

Paul woke early, ate breakfast, and readied his computer print-outs. At mid-morning, a blue glow and trace of ozone appeared in the air. Fleshrender stepped out of the blue mist.

"Good morning, Paul. How are you?"

"Fine, thank-you, Fleshrender. I hope you're feeling well this morning. Care for something to eat or drink?"

"Thanks for the offer, but you probably don't have anything that I would like."

"Oh, sure. Well I've got a list of possible choices for you, if you'd like to take a look at them."

"Thank-you. Yes, these look interesting," said Fleshrender as he examined the print-outs.

Fleshrender studied each sheet, and placed the print-out in one of two piles. When he was finished, he had one stack with the bulk of the selections and a second stack of about five or six items.

"These are the ones we are interested in. All of them meet our specifications for topography and climate. Major prey species are all mammalian; no mention of cost is made in the print-outs."

"They are all in the same price range, but I didn't think price was a primary consideration. I'm more interested in matching possible locations with your requirements."

"I see. This first planet seems ideal except for one small concern. You state on your report that the prey species is proto-simian. How far along the evolutionary line is the species?"

"They are not very far removed from a carnivorous stage. They have recently taken to aboreal existence, and are developing an omnivorous diet at the present time. It would be hundreds of thousands of years before they evolved to the level of the great apes - say the equivalent of a terrestrial chimpanzee or orang, for instance."

"As I mentioned at our last meeting, we are adverse to hunting highly intelligent species, yet we do like our prey with a certain degree of native intelligence. The hunting of primates is not to our liking, so

We would avoid any such prey animals."

"Well, there are a few more selections to consider. There was one world with a race of animals very similar to terrestrial mustelids except for their large size. I would imagine that these animals would make an excellent prey species because of their cleverness and ferocity. Another was inhabited by a race of canine-looking animals who hunted in large packs. I think the planet I found most intriguing was the one populated by equine-looking carnivores. Imagine an animal as fleet as a horse and as dangerous as a terrestrial lion."

"Yes, I quite agree. That planet does seem intriguing. The only drawback is that the species inhabits the plains areas only. To tell the truth, we must also consider secondary and tertiary species on each planet. One gets so bored hunting the same prey all the time. If you don't mind, I'd like to take a few hours to study these documents. Do you have a room available where I might be sequestered for a while?"

Paul showed Fleshrender to the guest-room and searched the computer for any messages from Owhindamon. After discovering that no messages had been received, he turned on the television set and waited for Fleshrender.

After what seemed an interminable time, Fleshrender emerged from the guest-room.

"We have made our selection. The new game preserve will be located in your quadrant, Mr. Phillips: we shall be neighbors. These equine creatures should prove quite a challenge. I notice that quite a variety of creatures occur in the tropics. If I may be permitted to use your computer, I would like to contact my home planet to apprise my people of the preserve selection and to arrange funds transfers, etc."

"Sure, just let me activate it; the machine is programmed to respond to my voice only. Computer, receive instructions from Fleshrender, and respond as you would to my commands." Turning to his guest, Paul continued "Fleshrender, say a few words to the computer so that it can recognize your voice patterns."

Fleshrender spoke a few words in his native tongue, until a message appeared on the screen acknowledging the computer's acceptance of his voice for input. Paul discreetly left the room while Fleshrender communicated with his superiors via the computer.

In a few minutes, Fleshrender entered the room. "Well, we have received approval to buy the preserve, provided the price is reasonable. Oh, by the way, a message came across the machine while I was talking to my superiors."

Paul blanched when Fleshrender told him of the message.

"Don't worry, my friend, I don't read other people's messages. Must be pretty important though, judging from your reaction."

"If only you knew how important," said the voice of Owhindamon in Paul's head.

Paul damn near jumped out of his skin when he heard Owhindamon. Fleshrender noted Paul's reactions and grew curious.

"Is something bothering you? Are you having misgivings about selling us the preserve? We are prepared to reward you handsomely for the property."

"No, I'm fine. I thought I heard something just now and was startled. Why don't we decide on the selling price and manner of payment, and then I'll record the deed."

Paul and Fleshrender haggled over price for quite some time. After a price was agreed upon, payment was tendered and the deed recorded. Having finished his business, Fleshrender was anxious to leave to inspect the property.

"I'd better be going; I'll have plenty of work to do over the next few days. I think you should plan to visit us within a short while. Nick is familiar with this quadrant of the galaxy; ask him to take a trip with you. Well, it has been a pleasure doing business with you, Paul. Good luck selling the rest of the galaxy. Give my regards to Nick."

"Holy shit," said Paul when Fleshrender had vaporized into the air. "Why in hell did Owhindamon leave a message when that overgrown Tomcat was here."

"How was I to know he was at your house at that very moment?" came a voice in Paul's head.

"You are a mind-reader," thought Paul to himself.

"Yes, but do you think I think of nothing but your problems all day? That's why I sent a message on the computer. I thought you could get to it when you had time. I sensed your alarm when Fleshrender relayed the discovery of the message to you, and immediately tuned-in to you."

"Oh, I see. I can tell you I was more than a little startled when

your voice popped into my head. I'm still not used to telepathy, and I guess my reactions showed quite visibly."

"Yes, I guess they did, from what Fleshrender said. You recovered rather nicely, I thought. Anyway, I erased the message, so don't go looking for it on the computer."

"Why the hell did you do that?"

"Beacuse I'll be at your house in just a few hours. I still have some business to attend to in Borneo. I'll se you in a little while."

"Ya, right. I wonder what the hell he does in Borneo all the time?"

"Would'nt you like to know?" came the giggled reply.