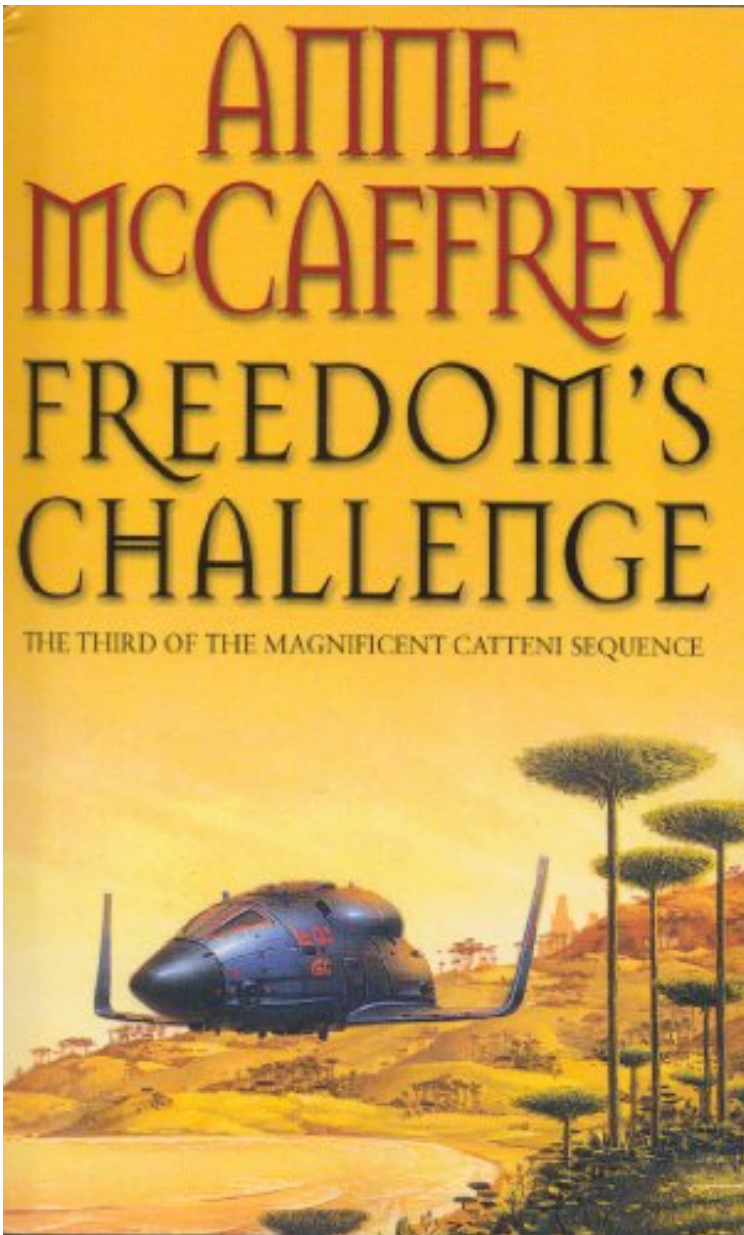


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Freedom's Challenge: Fantasy



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe inhabitants of Botany - a mixture of humans and extra terrestrials - had managed to build a thriving and productive world out of what had originally been intended as a slave planet. And now they had plans to try and overthrow the terrible Eosi, who for centuries had existed by subsuming members of the Catteni race, living in their bodies and ruling space through them.And the Botanists had received mysterious and unexpected help from the great beings they knew only as 'Farmers' - for the Farmers had thrown a huge impervious space bubble round Botany. Even as the Eosi ships tried to pulverise the

rebellious planet, the bubble held firm. But, safe though they were behind the protective device, Kris Bjornsen, Zainal and all of the Council knew they had to go out and destroy the Eosi on their own ground. It

fell to Zainal to risk his life in a desperate and daring mission to vanquish the monster life forms forever. Extrait Readers will savor [McCaffreys] works for generations to come. Starlog Praise for Anne McCaffreys Freedom series Freedoms Landing McCaffrey has created another set of winning protagonists and a carefully detailed, exotic background. Publishers Weekly There are enough problems and mysteries involved in establishing a colony to keep things interesting and to promise intriguing developments to come. Locus Not for nothing do her fans call the author the Dragonlady She crafts a sci-fi adventure that will please followers of the genre and of the author. Dayton Daily News Exciting and totally convincing There can be only more action in the sequels McCaffrey presumably plans. Booklist The narrative hits an admirable groove. Kirkus s Freedoms Choice A fun adventure Delightfully audacious. Locus This episode of the Freedom saga is as exciting and convincing as the first. Booklist The setting is crisp and expertly detailed, and the plot spins out smoothly Readers will be eager for the next installment in the series. Publishers Weekly Freedoms Challenge The action is fast-paced and riveting, and the characters human and of other species are well limned and exhibit great individuality. McCaffrey continues to amaze with her ability to create disparate, well-realized worlds and to portray believable humans, convincing aliens of varied sorts, and credible interactions between them all. A very satisfying tale. Booklist Rip-roaring adventure no science fiction fan could possibly resist. RT Book s Freedoms Ransom Touching and humorous. Publishers Weekly McCaffrey is masterly at creating universes and characters so memorable that readers can slip comfortably back into [her] world Full of humorous events as well as excitement, the fourth entry in McCaffreys Freedom series will be relished by fans. Booklist Praise for the bestselling novels of Anne McCaffreys Tower and Hive series The Rowan A reason for rejoicing. The Washington Times One of the best McCaffrey novels. Locus The Rowan introduces readers to the Gwyn-Raven dynasty complete with an interstellar love affair steamy enough to attract those not usually interested in science fiction. Calgary Herald A well-told tale McCaffreys popularity is immense and justified. Booklist Damia Dynamic. St. Louis Post-Dispatch Holds the reader spellbound [with an] artful weave of romance and humor that infuses her characters. Calgary Herald McCaffrey interweaves an engrossing romance with a coming-of-age story as she examines the issue of responsibility in a society where survival depends on the abilities of a gifted few. Publishers Weekly Damias Children Winning, carefully developed young characters, an attractive alien society, and an enemy drawn with more than a touch of mystery. Publishers Weekly McCaffreys fans wont be disappointed Fascinating in its exploration of the brains potential and untapped powers. The Calgary Sun McCaffrey skillfully combines elements of family, adventure, action, and the intriguing possibilities of psychic phenomena. The Toledo Blade Lyons Pride McCaffreys protagonists remain as warm and appealing as ever. Publishers Weekly McCaffrey continues to spin a good tale All in all, a rich, compelling novel. Booklist Another exciting episode in the thrilling epic of the Rowan Read and enjoy! RT Book s The Tower and the Hive Readers looking for intelligent, heroic adventure will find it here, and Rowan fans will be especially pleased at this felicitous closing of a popular SF series. Publishers Weekly Fans of the series will plunge right in. Kirkus s The fifth installment in the authors Rowan series brings to a satisfying culmination the tale of three generations of a uniquely gifted family while leaving room for future novels. McCaffreys skillful storytelling and fluid writing make this a necessary purchase. Library Journal McCaffrey maintains the high quality of characterization of humans and aliens alike, and, once again, she skillfully interweaves the plot threads, making it easy to follow the action on all fronts. Booklist Ace Books by Anne McCaffrey The Tower and Hive Series The Rowan Damia Damias Children Lyons Pride The Tower and the Hive The Freedom Series Freedoms Landing Freedoms Choice Freedoms Challenge Freedoms Ransom FREEDOMS CHALLENGE ANNE MCCAFFREY Table of Contents Dont look back in anger, I hear you say. Acknowledgments I HAVE, AS USUAL, ACKNOWLEDGMENTS TO make for some of the material used in Freedoms Challenge. Especially helpful was Dr. Susan Edwards, Ph.D., social cognitive psychologist, author of Men Who Believe in Love, who helped me with the social and trauma techniques, which have been used so successfully to help the victims of catastrophes, both personal and public (such as hostage situations), in recovering their personalities and self-confidence. Margaret Ball, bless her heart, had all the Swahili and hunted down information about the customs and traditions of the Maasai tribes of East Africa. Fortunately, she also speaks Swahili, though I didnt have to use that much, since so many of the tribal chiefs are fluent enough in English. I also wish to thank Georgeanne Kennedy for her careful copyediting and invaluable suggestions of what she wanted to know more about in this story. What errors a spell-check, even the most

advanced ones, do not catch, the sharp eye of the intelligent reader does. And I give my spell-check a lot of hard names to cope with. Thank goodness it cant complainALoud!Preface

WHEN THE CATTENI, MERCENARIES FOR A RACE

called Eosi, invaded Earth, they used their standard tactic of domination by landing in fifty cities across the planet and removing entire urban populations. These they distributed through the Catteni worlds and sold them as slaves along with other conquered species. A group rounded up from Barevi, the hub of the slave trade, were dumped on an M-type planet of unknown quality, given rations and tools and allowed to survive or not. A former marine sergeant, Chuck Mitford, took charge of the mixed group, which included sullen Turs, spider-like Deski, hairy Rugarians, vague Ilginish, gaunt Morphins, with humans in the majority. There was also one Catteni who had been shanghaied onto the prison ship. Though there were those who wanted to kill him immediately, Kris Bjornsen, lately of Denver, suggested that he might know enough about the planet to help them. He remembered sufficient from a casual glance at the initial exploration report to suggest they move under cover, and preferably rock, to prevent being eaten by night crawlers, which oozed from the ground to ingest anything edible. Installed in a rocky site, with cliffs and caves to give them some protection, Mitford quickly organized a camp, utilizing the specific qualities of the aliens and assigning tasks to every one in this unusual community. However, the planet was soon discovered to be inhabited by machines, which automatically tended the crops and the six-legged bovine types. After being caught by the Mechs, Zainal, the Catteni, with his scout party, not only escape but rescue other humans trapped by the Mechs in what proves to be an abattoir. However, human ingenuity being rampant among the mixed group, they soon learned how to dismantle the machines and design useful equipment. Zainal, in a conversation with one of the Drassi drop captains, gets not only a supply of the drug which will keep the Deski contingent from dying of malnutrition, but also aerial maps of the planet. And discovers a command post, presumably built by the real owners of the planet. While it has obviously not been used, a mechanically inclined member of their scouting party launches a homing device. Both the Eosi overlords looking for Zainal and the genuine owners of the planet note the release of the homing device. The search to bring Zainal back to face the consequences of his delinquency continues. But Zainal manages to lure the searchers into the maws of the night crawlers and acquires their scout vehicle. Meanwhile, six more drops of dissidents from Earth and a few other aliens have swelled the population of Botany, as the planet is now called, to nearly ten thousand folk: some of them with skills that benefit the colony and improve conditions. Zainal, now with a constant companion in Kris Bjornsen, and others explore this new world. What Kris slowly discovers from her buddy is that Zainal wants to implement a three-phase plan: one that will end the domination of his people by the Eosi and, incidentally, bring about the liberation of Earth. Following this agenda, Zainal explains to Mitford and other ex-naval, air force, and army personnel how he means to proceed: by capturing the next ship which drops more slaves on Botany. This plan necessitates some alteration when the next ship turns up in such poor condition that only quick action saves it from blowing up. But the captain has sent out an emergency message and looks forward to being rescued from the planet. By a clever plot, the rescue ship, which is a new one, is captured by Zainal and other Catteni staff, thus giving them two operational ships, plus the bridge equipment of the one they have now cannibalized for parts. Because Zainal was dropped on Botany, his brother Lenvec has had to take his place, becoming subsumed as a host for an Eosi. The Eosi is somewhat amused by his host body's violent hatred of his brother. And soon becomes obsessed with finding the runaway. An immense ship does a flypast of Botany and replaces the machines, which the colonists have salvaged to provide themselves with useful vehicles and equipment. At this reminder that they live on Botany on sufferance, the entire colony decides that they should show goodwill to their unknown landlords by leaving the farmed continent on which they were dropped and moving to a smaller, unused continent across a small strait. They are in the process of moving when the Mentat Ix, hosted in Lenvec's body, does a search of the planet to find the missing Catteni. Without success. No sooner does this inspection tour end than the real owners of the planet, who accept the appellation of Farmers, arrive in unusual form. They seem able to give personal messages to all they meet: the important news is permission for the colony to remain. They also protect it with a most incredible device, a Bubble, which surrounds the entire planet while still permitting the sun's rays to filter through even as it impedes the exit of the Eosi ship. Once free of the obstacle, the Mentat orders its ship to fire on the Bubble, which has no effect on it. The impenetrable protection of this planet infuriates the Mentat who decides that the shield must be broken and the recalcitrant colony disciplined. To this end, the Mentat retires to its home world to accumulate an armada. And also to probe the minds of human specialists to see what knowledge they must possess. The two ships owned by the colony are able to leave the protection of the Bubble, while

the two Eosi satellites are on the other side of the world, and succeed in raiding Barevi for much needed fuel, supplies, and more plursaw for the Deskis diet. Kris, who had already learned enough Barevi to deal with merchants, and others accompany Zainal. While there, they learn of the plight of Humans whose minds have been wiped by the Eosian device with which they had enhanced the basic intelligence of the Catteni race.

From Barevi, Zainal makes contact with dissident Emassi who are also pledged to end Eosi domination. Having found slave pens full of the mind-wiped Victims of the Eosi, the Botanists are unable to leave their compatriots to sure death in slave camps. So they contrive to take over yet another ship. Between the two, they are able to rescue several thousand Victims, irrespective of the problems this might cause the colony. Zainal's first two phases have been successful: the planet is safe and they have ships with which to seize additional supplies. But will he be able to talk the colony into supporting his third-phase plans? And liberate not only Earth but also the Catteni from Eosi domination?

Chapter One

WHEN ZAINAL HAD ORGANIZED THE DATA he wanted to send to the Farmers via the homing capsule, he let Boris Slavinkovin and Dick Aarens fly it down to the Command Post for dispatch. You have a nasty sense of humor, Zainal, Kris said when the hatch of the scout vessel Baby closed behind the messengers. She had been surprised by his choice of Aarens, considering the man's behavior on their first visit to the Command Post. Well, and Zainal gave a shrug of one shoulder and an unrepentant grin, Aarens has had experience sending one off. Let him do it official this time. As a reward for his improvement. What improvement? Kris still had little time for the self-styled mechanical genius who had deliberately launched a homing capsule without authorization on their first trip to the Command Post. They both stepped back from the takeoff area, as much to avoid the fumes as the wind, although Boris lifted the little craft slowly and cautiously. They watched as it made an almost soundless vertical ascent before it slanted forward and sped off, disappearing quickly in the dusk of what had been a very long and momentous day. The wide landing field that stretched out level with the immense, Farmer-constructed hangar could accommodate a half dozen of the K-class ships that had arrived today. They now were out of sight, within the vast hangar. At the far end of the landing area grew small copses of the lodge-pole trees: young ones in terms of the age of the mature groves above and beyond the hangar. In the nearest of those groves the cabins of the colonists were being constructed, out of brick or wood, in separate clearings to allow the privacy that everyone preferred. Farther up the slope were the infirmary, which today was crowded, and the huge mess hall, which served food all day long and well into the long Botany night. The largest building that faced Retreat Bay was the administration, where Judge Iri Bempechat held court when necessary, with the stocks just outside as a reminder that offenses against the community would be publicly punished. The building also held the living quarters for the judge and other members of the body known as the Council, which included those with experience in management and administration to run the affairs of the colony. In the earliest days, when Master Sergeant Charles Mitford had taken charge of the dazed and frightened First Drop colonists, he had kept records on pieces of slate with chalk. Now the admin building posted weekly work rosters and the community services that all were required to perform. (It still shocked Kris to see Judge Iri washing dishes, and he did it more cheerfully than many.) Ex-Admiral Ray Scott had elected to live in a small room behind his office in the hangar complex. It was he, disguised as a Catteni Drassi, who had insisted that the Victims be rescued from the fate to which the Eosi had condemned them: working until they died as mindless slaves in the appalling conditions that existed in the mines, quarries, and fields. There had been no way that those of his crew who had been among the first dropped on Botany would have allowed those battered people to be transported to their deaths. Considering the excitements of the day, the unloading of the victims of the Eosian mind-wipe experiment, which had occupied a good third of Botany's settlers, the field was now abnormally quiet, peaceful. Kris sighed and Zainal gave her a fond look. ZAINAL? KRIS? Chuck Mitford's parade ground voice reached their ears over the muted sounds that Baby was making. They looked back to the hangar and saw Chuck urgently waving to them. He was talking to someone who had just pulled up in a runabout. Oh, now what? The testy demand left Kris' mouth before she could suppress it. She was tired and she earnestly desired a shower and a long sleep. She had even arranged with the crche to keep Zane overnight since she knew herself to be stretched to the limit after the tense voyage home and the stress of landing all the pitiful mind-wiped people. We'd better see, Zainal said, taking her hand in his big one and pressing it encouragingly. Don't you ever get tired and just have too much, Zainal? This was one of those moments when his equanimity bordered on the unforgivable. Yes, but it passes, he said, leading her to where Chuck Mitford waited for them with the passenger of the runabout. It wasn't a long walk but long enough for Kris to get her irritation and impatience under control. If Zainal could hack it, so could she. But when would she get a shower? She

stank! Well, maybe her body odor would encourage whoever this was to shorten their errand. Whats up, sarge? she asked, noticing that he was talking to a woman she vaguely recognized from the Fourth Drop: as much because she managed to look elegant in the basic Catteni coverall. Kris wondered if shed taken it in at crucial spots to make it look so fashionable. She was fleetingly envious of such expertise. Dorothy Dwardie whos heading the psychology team needs some of your time, and right now, Chuck said and had the grace to add, though Id guess another meetings the last thing you two need right now. It is, Kris said without thinking but she smiled at the psychologist to take the sting out of her candor. It is important? And Zainals question was more statement than query. Yes, it is, quite urgent, Dorothy said with an apologetic smile. We need to know more about that mind-probe before we can proceed with any sort of effective or therapeutic treatment. Whynt you use the small office? Chuck said, gesturing to that end of the immense hangar. Zainal squeezed Kris hand and murmured: This wont take long. I know very little about the probe. I was hoping youd know something, if only the history of its use among your people, Dorothy said ruefully and then looked about for a place to park the runabout. Ill take care of it for you, Chuck said so helpfully that Kris smothered a grin. Dorothy Dwardie gave him a warm smile for his offer. Weve had a bit of outrageous luck, she said as they walked to the right-hand side of the enormous hangar where other small offices had been constructed. We could use some, Kris agreed, struggling for amiability. Indeed we could, though I must say that hijacking all those poor people out from under Eosi domination is certainly their good luck. And you deserve a lot of credit for that act of kindness. What she didnt say rang loud and clear to Kris. There were some who werent sure she and Zainal deserved any credit? As well for them that Ray Scott had loudly declared that he took full responsibility for the decision to save the damaged Humans so no one could blame that on Zainal or her. Actually the guilty were the Eosi but too many people failed to make a distinction between overlord and underling. Kris mood swung back to negative again. But until we and Dorothys hand on her chest meant all the psychologists and psychiatrists on Botany who would now take charge of the mind-wiped, understand as much as possible about the mechanismah, here we are and she opened the door to the small office and automatically fumbled for a light switch on the wall. Kris had seen the cord and pulled it. OhI suppose Ill get used to it in time, Dorothy said with an apologetic grin. Youre Fourth Drop, arent you? Kris replied as neutrally as possible while Zainal closed the door behind them. There were several desks against the long stone wall but a table and chairs made an appropriate conference spot by the wide window. There was nothing but darkness outside, since the hangar faced south and there were no habitations yet beyond the field. You said you had a bit of outrageous luck.? Kris asked when they were seated. Yes, not everyone in the group you brought had been mind-wiped. Certainly the Deskis, Rugs, and Turs werent, Kris said. Nor all the Humans, Dorothy said, smiling over such a minor triumph. They werent? Kris asked, exchanging surprised glances with Zainal. Yes, some faked the vacuity of the mindless. Faked it? Dorothy smiled more brightly. Clever of them, actually, and they got away with it because those in charge werent keeping track of who had beendone. Kris let out a long whistle. All us Human look alike to Eosi? Proves, though, doesnt it, that the Eosi arent all that smart after all. Clever of us Humans to run the scam. Theyre also able to give us names for many of the people who no longer remember who they are. Dorothy gave a little shudder. Ive dealt with amnesia patients before, of course, and accident shock trauma, but this is on so much larger a scaleand complicated by not only emotional but also physical shock and injury. We have establishedthanks to Leon Danes work with injured Cattenithat there are more points of similarity than differences between our two species since both are bipedal, pentadactyl, and share many of the same external features, like eyes, ears, noses. We cant of course cross-fertilize, and to Kris surprise, Dorothy ducked her head to hide a flush. As well, Kris said dryly. Dorothy flashed her an apology and continued. Internally, though the Catteni have larger hearts, lungs, and intestinal arrangements, Leon says that the main difference is the density of the brain matter. Its also larger though similarly organized as ours are, as far as the position of the four major lobes is concerned. Leon was amazed at what damage a Catteni skull could take without permanent injury. I think, and she paused, frowning slightly at what she did not voice, that the initial injuries to the prisoners were attempts to recalibrate the instrument to human brains. Initial injuries? Kris asked. Yes, and Dorothy seemed to wish to get over this topic very quickly, though they would have been dead before their nervous systems could register much. Oh? Yes, and leave it at that, Kris, Dorothy went on briskly. Will Seissmann should not dwell on the details although he seems to want to a part of his trauma. Will Seissmann? Kris asked. Yes, he and Dr. Ansible. Dr. Ansible? Kris shot bolt upright. But hes was, rather at the observatory. Only I think he was away on some sort of a conference when the Catteni took Denver. Yes, he was and took refuge at Stamford, Dorothy replied, nodding. He tried to argue others he knew

to follow Wills example. I dont know whether or not the dogmatic scientist has an innate martyr complex but only a few would resort to the trick to save themselves. She broke off with a sigh. At any rate, we are able to put names to most of the Victims. But I need to know whatever details you may have, Zainal. They will be so helpful in correcting the traumaif, indeed, we can.Zainal shook his head. I know little about such Eosi devices. Then his expression changed into what Kris privately termed his Catteni look, cold, impassive, shuttered. I do knowit is part of the Catteni historythat they have a device that increases and measures intelligence.Oh? Dorothy leaned forward across the table in her eagerness. Then it could possibly extract information, too?Zainal blinked and his expression altered to a less forbidding one. He gave a slight smile. It would seem likely since I only know of the one device. The Eosi used it on the primitive Catteni to make them useful as hosts.Really? Dorothys expression was intensely eager as she leaned forward, encouraging Zainal to elaborate.Yes, really. Roughly two thousand years ago, the Eosi discovered Catten and its inhabitants. We were little more than animals, a fact the Eosi never let us forget. About a thousand years ago, my family started keeping its records for our ancestor was one of the first hundred to havehis brains stimulated by the device. Each family keeps its own recordshow many males it has delivered to the Eosi as hosts and details of children and matings.A thousand, two thousand years to develop into a space-going race? Thats impressive, Dorothy said.Humans did it without such assistance and that impresses me, Zainal said with an odd laugh. But thats how the Emassi were developed. To serve the Eosi.They didnt use the mind thingummy on the Drassi? Kris asked.To a lesser degree, Zainal replied and turned to Dorothy. There are three levels of Catteni nowEmassi, and he touched his chest, Drassi who are good at following orders but have little initiative or ambition: some were rejected for the Emassi ranks, but are able to be more than Drassiship captains and troop leaders. Then therere the Rassi, who were left as they are.Rassi? Kris echoed in surprise. Never heard of them.They do not leave Catten and are as we all were when the Eosi found us.So you, as a species, did not evolve by yourselves? But had your intelligence stimulated? Dorothy asked. She turned to Kris. The Eosi evidently never heard of the Prime Directive.Kris giggled. A psychologist who was a Trekkie?The Prime Directive means an advanced culture is not supposed to interfere with the natural evolution of another species or culture, Kris explained to Zainal.The anthropologists will have a field day with this, Dorothy added, jotting down another note. Was oneapplication sufficient to sustain the higher level of intelligence? she asked Zainal.He shrugged. I do not know that. Abruptly his expression again changed to his Catteni look, impassive, expressionless, shuttered. When I had my full growth, I had to be presented to the Eosi, to see if I was acceptable as a host. And what training I should be given.And? Dorothy prompted him when he paused.I was passed, and I was to be trained to pilot spaceships. Then his grin became devilish and his Catteni look completely disappeared. My father and uncles had worried that Eosi would find me too curious and unacceptable.Too curious? Why would that make you unacceptable? Dorothy asked.Eosi tell Emassi what they need to know. That is all they are supposed to know.Before you start training? Surely you had basic schooling? Dorothy asked, surprised.Zainal gave a snort. Emassi are trained, not schooled.But didnt you learn to read, write, and figure before you were fourteen? Dorothy was having difficulty with this concept. Surely youve had to learn mathematics to pilot spaceships?Zainal nodded. Emassi males are taught that much by their fathers He grimaced.The hard way? Kris said, miming the use of a force whip.Yes, the hard way. One tends to pay strict attention to such lessons.And yet you were curious enough to want to know more? Dorothy asked.Because it was forbidden, Zainal said, again with the twinkle in his eye. He must have been a handful as a youngster. Kris was also immensely relieved that his intelligence, which she suspected was a lot higher than hers, was natural, rather than artificially stimulated.So the device assessed you. Can you give me any description of it?Zainal looked down at his clasped hands as he organized his response. I was taken into a very large white room with a big chair in the center and two Eosi, one at a control desk. I was strapped into the chair and then the device came down out of the ceiling to cover my head.Could you see what it looked like? Dorothy asked, and Kris realized how eagerly she awaited details.Zainal shrugged. A large shape, and he made a bell form with both hands, with many wires attached to it and dials.It covered your head or just your face?My head down to my shoulders. It was heavy.Did you see any blue lights? Dorothy asked, scribbling again.I saw nothing.And the sensations? What were they like? She turned to Kris as Zainal once again considered his answer. Were trying to establish if any invasive probe is used: Needles or possibly electrical shock. We need to know whether the brain itself has been entered and damaged: whether or not there has been physical damagerather than just memory, emotional, and fact erasures.There arent any scars on the Victims? Kris asked, and Dorothy shook her head.Not visible ones, certainly. Which is why Zainals recollection is so vital to us.Like electricity, Zainal

said, putting his hands to his temples and moving them up to the top of his broad skull. And here, and he touched the base of his cranium. But no blood. No scar. Oh, yes, that's interesting, very interesting, and Dorothy wrote hastily for a minute. No pain in the temples? Where? Zainal asked. Here, and Kris touched the points. Oh. Not pain, pressure. Isn't that where lobotomies are done? Kris apprehensively asked Dorothy. She nodded. Anywhere else? Pressure or pain or odd sensations? I'm trying to discover just which areas might have been touched by this device. If they coincide with what factual, emotional, and memory centers humans have, she added as an aside to Kris. There are more parallels than you might guess. A sort of stabbing, very quick, to the and Zainal put his hand to the top of his head, inside of my head. Quite possibly a general stimulation, Dorothy murmured. Then, with a kind smile, went on. So you were assessed and passed. Then what happened? I was told who to report to for training. Then he grinned. I know that my uncles were disappointed that I was acceptable. My father was relieved. More glory for our branch of the family. How old are you now? Dorothy asked, a question which Kris had never bothered to ask. Zainal hesitated and then with a grin and a shrug, Thirty-five. I have been exploring this galaxy for sixteen years. Sixteen? Kris was surprised. That would make only four years of formal training? Of any sort? Dorothy asked, surprised. Three. I have been here two years now. Two Catteni years. And he grinned at Kris. Pilot training is all you had? I learned what I needed to know to do the job which the Eosi ordered for me. I worked hard and learned well, Zainal said with a touch of pride. Amazing, Dorothy murmured as she made more notes. But you know a lot about a lot of things, Kris protested. Zainal shrugged. Once I am officially a pilot, and he gave Kris a mischievous look out of the corner of his eye, it was no longer wrong for me to learn what I wish so long as I pilot well. The Eosi, and his face slid briefly into Catteni impassivity again, require their hosts to have been many places and seen many things. Then you don't have any knowledge about your own body? No biology? Dorothy asked. Bi-o-lo-gy? Zainal repeated. Dorothy explained, and he laughed. As long as my body does what I need it to do, I do not ask how it does it. Both Dorothy and Kris smiled. When I compare what our astronauts went through to qualify as space pilots and Dorothy raised one hand in amazement. The earliest aviators flew by the seat of their pants, Kris remarked. Seat of their pants? Zainal asked, frowning so Dorothy and Kris took turns explaining the meaning. I did that, too, when training did not cover all I needed to know. So I made those who build the spacecraft show me how everything worked, Zainal said. And those engineers were also trained by families who were engineers? Dorothy asked, and Zainal nodded. Very restrictive educational system. Only a need to know. However did they manage? The Eosi do the manage part, Zainal said in a caustic tone. Emassi follow orders just like Drassi and even the Rassi. It's amazing even the Emassi can do what they do, Kris remarked, regarding Zainal with even more respect. Yes, it is, Dorothy agreed, and we tend to rely on the educational processor the genetic heritage, and she gave Kris a look. Depending on which school of thought you adhere to. She gave another sigh and then said more briskly, including Kris, Are there any special aptitudes which Catteni have which Humans do not? For example, the way the Deski can climb vertically and have extraordinary hearing? Night vision, Zainal said promptly. Our hearing is more acute but not as good as the Deski. We can last longer eating poor food or is that body difference, not brain? Metabolic differences certainly, Dorothy said, having written eye and ear on her pad. Kris could read such short words backwards. Then the psychologist spent a moment doodling. Could you possibly draw me a sketch of the device used on you? She turned to Kris in explanation. Those that got a good look at it can't talk, and those who can talk didn't see it. Zainal's very good at drawing devices, Kris said, with a touch of pride. Yes, and Zainal complied, using the pen with the quick, deft strokes that Kris had seen him use in delineating the mechanicals. There! Dorothy regarded the neat sketch and hummed under her breath. Hmm, yes, well it looks like something an evil scientist would create. She sighed. Considering who the Eosi chose to brain-scan, they seem to have been on an information hunt. But why? Their level of technology is so much more sophisticated than ours. Or were they just trying to strip minds that could possibly help foment riot and rebellion? Or maybe reduce humans to the level of your Rassi? Zainal made a guttural noise and his smile, while it did not touch his eyes, was evil. Ray Scott said that he recognized some of the people as scientists. So the Eosi are looking for information. If they were wiping minds to make you like Drassi, they would start with children and block learning. He grinned. The Eosi look for ideas. They have had very few new ones over the past hundred or so years. Really? Dorothy remarked encouragingly. Maybe they need to stimulate their own brains, Kris said. Or would it work on them? Zainal shrugged. Will Seissmann and Dr. Ansible felt that the Eosi were taking a vicious revenge on humans by destroying minds in a wholesale fashion, Dorothy said in an expressionless voice. There seemed to be no reason to include some of the individuals TV reporters and anchor men and women. Really? Who? Kris asked

in astonishment. Who? Anchor men and women? Zainal didnt understand the term. Oh, he said, when Kris explained, and added, information would be the first thing Eosi want to control. All your satellites and communication networks were destroyed in the initial phase of the invasion. Did you know they were choosing Earth? Dorothy asked. Zainal shook his head with a rueful grin. I am exploring on the far side of this galaxy. I had stopped at Barevi for supplies and fuel when And then he shrugged as if both women knew his history from then on. Zainal picked a fight, Kris said, answering the querying look on Dorothys mobile face, killed a Drassi and went on the lam. I saw his flitter crash and went to see whom the Catteni were after this time. I had no idea what I was rescuing. If I had, and she gave Zainal a mock dirty look, I might have thrown him to the wolves. Then I decided Id better get him back to Barevi. Only we both got caught in one of those gassings the Catteni spray to quell rebellion. Kris knew that Dorothy would be familiar with that tactic which was often used on Earth. And ended up here on Botany. For which many of us are exceedingly grateful, Dorothy said sincerely. Will, Dr. Ansible, and a former TV reporter, Jane O'Hanlon, were able to bring us up to date with the situation on Earth, by the way. Which I can give you without benefit of sponsors or commercials, Dorothy said in a droll tone of voice. I think there was probably more than one reason for the Eosi to resort to extracting information from human beings. Not only have we here on Botany produced a new wrench in the works with the Bubble but resistance is increasing on Earth despite their attempts to control or contain it. I gather that there will be an effort made to support activities on Earth now that there are three spaceships at our disposal? And she looked at Zainal for comment. We havent heard of any, Kris said and added yet. Zainal had been so busy getting pictorial proof to send the Farmers that they hadnt discussed any future plans. He shrugged. Three ships are too few against as many as the Eosi have. Not even for a teensy-weensy hit, and Dorothy left a very tiny space between her forefinger and thumb by way of illustration, just to serve notice on the Eosi? I think weve just done that, Kris said with a droll grin. They will try to penetrate the Bubble, Zainal said. They will have to figure out what it is and how it is maintained. That will annoy them seriously. And he was patently delighted. We must hope that it remains. The Eosi have other weapons that destroy planets. Do they? And Kris felt a twinge of fear under her bravado. If they cannot possess, they do not leave it for others to have. Oh! Kris had no flippant reply for that. Does the Council know? Dorothy asked, concerned. I will tell them, Zainal said, nodding solemnly. Well, then, thats all I can bother you with, Dorothy said, beginning to gather up her notes. Then she paused, tilting her head at Zainal. You dont have any idea where the Eosi came from, do you? When Zainal shook his head, she managed a self-conscious laugh. From a galaxy far, far away? Kris chuckled, delighted that Dorothy was not only Trek oriented, but could also quote from Star Wars. Thank you, Zainal. Youve given me valuable information. I have? Dorothy smiled. More than you might think. I do apologize for besieging you after what has been a very difficult day but we needed this input. She held up the notes. We can design appropriate treatment now. In so far as our resources permit, that is. Zainal opened the door, and they stepped into a moonlit night. Over here, Dorothy, Chuck said, flipping on the runabouts light. Oh, thank you, and thank you again, Zainal, Kris. She hurried over to the little vehicle, murmuring her thanks to Mitford before she turned it northward. Ive one of the flatbeds and theres room on the boxes for you two to ride back to your place, Chuck said. Dont want any night crawlers grabbing you. Thanks, Chuck, Kris said, only too grateful for both the offer and the sentiment. She was really dragging with weariness right now. Sitting down for a spell had not been as good an idea as it had seemed. It only emphasized her fatigue. Over here, and Chuck reached the flatbed and turned on its light to guide them. Kris was already climbing on the cargo before she realized that the boxes didnt resemble anything she had purchased on Barevi. Whats all this, sarge? She couldnt see the printed labels in the dim light. Its the books we found, Zainal astonished her by saying. Books? Yes, books, Zainal repeated calmly. Ray saw them. As trading captain of the KDI, I thought such paper stuff would be good for packing material. He grinned. The Drassi did not argue, glad to be rid of the stuff. But there must be fifty boxes here? Theyre not all the same book, are they? Nope, Chuck said. Catteni looted libraries, too. Weve got some former librarians just drooling to catalog what we managed to liberate. This is only part of what we unloaded. Our kids wont grow up ignorant, though they might have some rather interesting gaps in their education. Books, Kris said and suddenly realized that she had missed books certainly the availability of books. Wow! That was a real coup. Books? Zainal asked. Schoolbooks? His tone was sly though Kris could not see his expression in the dim light. Bi-ol-o-gy? Dont know yet, Chuck said, though thats a possibility. Why? Zainal has just acquired a need to know, Kris replied drolly. Oh, well, shed had good grades in biology, though just how much human biology would expand Zainals understanding of how his body worked was a moot point. And she was too tired to inquire. All three were silent for the rest of the

journey. Once Zainal closed the door behind them, Kris gave up the notion of a shower as being too much work and a ruse to keep her from getting horizontal, and asleep, as soon as she could make it to the bed. She did take her boots off, as Zainal was doing, but that was all she managed. THE K-CLASS SHIP, WHICH ARRIVED AT BAY forty-five to collect a shipment of slaves for an ice planets mining operation, was furious to discover that someone else had taken them. The Drassi lodged a protest about that, and then another one that he had been forced to wait eight days before sufficient slaves could be assembled. So insignificant a report went unread. The costs submitted against a ship with a KDI identification code were duly registered although it was later noted that this ship had supposedly been listed as lost. The charges were paid and the anomaly forgotten. Chapter Two IT SHOULDNT HAVE SURPRISED KRIS THAT by the next afternoon many people were aware of the substance of their discussion with Dorothy Dwardie. Rumor circulated the settlement as fast as a Farmer orbiter. Fortunately, it worked more in favor of Zainal than against him. The Catteni were, however briefly, also seen as Victims of Eosian tactics, more to be pitied than feared. A quintet of anthropologists, while loudly deploring the forced evolution of the Catteni, requested most politely for Zainal to take some tests to evaluate his stimulated intelligence. Kris was furious and Zainal amused. In fact, Kris was so incensed that she was even mad at him for agreeing. They cannot do me any harm, Zainal said in his attempt to placate her. Its the whole idea of the thing as if you were no better than a laboratory mouse or rat or monkey, she said, pacing about the house while her mate and her son regarded her with surprise. They are also testing the Deski and the Rugarians. He grinned at her. I would like to know how I rate. How can they possibly evaluate you fairly? In the first place, she said, waving her arms about as she paced, lots of the questions require a similar cultural background and history and things youve never had a chance to study. So? Zainal reached out and stopped her mid-stride as she was going past him. You are annoyed for me? Or with me? he asked at his gentlest, a gleam in his yellow eyes. With them! The nerve, the consummate gall, and she tried to struggle out of his embrace. Sometimes, Kristin Bjornsen, you protect me when I do not need it, he said, smoothing her hair back from her face. As you would Zane. Nonsense, Kris snapped, trying to push him away. You dont know when to be insulted. I am insulted. For you. Zainal laughed and easily resisted her attempts to break free. It is difficult to insult an Emassi, he said. I think it is better for them to find out that I am very, very smart. It will solve other problems. That mild remark stopped her struggling. What problems? she demanded, suspicious. The ones I must solve. Which are? How to free us and he gestured himself and then to her, and your people from the Eosi. But we need the Farmers help for that and we have no idea when well have a response if any to that report you sent them. What are you planning, Zainal? This time you, too, must wait and see, he said, giving her a final squeeze before he released her. And she got no more out of him. He went off to the session with the anthropologists while she fumed and fretted as she did the household chores. She was not due for her shift until late afternoon. She couldnt even find satisfaction in taking care of Zane, which she usually enjoyed thoroughly. She all but pounced on Zainal when he returned a few hours later. Well? she demanded as soon as he entered the cabin. His grin was a partial reassurance but she insisted on details. They say I am very smart. At the top. How could they figure that out? What did they ask? How did you reply? Carefully, he said, pouring himself a cup of water. Thirsty work. Kris let out an explosive oh of total frustration. Youd drive a saint to drink. Saint? More of that God stuff? What sort of questions? She would not be diverted. Logic ones which I am well able to answer. Sorrell told me that they used some of the Mensa tests? That you would know what those are? Kris nodded, obliquely reassured. And? I passed, he said and then bent to lift the lid on the pot over the fire. We eat here tonight? Yes, its the stew you like. How high did you pass? Zainals grin was malicious. Very high. They were surprised and he paused to let his grin broaden, they were respectful. Well, its about time. He turned and put his arms about her, drawing her close to him so that he could look her in the eyes. One earns respect. It is not just given. But youve earned it twenty times over, Zainal, she said, not quite willing to be totally placated by his proximity but letting her arms creep around his neck. When I think of how lucky we were that you got dropped I was very lucky, he said, burrowing his head in her hair. Very lucky. They remained in that embrace, enjoying the simple pleasure of touching and being together until Zane, waking from his afternoon nap, disturbed their communion. So, what have you been planning in that devious stimulated Catteni mind of yours? Kris asked. I think we have to go to Earth, he said so casually that she nearly dropped her son. Just like that? Go to Earth? How? Why? Can you? Will they agree? It is safer right now than it will be he began, taking Zane from her to dandle on his knee, which had the boy chortling with delight, while she tasted the stew. Oh? The stew needed a pinch more salt, which she added. Yes, because it will take time for the Eosi to discover that the Victims did not get to the intended destination. They will also be thinking of a way to break

through the Bubble. They do not like such defenses. So? What good would a trip to Earth do? *Revue de presse* A good read, full of interesting characters and space-opera action. *Locus* Another rousing episode McCaffrey continues to amaze. *Booklist* A saga of desperate courage and the desire for freedom. *Library Journal*