his desk, balanced on fingertips, and the sun touched his hair also, it was still rust colour, and made shadows in the creases of his face; and, yes, a smell of green (E)arth blew in, with the sleepy noise of a mower somewhere in the middle distance - 'gentlemen, you have heard a good many fine words about honour, esprit de corps, and service to mankind. They are true enough. But you will not live up to them unless you can see your service in its proper perspective. The Cosmocorps is not the elite of human society, its mission is not the purpose of society, it must not expect the highest material rewards or even the highest honours which society has to

offer.

'We are an instrument.

'Man is not alone in this universe. Nor is he entitled to every habitable world. There are other races, with their own hopes and ambitions, their own pains and fears; they look out of other eyes and they think other thoughts, but their aims are no less legitimate to them than ours are to us. It is well when we can be friends with them.

'But that isn't forever possible. Some of you will explain it by original sin, some by Karma, some by simple mortal fallibility. The fact remains that societies do conflict. In such cases, one must try to negotiate the dispute. And true negotiation can only take place between equals. Therefore equality in the capability of inflicting harm, as well as in other and higher capabilities, is essential. I do not say this is good, I say merely that it is so. You are to become part of the instrument which gives Earth and the Union that capability.

'An instrument can be misused. A hammer can drive a nail or crush a skull. All too often, armies have been similarly misused. But the fact that you have accepted military discipline and will presently accept commissions does not absolve you from your responsibilities as citizens.

'*Read* your Clausewitz. War is not an end but a continuation of political intercourse. The most horrible disasters of a horrible history occurred when that was forgotten. Your duty as officers - a duty too high and difficult to be included in the Articles - will be to remember.'

I suppose that basically I am a humourless type. I like a joke as well as you do, I rather distinguish myself in my class by my fund of limericks, a poker game or a drinking bout is fun, but I do take some things with a possibly priggish seriousness.

Like this matter of racial hatred. I will no more tolerate that word 'Jango' than I would have tolerated 'Nigger' or 'Gook' a few centuries ago. (You see, I've read quite a lot of history. Hobby of mine, and a way to pass the long time between stars.) It was brought against me at the court martial. Tom Deare testified that I had spoken well of the Morwain. They were fair minded men on the board, who reprimanded him and struck his words from the record, but - Tom, you were my friend. Weren't you?

Let me set straight what happened. Memory gets more total with every sweep of that minute hand. We were on Asphodel for refitting. Once this was the pet hope of every

spaceman. Next to Earth herself, perhaps more so for many, Asphodel! (Yes, yes, I know it's an entire world, with ice caps and deserts and stinking swamps, but I mean the part we humans made our own, in those magnificent days when we thought we had the freedom of the galaxy, and could pick and choose our colony sites.) Mountains shouldering white into a cornflower sky, valleys one dazzle of blossoms and bird wings, the little laughterful towns and the girls... But this was late in the war. You hated to go out after dark, for the enemy held those stars. Most of the towns were already empty, doors creaked in the wind, echoes rang hollow from your footfall in the streets. Now and then a thunderclap rolled, another ferry taking off with another load of civilians for evacuation. Asphodel fell to the Morwain two months afterward.

We sat in a deserted tavern, Tom and I, violating regs by drinking liquor which could not be taken away. There was nothing else to do. War is mostly hurry up and wait. Sunlight came in, and the same green smell I remembered across an eon, and a dog ran by outside, abandoned, bewildered, hungry.

'Oh, God *damn* them!' Tom shouted into silence.

'Who?' I asked, pouring myself a refill. 'If you mean those officious bastards in QM, I entirely agree, but aren't you wishing a rather large job on to the Almighty?'

'This is no time to be funny,' he said.

'It's no time to be anything else,' I answered. We had just heard about the destruction of the Ninth Fleet.

'The Jangos,' he said. "The filthy, slimy, slithering, pervert-begotten Jangos.'

'The Morwain, you mean,' I said. I was rather drunk too, or I would simply have held my peace. But it buzzed in my brain. 'They aren't filthy. Cleaner by instinct than we are. You don't see litter in their cities. Their perspiration is glutinous, they walk like cats, and they have three sexes, but what of it?'

'What *of* it?' He raised a fist. His features had gone white, except for two fever-spots on the cheekbones. "They're going to take over the universe and you ask what of it?'

'Who says they're going to?'

'The news, you clotbrain!'

I couldn't answer directly, so I said, with that exaggerated consciousness of each single word which comes at a certain stage of drink: 'Earth-type planets are none too common,

they wanted the same real estate we did. Border disputes led to war. Now their announced purpose is to draw Earth's teeth, just as ours was to draw theirs. But they haven't said anything about throwing us off the planets - most of the planets - we already hold. That'd be too costly.'

'No, it wouldn't. They'll only need to massacre our colonials.'

'Would we massacre - what's the figure? - about twenty thousand million in either case - would we massacre that many thinking creatures?'

'I'd like to,' he got out between his teeth.

'Look,' I said, 'forget the propaganda. As the war dragged on, and went badly, we've lost all sense of proportion. Suppose they do occupy us?'

"Those tentacled horrors,' he whispered, 'under the spires of Oxford.'

Well, for me it would be strangers walking the Wyoming earth where free men once whooped their cattle down the long trail; and for Iwasaki, demon shapes gaping before Buddha at Kamajura; and for Goncharov, if he was unfortunate enough to be still alive, an alien victory monument raised in the holy Kremlin; and on and on, mans-history's tapestry warped into a shape our dead would never have recognized. But - "They'll set up a government, if they win,' I told him, 'and we'll have to learn some new ways of thinking. But you know, I've studied them, and I met some of them before the war and got pretty friendly, and you know, they admire a lot about us.'

He sat altogether still for a long while, before he breathed, 'You mean you don't care if they win?'

'I mean that we'll have to face facts... if they win,' I said. 'We'll have to adapt, in order to conserve as much as we can. We could be useful to them.'

That was when he hit me.

Well, I didn't hit back. I walked straight out of there, into the obscenely beautiful sunlight, and left him weeping. The next day we said nothing about the incident and worked together with stiff politeness.

But he has testified that I want to be a collaborationist.

Alice, did you ever understand what the war was about? You said goodbye with a gallantry which was almost more than I could endure, and the one time in these five years that I have had Earth furlough, we had too much else CENSOR CENSOR CENSOR. But I suspect that to you these imperial questions were simply a thing, like sickness or a floater crash, which could eat your man.

It was raining when last I left. The ground was still dark with winter, here and there a bank of dirty snow melting away. The sky hung low, like some vague grey roof, and threw tendrils of mist round the house. But I could see quite a distance across this

ranch of ours, over the high plateau until the buttes, where I was someday going to take my son hunting, blocked off vision. The rain was soft, it made little drops in your hair, like Middy's blood - No, anyhow, I heard our brook chuckle, the one we installed the first year we owned the place, and the air smelled wet too, and I was as conscious of an aching toe as I was of your body of the stiffness in my gullet.

I hope you find yourself another man. That may not be easy. It won't be, if I know you; for you are a traitor's widow, and you have too much cleanliness to take one of those Brothers who will come sucking around. But, well, someone from the Cosmocorps, returning to cope as best he can with an Earth gone strange.

Sure, I'm jealous of him. But curiously, not of the fact that you will tell him, 'I love you' in the dark. Only of his becoming father to Jeanne and Bobby. So does this justify (Drusilla and others, now and then) when I never doubted you would stay loyal to me?

But I am supposed to justify something allegedly more important. The trouble is, it's so childishly simple that I can't see why this psychograph is needed.

Look! The Morwain and the Terrestrial spheres had interpenetrated long before the war. 'Border dispute' is a bad phrase; the universe is too big for borders. They have a thriving colony on the second planet of GGC 421387, which has extended its industry throughout the system. And this planet is a bare fifty light-years from Earth.

The fighting began much farther away. Savamor, as we call the planet in question - human throats can't make that particular music - was then a liability to them. They had to defend it, which tied up considerable strength.

We evacuated Asphodel, didn't we? Yes, but Savamor was too valuable. Not just the industry and the strategic location, though naturally they counted too. Savamor is a myth.



I have been there. That was as a newly fledged lieutenant, aboard the old *Danno-ura*, in days when the Fleet made goodwill visits. Already there were disputes, there had been clashes, an ugliness was in the air. We knew, and they knew, that we orbiting our ships around the planet as a warning.

Nevertheless we were understandably excited about getting leave. This was where the Dancers had gone to escape the upheavals at home, this was where they had raised those cities which remain a wonder and written the Declaration for a new chapter - oh, think of America shining before weary old Europe, but think also of Paris.

We got off at Darway port, and I shook my party in order to drift about on my own. When I was among elfin green towers, on a green-carpeted lane, and the long line of jewelposts glistened before me... what could I do but call it the Emerald City? After some hours I was tired and sat down on a terrace to hear the melodies. They're plangent, on no scale that men ever invented, but I liked them. Watching the beings go by, not just Morwain but beings from twenty different species, a thousand different cultures, I felt so cosmopolitan that it was like kissing my first girl.

Before long a Morwa joined me. 'Sir,' he said in fluent Esperanto - I won't try to remember the nuances of his accent - 'may this one have the joy of your presence?'

'My pleasure,' I said. And we got to talking. Of course, there was no drink, but none was required, I was quite intoxicated enough.

Tamulan was one of his names. At first we just exchanged pleasantries, then we got on to customs, then into politics. He was unfailing courteous, even when I got a little overheated about aggressions against our colonies. He simply pointed out how the matter looked from his side - but never mind now. You will be hearing the same things in years to come.

'We must not fight,' he said. 'We have too much in common.'

'Maybe that's why we do fight,' I said, and congratulated myself on so neat an insight.

His tentacles drooped; a man would have sighed. 'Perhaps so. But we are natural allies. Consider our societies, consider how the stars lie in the galaxy. Who would profit from a war between Earth and Morwai, except the Bilturs?'

In those days the Bilturs were remote from Sol. We hadn't borne their pressure, that had been Morwai's job. "They're sentient too," I said.

"They are monsters," he replied. At the time, I didn't believe what he went on to tell me.

Now I have studied too much to disbelieve. I will not admit that there is any race which has forfeited its right to existence, but there are certainly cultures which have.

'Come, though,' he said at length, 'twilight cools inward and

one hears a rustle of nest-bound feathers. Will you grace our home by taking dinner?'

Our home, you note. Not his, but his and his mates' and the fuzzy little cubs'. We can learn some things from the Morwain.

And they from us, to be sure. Chiaroscuro painting; Périgordian cuisine; the Bill of Rights. However, such matters have been cheapened by noise about What We Are Fighting For. They will need time to recover.

So what have we been fighting for? Not a few planets; both sides are realistic enough to horse trade them, albeit our conflicting claims were the proximate cause of battle. Nor, in truth, any desire on either side to impose a particular set of values on the galaxy; only our commentators are sufficiently stupid to believe that's even desirable. Why, then?

Why me? Why have I fought?

Because I was a career officer. Because men of my blood were fighting. Because I do not want aliens walking our land and ordering us about. *I do not.*

I say into the psychograph, and I am going to leave this tape unwiped because I most passionately want to be believed, my wish is that Earth should win. For this I would not only give my own life; that's easy, if you don't stop to think about the implications, and it's always possible. No, I would throw Alice, and Bobby, and Jeanne who must by now have become the most enchanting awkward hybrid of child and girl, into the furnace. Not to speak of Paris, and the caves where my ancestors drew the mammoths they dared hunt, and the whole damned state of Wyoming - from which it follows that Savamor planet would occasion me simply the mildest regret. Doesn't it?

As for why my feelings run thus, we must go deeper than psychodynamics has yet managed. In spite of glib talk about 'instinct of territoriality' and 'symbol of identification', I don't believe we really know

*Why men were born: but surely we are brave,  
Who take the Golden Road to Samarkand.*

(Will they remember Flecker, when Earth has been changed?) I'm rambling again. My

position can be put approximately, in crude terms: Somebody has to have the final say - not any dictatorship, just the tribunal power - as to what is to happen in the galaxy. I want it to be my people.

No, let's modify that. I only want my people to have the final say as to what is to happen to them.

If, for this purpose, we must destroy Tamulan who was so hospitable, and his mates and his fuzzy cubs that climbed over my knees, and the Emerald City, well, so be it. Earth should not be dominated by anyone. Nor dominate anyone else, ideally; trouble is, nobody's allowed simply to mind his own business. We get down to some kind of bedrock when we say that man must be free to settle man's destiny.

My question, then, is merely, What do you do when you see that this isn't going to be possible?

I would like to write a love letter to Earth, but I am no writer and I can only call up a jumble: a sky that burned with sunset one snow-clad evening; 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created free and equal;' the astonishing smallness of Stonehenge, so that you need some time to feel the sheer mass of it, and the astonishing mass of the Parthenon, so that you must sit a while in the spilling Athenian sunlight to grasp its beauty; moonlight on a restless ocean; Beethoven's quartets; the cadence of boots in a rain-wet street; a hand axe chipped out by some heavy-browed Neanderthal who also wondered why men were born; a kiss which becomes more than a kiss, and nine months later a red, wrinkled, indignant blob of life; the feel of a horse's muscles flowing between my thighs; caviar, champagne, and eyes meeting in the middle of elegance; outrageous puns; Mrs Elton, my neighbour, who raised three sons to manhood after her own man was dead - no, the clock is moving. I have to compose my thoughts most carefully now.

None less than General Wang briefed me. He sat in the command room, in the depths of Hell-Won't-Have-It, with the star tank a-glitter behind his big bald head, and after I came to attention there was a silence so long that the rustle of the ventilators began to run up and down my spine. When he finally said, 'At ease, Colonel. Sit down,' I was shocked to hear he had grown old.

He played with a duplipen for a while longer before he raised his eyes and said: 'You notice we are alone. This is a matter for absolute security. At present an 87 per cent probability of success is computed - success defined as mission accomplished with less than 50 per cent casualties - but if word should get out the operation will become hopeless.'

I never really believed those rumours about Morwain agents among us. No being who would sell out his own species could make officer grade, could he? However, I nodded, and said, 'Understood, sir.'

He swivelled around to face the tank. 'This thing has a very limited value,' he remarked in the same dead voice. 'There are too many stars. But it can illustrate the present situation. Observe.' His hands passed over the controls, some of those swimming points of light turned gold and some blood colour.

Enemy colour.

I saw how we had reeled back across the parsecs, I saw the ugly salient thrusting in among those suns which still were ours, and even then I guessed what was to come and snatched after words of protest.

"This system... entire sector dependent on it... interior lines of communication... depots... repair centre - ' I scarcely heard. I was back on Savamor, in Tamulan's home.

Oh, yes, a squadron could get through. Space is too big to guard everywhere. One would meet defences at the end of the trip, which were not too heavy when attack was unexpected, and afterward one must fight back through ships which would converge like hornets from every point of the three-dimensional compass; but yes, indeed, the probability was more than 85 per cent that one could shoot a doomsday barrage into the sky of Savamor.

It wouldn't even be inhumane. Simply a concerted flash of so many megatons that the whole atmosphere was turned momentarily into an incandescent plasma. True, the firestorms would run for months afterward, and nothing would be left but desert, and if any life whatsoever survived it would need several million years to crawl back from the oceans. But Tamulan would never know what had happened. If Tamulan wasn't off with his own fleet somewhere; if he hadn't already died with a laser beam through his guts, or gasping for air that wasn't around him any longer, or vomiting in radiation sickness, as I'd seen human men do. Without a habitable planet for their economic foundation, industries on the other worlds around GGC 421387 could no longer be maintained. Without the entire system for base and supply centre, the salient must be pinched off. Without that salient, pointed like a knife at Earth -

'Sir,' I said, 'they haven't bombarded any of our colonies.'

'Nor we any of theirs,' Wang said. 'Now we have no choice.'

'But-'

'Be still!' He surged half out of his chair. One eyelid began to twitch. 'Do you think I have not lain awake about this?'

Presently, in the monotone with which he began: 'It will be a heavy setback foil them. We will be able to hold this sector for an estimated year longer: which is to say, prolong the war a year.'

'For the sake of that -'

'Much could happen in a year. We might develop a new weapon. They might decide Earth is too expensive a conquest. If nothing else, a year can be lived in, back home.'

'Suppose they retaliate,' I said.

He is a brave man; he met my gaze. 'One cannot act, or even exist, without risk,' he said.

I had no answer.

'If you feel grave objections, Colonel,' he said, 'I shall not order you into this. I shall not so much as think ill of you. There are plenty of others.'

Nor could I answer that.

Be it made plain here, as it was at my eminently fair trial: no man under my command is in any way to blame for what happened. Our squadron took space with myself the only one in all those ships who knew what the mission was. My subordinate captains had been told about a raid in the Savamor environ, and took for granted that we were after some rogue planet used for a stronghold, much like our own. The missile officers must have had their suspicions, after noting what cargo was given into their care, but they stand far down the chain. And they assumed that last-minute information caused me to shift course and make for Cantrell's Cluster. There we fought our bloody, valiant, and altogether futile battle, won, and limped home again.

Thus I am responsible for much death and maiming. Why?

My official defence was that I had decided the attack on Savamor was lunacy, but knowing that the Morwain salient also depended on the Cluster, I hoped to accomplish our purpose by a surprise attack there. Nonsense. We only shook them up a little, as any second-year cadet could have predicted.

My private reason is that I had to cripple the strength which Wang would otherwise use to destroy Savamor, with a more reliable officer in charge. Facts vindicate my logic. We have already abandoned Hell-Won't-Have-It, and could now find no way past the triumphantly advancing enemy. Nor would there be any point in it; they have straightened out their front and the rest of the war must be fought along conventional lines.

My ultimate motive was the hope of being captured. They would have treated us decently, as we have thus far treated our own prisoners. In time I would have returned to Alice, with the favour of the Morwain behind me. And isn't my race going to need go-betweens?

Eventually, leaders? For they can't hold us down too long. The Bilturs are coming, the Morwain will want allies. We can set a price on our friendship, and the price can perhaps be freedom.

Once upon a time, the English fought the French, and the Americans fought the English, and those were fairly clean wars as wars go. They left no lasting hates. It was possible later for the nations to make fellowship in the face of the real enemy. But who, across the centuries, has forgiven Dachau?

Had we fired on Savamor, I don't believe the Morwain would have laid Earth waste. Tamulan's people aren't that kind. Nevertheless, would they not have felt bound to tear down every work, every institution, every dream of the race which was capable of such a thing, and rebuild in their own image? And could they ever have trusted us again?

Whereas, having fought and been defeated honourably, we may hope to save what is really ours: may even hope to have it admired and imitated, a decade or two from now.

Of course, this is predicated on the assumption that Earth will lose the war. One keeps believing a miracle will come, can we but hold out long enough. I did myself; I had to strangle the belief. And then, in my arrogance, I set my single judgment against what can only be called that of my entire people.

Was I right? Will my statue stand beside Jefferson's and Lincoln's, for Bobby to point at and say, He was my father -? Or will they spit on our name until he must change it in the silly hope of vanishing? I don't know. I never will.

So I am now going to spend what time remains in thinking about it.