Cindy. "There's nothing logical about dying. And it is no more fit for a human being to die struggling than to die peacefully in bed. That's the logic of an egotistical warrior or of an insane revolutionary."

"You can believe what you want," said Thomas, "but anyhow, the main thing is that we have to get off this planet. We can either sit here and twiddle our thumbs, or we can do something about our predicament. And so here we are; we're doing something about our problem. But now here's the kid, who thinks of himself as a brave hero, who wants to slink back to the crash site and hide while waiting for someone else to rescue him."

"No, going back to the crash wouldn't mean that," countered Cindy. "But it would mean that we would not be charging out to fight a dragon we know nothing about. Rather it would be a much more rational method of dealing with our problem. And if a rescue ship doesn't come, at least we will have some time to think about--."

"About our deaths," interrupted Thomas. "No, sister, your idea isn't going to work. What's needed in this situation is some strong action which we're currently taking. As it is, the steps we've taken so far may not be enough. But it's the best we could have done."

"If we had followed my advice, we would probably have been rescued by now," said Don.

"Kid," said Thomas, "when they were handing out brains, they must have given you rocks. We weren't due at Fedlar for another five hours. Even saying that we were unconscious for a whole day -- and I can't buy that -- it would still take them around a
half a day for them to get any kind of a true search operation going. And then, where would they start? We hadn't been in radio communication since we took off, and I doubt that the communications officer got one off before we crashed. Without any idea where we are, it could be months before they would think to look here. And by that time they would probably give up looking."

"Yeah, but we're passengers and you're one of their employees; they have a responsibility to find us," said Don.

"They have some responsibility, but a lot of ships have been lost in space. This one would just be put down as another."

"They can't do that to us," said Don.

"Why not? Think you're something special kid?" asked Thomas. "Well, you're not and neither am I.

But come on now. This is enough bull. We've got to get going, or we'll die where we are now." Thomas adjusted his pack and began to descend the slope gingerly.

"Now, wait a minute," called Don after him.

Thomas stopped and turned his head to face the other two. "Since you want to be so stubborn, I'll let you go ahead and do what you want to do." He continued descending.

"Wait! We're coming too," cried Cindy as she ran to him while Don looked on dumbly.

"Well, then come on. Don't just stand there and gape, kid. Get your legs working and get over here with us."

With a disgusted motion of one who thinks the world is against him, Don shuffled to where Thomas stood.
"Now that we have a unanimous decision," said Thomas, "I propose that instead of wandering around, we follow this road down here to wherever these destroyed people came from. Is it agreed then?"

Both young people nodded their heads and the three continued down the slope. They reached the road and while passing the spot upon which the recent storm had rained destruction, Thomas noticed that not a trace of the event could be found. With the cloudless sky over his head and the parched dust beneath his feet, he found it hard to believe what he had seen earlier.

The trio continued their journey throughout the rest of the afternoon until the setting of the bright sun, bringing with it a black darkness broken only by the dim twilight of the dark sun, and forcing them to cease their efforts. With the night came the appearance of a brisk cold wind which blew through the survivors' pitiful efforts to keep warm. After a cold supper of strangely soggy food, the three huddled together and tried to sleep. After some time, Thomas resolved that he would get up and construct some type of shelter from the wind, no matter how crude.

It was as he was positioning the last pack into his newly-created barrier against the wind that he noticed a blinking light in the far distance. As he looked more intently he noticed that it seemed to come from a low mountain or hill. The light blinked in a synchronized fashion as if it were a type of code. While he watched he toyed with the notion of informing the others. Finally, though, he decided against raising possible false hopes. After a short time the light was extinguished. He waited for some time for it to reappear, but when it did not, he noted as care-
fully as he could exactly where it came from. Then, while
working on a method to divert the others from his suspicions, his
weary mind clicked itself off and he went to sleep.

Dawn brought a steady rain interspersed with thunder and
lightning. This storm, though, was much more peaceful than the
first one. However, unlike the other one, this deluge ceased to
quit or even diminish. Since they had no shelter and there was a
chance they might get away from the storm, Thomas proposed they
start going again. He saw a spark of rebellion in Don's eyes,
but the fires seemed to have been cooled by the steady precipita-
tion. He nodded a slight assent while a visibly worn-out Cindy
saw her's also. Then they began to trudge along their way, Thom-
as trying to remain oblivious to the rain and hopeful that the
others could do so as well.

Lunchtime came and passed by barely noticed. Thomas had con-
sidered asking the others' opinions, but the look on their faces
told the story. At least there are no questions about our specific
direction, he thought.

Towards evening the rain finally stopped, due more to the
natural forces of the planet than to any movement by the sur-
 vivors. For a short time Thomas could see the outlines of tall
hills far in the distance off to the sides with a smaller one
looming a closer distance in front of them. Then dusk fell ra-
pidly and ended any view of the landscape around them. Like the
night before, the dark sun maintained its position and cast a
unhappy light over the area. But the dark disc radiated no more
light than a sky full of stars. It was as he came to this con-
clusion that Thomas realized he could see no stars. He recalled that with the ceasing of the rain the clouds had moved away, possibly in search of other victims. But yet, though he could see the dim sun at its site just above the horizon, no stars were visible.

While they ate a tiny supper, Thomas pondered both the eerie occurrence above their heads and the flashing light of the night before. The more he examined the latter discovery the more convinced he became that it was a signal or a beacon. But he didn't understand why the sender would use such an indirect means of communication and how the sender knew where they were.

The answer to the puzzle, as Thomas saw it, lay among three possibilities. It could be just plain luck that a flash of light was heading their way. The light might only be a freak beam of light from the dim sun overhead somehow being reflected off a shiny rock in such a way that it appeared to flash. But he really couldn't swallow the probability of the first possibility.

The second possibility was that someone had discovered their or the wreck of their ship and for reasons of an unknown nature, the watchers had decided on an indirect means of communication.

The third possibility had implications which Thomas found frightening. The thought that anyone would or even could harness a black hole for a purpose of their own was terrifying to him. In theory the hole could be "led on leash" but manipulated? He could only wonder about the power that could control a black hole and a planet at the same time.

He had scarcely noticed it while he was thinking, but like the night before, dusk brought with it a dank cold wind which
chilled their dreams of sleep.

The others somehow dropped off to sleep, their overwhelming weariness overcoming the cold. But Thomas held out against the same exhaustion in the hope of seeing the light again. Despite the wind, a dull stillness filled the air as he strained his eyes looking for a pulsing illumination he hoped would be there. After some minutes he saw it and stared at it with growing fascination. As he watched it flicker on and off in a strange and complex, yet seemingly definite pattern, he imagined that it was calling him to its source. The more he watched the more he disliked spending another uncomfortable night out in the open on the alien planet's surface. As he stared he dreamed about a honey village surrounded by farms with shepherds on the hills around tending to the light. The beacon seemed to move towards him and his calculations of the gap of the distance became smaller and smaller with each passing minute. He watched the light and dreamed of a warm bed, or, indeed, only a bed. He watched and seemed to see the darkened surroundings infused with a redness as though they were imbued with infrared sources and he was wearing infrared glasses. His resolve became firmly ignited by the flashing light and he began preparations to put his newly-formed plan into effect.

He collected the packs and set them in position so that they could be picked up. Behind his back Thomas heard moving about, and he knew what would come next.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" Don asked. "You trying to freeze us?"
"We've got to go to the light," Thomas said, hardly knowing what he meant.

"What light?" asked Don.

"The light over there," Thomas pointed in the direction of the beacon.

"Well, so it's -- wait a minute, wait a minute. We're not going to go running around on a wild goose chase at this time --." "What's going on, dear?" asked a sleepy Cindy.

"This fool captain wants to go out playing hero again," replied Don. "Wants us to go over to that light over there." Don indicated the direction.

Thomas saw Cindy's eyes grow big. "Light. There's a light?" she queried.

"Yes," replied Thomas, "it's coming from a village filled with people. A race of higher beings. They're waiting for us." He felt the words dribble out of his mouth, unsure how many were his own hopes and how many were inspired by the light.

"How do you know that?" asked Cindy as her eyes narrowed.

"Because it's true," answered Don.

Thomas was shocked somewhat out of his trance by Don's words and the dull look on his face. Somewhere in his mind he wondered if his own face looked the same. Then his thoughts were clouded over again by the light and the urgency of going to it.

"Don, Captain Thomas, what's happened to you? You're acting as if you've been hypnotized," said Cindy.

"We must go to the light," said Thomas and Don in unison. Mechanically, they put on their packs and set out towards the
light.

"But --," began Cindy.

Thomas heard her call, but his feet continued their forward progress and headed not his thoughts. Even the twinkling light, though, could not stop relief from flooding his mind when he heard the footsteps of Cindy behind him and her pleading with him to stop. But he could not stop; some other power guided his body tonight.

The hours of night swept past, and still Thomas felt compelled to continue on, the light's hold on him undiminished. With what little control he had left he managed to turn his head and look at Don and Cindy each in turn. Don still had a blank look on his face and his eyes were riveted on the light before them. Cindy's eyes were clear, but bloodshot from the exertion. Indeed, her entire appearance with her hair disheveled, her face red, and the stumbling gait with which she walked told the tale of her almost complete exhaustion.

It seemed strange to Thomas that he didn't notice it before, that they were closing in on the source of the light. It was at dawn, as he felt the strange sensation of one coming out of a long sleep, that they finally found the origin of the light which had shone like a star.

As the bright sun rose to add an ever increasing glow to the planet's landscape, the true nature of the light and the low hill was revealed.

A many-turreted castle stood on a low mound covered with moss. Atop one of the towers was a large window through which a
huge chandelier shone. An old crone dressed in a black robe passed a narrow board in front of the light at certain intervals.

The castle seemed to be a blend of many different styles and architectures. The leaning stance of most of the turrets and the apparent random conception of the general plan gave it an eerie look, so thought Thomas.

In front of the castle stood the next object to occupy Thomas' attention: a long line of people standing in front of the castle's gigantic iron door like an army in formation before its commanding general. The people were in their adolescence or above and were dressed alike in black robes similar to the one the old woman near the light was wearing. Thomas noticed that the people stared at the approaching trio expectantly.

An old woman, who looked even more aged than the one near the light, seemed to be the leader. Thomas, now fully in command of himself, saw his duty and made the introductions.

"I'm Captain Martin Thomas and these are Donald and Cynthia Parks. My ship crashed on your planet and we are the only survivors."

"I know who you are and why you are here," said the old woman with a queer foreign-sounding accent. "My name is Granny and this is my family." She turned towards the other people lined up behind her and announced their names.

"This is my husband, Grandad," she pointed to a wizened, old man, who cringed at Granny's attention on him. He shifted on his feet nervously and his hands shook even though they were clasped behind him.
"My eldest son, Ronald." This time a much younger man with long, blond hair was indicated. The young man was much more confident of himself and actually appeared to enjoy Granny's harsh glance at him. Thomas thought he carried his broad, muscular body with pride.

The next family member to be introduced was a small, young girl with long, black hair, who like Grandad, wilted under Granny's piercing look.

"My youngest daughter, Jody."

A young man with long, dark hair was next in line. He was not as self-assured as Ronald, but neither was he as nervous as Grandad or Jody. His thin face was lit by a smile.

"Eric, my youngest son."

He appeared about to say something, hesitated, and then went ahead and spoke. "I guess I'll play this game, Granny."

Thomas was surprised by the effect the meaningless words had on Granny. First a look of shock, and then anger swept into Granny's face. Purple rage colored the pale whiteness of her face and hands. She spoke with anger and authority mixed together in her voice.

"Eric, you were not given permission to speak."

Thomas saw the instantaneous effect her words had on Eric. The smile disappeared and was replaced by a hurt-looking frown. He lowered his head and stared at the ground.

Granny appeared completely untouched by this act of sorrow. She moved, businesslike, along with her introductions. Next a man with short, wavy, grey hair was introduced. This man was most noticeably different from the others by his sense of distinction.
about him. He also carried a hint of the dramatic.

"Here is my nephew, Richard."

Finally, Granny came to the end of the line. The last person was a gnarled, old woman, who nonetheless had a child-like and innocent expression on her face. Her hands clutched a plain doll.

"My younger sister, Patricia."

Her introductions concluded, Granny abruptly turned and headed for the door to the castle. Over her shoulder she bade everyone to follow.

Thomas had meant to ask her about the possibility of some way off the planet, but had been too nonplussed by the strange greeting of her family to broach the subject with Granny. Now, though, he regained his composure and hurried to keep pace with Granny in order to pose his question. The other two followed behind him, while the rest of the family brought up the rear of the odd parade.

But by the time he had caught up with Granny, who had already entered the castle, Thomas found it difficult for his eyes to adjust quickly from the bright dawn outside to the gloom of the castle's interior. When his eyes had adjusted, they gazed on a museum of terror. The room in which the trio stood formed the lobby of the castle. Numerous objects of every shape and size and all suggesting of cruelty were strewn throughout the area. The objects were of both earthly and alien nature. In the far corner of another room adjoining onto the lobby stood a giant mummy case with a crude sketch of a nude girl on the front. Tho-
mas' memory, affected by the presence of the torture devices, disclosed that the mummy case was actually an iron maiden, similar to the one Countess Barthory used to dispatch six hundred girls to their deaths centuries ago. Next to the iron maiden was a rack. As Thomas gazed at it, he seemed to hear the agonized screams of one of its victims.

He saw that Granny had not lingered with the survivors to stare at the objects, but had instead climbed to the top of a large, winding staircase from which she spoke.

"You will have time for looking later. Come, your rooms are ready."

She continued into a dark space on the other side of the top of the stairs and Thomas found himself having to speed up to catch her. The dark space behind the stairs turned out to be a long, narrow hall lined with mirrors on the walls which were interrupted regularly by massive dark doors. At the far end stood Granny waiting impatiently. When everyone had caught up with her, she indicated three rooms, and gave them instructions.

"These rooms will be yours. I shall leave it up to you as to who uses which. In the meantime breakfast will be served. Follow me."

She turned to go, but Thomas called out after her.

"Wait...uh, Granny. We're not here for a social visit, but to find a way off this planet."

She stopped and looked at him with disapproval. "You are here," she said, "as a result of my good will, and for another consideration which is being taken care of presently."
"As far as leaving, that will wait. You are here as a part of a larger, overall plan, and when the proper conditions are filled to my satisfaction, then you may leave. But not before."

"I don't care anything about your plan," Thomas said. "All I know is that it is my duty to get off this planet and give out the warning about the blac -- about a dangerous situation near this planet."

"Breakfast is waiting," said Granny as she continued on down the hall with her family following behind her like a pack of dogs being led by their master.

"And to that end," he called in a louder voice, "I intend to seize any opportunity I find to escape."

But his outburst had no effect and Granny and her family soon strode out of sight. Then Thomas saw Don leading Cindy past him, heading in the same direction.

"Where do you think you're going?" he asked.

"To breakfast. Where do you think?" came Don's reply.

"Now, look, kid, I think we'd better take a closer look at this situation before we do anything. There's something funny going on here."

"There sure is," replied Don, "you're trying to deprive your passengers of breakfast. Maybe you're not hungry, but after that long hike without eating, Cindy and I are both hungry and bushed."

"But I don't like what's going on here," Thomas said.

"I don't care what you like," said Don. "Come along, Cindy."

Thomas opened his mouth to voice another protest, but they had already scampered out of sight.
"Damn kid," was all he said as he began to follow them.

Thomas strode down the winding staircase and found himself at a loss as to where to go. But then the old crone, whom the trio had seen passing the board over the light, appeared and with an outstretched arm indicated a direction. With this bare information, he found another dark hallway and followed it until it entered a large, moderately lit room where the family and the other survivors were.

He was assigned by the old crone, who had magically reappeared, to a chair at a long, oblong table next to where Cindy and Don sat. As he took his seat, he examined the room.

The setting was like a scene out of the Middle Ages. With the exception of the family's dress, everything in the room was an exact replica of an object from the Middle Ages. Tapestries with battle scenes on them hung on the stone walls, while on the floor lay animal skins. Torches placed in sockets on the wall provided the room's illumination. The table at which they were seated was constructed out of rough-hewn oak.

As Thomas looked around, some members of the family were engaged in a boisterous argument over who was the best dressed. He could not see the point of it since all of the members of the family were dressed in the same black robes. He concluded that the argument was merely a game among the members of the family.

As he looked on, the contest seemed about to come to a close when Patricia picked up a mug of ale and threw it at Ronald. The missile was on target and the rest of the family members laughed with glee at the sight.
From Thomas' vantage point it was clear that Ronald was the only family member not amused. His face turned a deep red and his hands clenched together so hard the fingers turned white. When he finally spoke, it was in a voice heavy with sarcasm.

"You thought that little stunt was funny, didn't you? Well, let me show you something even funnier, bitch."

Thomas watched with growing alarm as the grim Ronald got up and walked over to a still-amused Patricia. His powerful hands grabbed Patricia's fingers and forced them near her mouth. Finding trouble getting them to go in, he hit her brutally until she became groggy. Then, he inserted her fingers inside her mouth with one hand, and used the other to push her jaws up and down with increasing speed. As the blood flowed, she tried to scream, but gagged on her own bloody fingers.

While this grisly scene was going on, Thomas looked at Granny and noticed that she looked not in the least perturbed that one of the boys was forcing her sister to eat her own fingers. But as he continued watching, the horrible acts of Ronald sickened him and ignited a growing rage within him. Finally, he threw caution to the winds, and charged at Ronald. When he reached the young man who was gloating over his triumph, Thomas wrestled Patricia away from him and belted a surprised Ronald across the face.

Patricia lay where she had fallen, weeping a little and massaging her mashed fingers. Thomas moved to assist her, but she resisted and gave him a look of disapproval.

"It's not fair," cried Ronald. "It was my role and he ruined
it, Granny." Thomas watched as Ronald pleaded his case like a lawyer in a courtroom. "Punish him, Granny. Punish him. He ruined part of the game. Punish him, Granny!"

Thomas glanced at her as she said imperiously, "I never interfere in my children's games." As he watched in wonderment, she got up out of her chair and strode out of the room, as if to avoid further questioning.

"If Granny won't punish you, then I will," said Ronald. "But not now. I'll fix you later." He strode angrily out of the room.

"Now you're in trouble," said Eric. "Ronald's mad and he's mean when he's mad. You'd better watch out for Ronald, or he'll come and fix you good," he laughed gaily and the rest of the family laughed along with him.

"This is no laughing matter," said Thomas. "A woman was being hurt, yet you did nothing except sit there and watch. Why?"

"It was the game, and we all followed the rules -- except you," said Eric.

"What do you mean a game? What is this game? Is it the same as what Ronald was saying?" Thomas asked.

"It's just," Eric began and then looked around at the rest of the family's faces, "something that we do."

"Something that you do?" said Thomas. "And what you like to do is to watch the sufferings of others?"

"Yes, it is the game and we enjoy it," said Eric.

"You enjoy the sufferings of others? What kind of barbarians are you?" asked Cindy.

"Oh, no, my dear lady, we are not barbarians at all," said
Richard. "We are highly intelligent rational beings who perfectly understand their internal essence. Instead of letting childish rules of conduct hinder our emotional well-being, we prefer a much better method, which by the way, I happened to have had a part in its development."

"You're saying that this game is better than laws and moral codes?" asked Cindy.

"Why, yes. It's obvious."

"It's not obvious to me," said Thomas.

"Well, it takes a certain elementary level of intelligence to comprehend the ramifications of this exquisitely designed pastime, which by the way, I had a hand in developing." Richard smiled smugly.

"You did not!" interrupted Eric.

Richard whirled and faced Eric. "Hush, little child. I should have Granny wash out your mouth with soap for saying lies." He turned back towards Thomas and implored, "Don't listen to this impulsive little brat. I did indeed have a say in the formation of the game. In fact, I've already conceived of its successor, for, you see, I, not Granny, am the real --."

"All you've done with the game was to make up a scenario," said Eric.

"Yes, but it was a grand scenario," answered Richard, his eyes flashing. "It was the grandest scenario that we --."

"Children," came a shrill scream. Thomas whirled and saw that Granny had returned. "Children; it is time to go out and play."
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Obediently, the members of the family got out of their chairs as one and filed out of the room. Thomas noticed that Richard now acted meekly while under Granny's gaze. Granny followed the last of the family members out of the room and the trio were left alone.

"What do we do now, captain?" asked Don sarcastically.

"I don't know about you, but I seem to have lost my hunger," he said as Don and Cindy nodded their heads in assent. "But, perhaps while everyone is outside, we might look around here and see if we can find Granny's escape method, assuming she has one."

"Instead of doing that, why don't we just go and ask Granny?" said Don.

"I tried that once," said Thomas dryly.

"Well, just because you muffed it doesn't mean I will. If she doesn't answer when I ask nicely, then I'll get it out of her the other way."

"Kid, you do that, and you're going to have to answer to me. We're not on your home turf -- we're on someone else's. And from what we've seen they've got a few different rules."

"You may go outside for play too," interjected the easily recognizable voice of Granny.

"Say, uh --." began Don before Thomas clamped his hand over Don's mouth.

"We were thinking that we could go up to our rooms and rest awhile," said Thomas.

"You cannot, Mabel is cleaning them now," said Granny after a momentary hesitation in which her face took on a puzzled look.
"But we were never in them and you said they were ready," Thomas found it impossible to stifle Don's outburst.

"You will go outside now and play," repeated Granny.

"Now look here, you old bitch. I'm not one of your brats who you can lead around on a leash --."

"Don," said Thomas as he grabbed the other's arms.

"You leave me alone," Don said while he struggled to free himself. "As for you, hag, you're the ugliest bitch I've ever seen and when I get my hands around your scrawny neck, I'll --."

"Don!" said Thomas as he saw a look of rage enter Granny's eyes. He grabbed Don and led him away from the immediate vicinity of Granny.

"Take your friend outside. Do it at once, or face the consequences," thundered Granny and she turned to leave the room. Then she faced them again, "As for your leaving," she said in a quaking voice, "perhaps you shall become permanent guests of this family." She walked away, still quaking with rage.

Thomas quickly took a struggling Don out the door, threw a quick look around, and dashed into the shelter of the umbrella-like bottom of a large fir tree. Once there, he pinned Don's shoulders to the ground and held him there.

"What the hell did you think you were trying to do there, idiot!" Thomas said in a loud whisper.

"Let me go," coughed Don.

"Sure, kid. But before I let you go, we're going to get a few things straight, or, so help me kid, I'm going to break you into little pieces. As it is, it's all I can do to keep from
doing that right now.

"First, I do all the talking from now on. Understand?"
"I...uh."

Thomas squeezed hard on one of Don's vital points and it satisfied his bestial anger somewhat to watch Don struggling to free himself.

"Got that, kid? I do the talking?"
"Yes," it was barely a whisper.

"Now, second, I call the shots. Right, kid?"
"Uh...agh...yes," again the affirmative was barely more than a whisper.

"Okay, then," Thomas slowly extricated himself from Don.

"You know, kid, you wouldn't be too bad as far as surviving interrogation, if you weren't so damn foolish.

"Now, while we're out here, we may as well search around, though I doubt we'll find anything. But at least it's better than just standing around. Is your husband in condition to walk now?" he asked Cindy who was tending to Don.

"Yes, or he will be soon," answered Cindy. "Why did you have to hurt him like that? Did you feel that much need to inflate your ego that you had to beat up on a helpless young man?"

"I wouldn't exactly call your husband a 'helpless young man.' But he needed it. He needed someone to cut him down to size, to show him that he's not king of the world."

"Someday, captain," said Cindy as she looked directly into his eyes, "someday, someone is going to cut you down to size. And then you'll know how Don is feeling now."
He looked at her and had nothing to say. He got up and left the shelter of the tree and then waited as Cindy and a subdued Don pulled themselves out from under the tree also. Then, with him in the lead, the group began to wander around the outside of the castle, uncertain of what they were looking for.

After Thomas and the others had searched around the castle for a time, they came upon a large garden filled with many different types of vegetation. Inside its boundaries, conifers mingled with lush tropical plants. Trees with fruit on them stood side by side with those missing leaves.

As the three walked among the trees and bushes, they came to a clearing with large boulders arranged in a circle near its center. Atop one of the boulders sat Eric, lost in thought.

While Thomas and the others watched, Ronald crept stealthily up on Eric and placed a garrote around his neck. Thomas watched Ronald laugh fiendishly as Eric struggled against the increasing pressure that cut off his breath.

Finally, as Eric fell to the ground unconscious, Thomas broke out of his trance of horror and ran to the two family members. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Don do likewise. He reached the scene first and struck Ronald on the jaw while Don freed and revived Eric. A chorus of groans issued from behind a cluster of bushes on one side of the clearing.

The rest of the family walked out of the bushes with disappointment clearly shown on their faces. Ronald, who had been knocked down by Thomas' blow, got back to his feet and glowered.

"You spoiled it again," he shrieked, "but this time I'm
going to teach you a lesson. Show you what happens to those who don't play by the rules." He advanced menacingly.

"No!" said a hoarse voice. Everyone looked at a pale Eric. "They didn't know. You can't blame them," he pleaded with Ronald.

"They should have," said Ronald as he moved closer to Thomas. "Something has to be done about them. Otherwise, they'll mess up every part of the game from now on."

"I'll watch them to make sure they don't do that," volunteered Eric. "Remember what Granny said about them?"

Thomas saw Ronald's face lose some of its rage at the mention of Granny. He wondered what Granny had said about him and the others.

Ronald seemed to think over Eric's last statement awhile. Then, he said, "It'll be your responsibility, then, to watch them. If they violate the game again, you'll take the consequences."

"I'll take that responsibility," said Eric.

"Okay, then. But remember, little brother, if they do any least little violation, then you'll pay for it."

"Yes," said Eric as his hands moved nervously.

With that assurance, the rest of the family left the four in silence. Eric's fearful look was replaced by a defiant one as he watched them go.

"Well, now what do we do?" asked Don.

Eric turned and faced him. "What you're going to do now is stay out of trouble, and I'm going to make certain you do, both for your sake and mine."

"This game of yours mystifies me to no end," said Thomas.
"Just precisely what is it?"

"It keeps us busy when we're bored, and we're bored most of the time," answered Eric.

"But what is it really?" repeated Thomas.

"I can't tell you."

"Why not?"

"It's a part of the game."

"That blasted game stuff again," said Thomas in exasperation.

"Can't you just tell me what it is?"

"I've got to go now," said Eric, "but I'll be watching you."

He turned and dashed out of sight around some bushes before anyone could stop him.

Thomas looked in the direction in which Eric disappeared for a few minutes before calling to the others to resume their search for a means of escape off the planet. With him in the lead, Thomas guided the others in the direction of Eric's exit. The little group passed through more foliage for about a half hour before they came upon another clearing.

In the center of this clearing stood a stone bench on which lay two family members intently engaged with themselves. For a moment, Thomas thought that perhaps they had finally found something worthwhile going on on the planet. Maybe, he thought, these two members, at least, believed in real experiences instead of make-believe ones.

His hope was demolished minutes later as the two separated, their faces full of rage. Thomas recognized them as Richard and Jody. The two family members squared off as boxers in a ring.
Richard made an animal cry and rushed at Jody. Despite the added strength she appeared to gain by her anger, Jody could do little against Richard's charge. His fists hurtled forward and crashed against her face and body many times.

As Jody fell towards the ground in evident pain she grabbed a small, pointed rock and rammed it into the midsection of Richard. He howled in agony and fell to the ground. At the conclusion of their fight, they were reduced to throwing dirt into each other's eyes.

Thomas made a move forward, but a hand grabbed one of his arms.

"No, you may not interrupt the game again," said Eric's voice.

"But they're like animals out there!" exclaimed Thomas.

Eric turned to watch the scene where the two family members were now hurling curses along with the handfuls of dirt. "I'm surprised they still do this. They've done it so many times before I would think that they would be bored with this scenario by now. But I guess they're not, so..." he shrugged.

"But it's time for lunch," continued Eric, "and so we must go back to the castle. First, though, I must call them."

Thomas was amazed at the transformation that came over the two combatants after Eric's call. They immediately stopped their battle and dusted themselves off. The two, who had been locked in mortal combat only moments earlier, helped clean the other and even congratulated themselves on their performance. When they deemed themselves clean enough, they walked to where
Eric and the others stood without any apparent trace of violence whatsoever left in them.

Thomas let Eric lead the way back which he did happily as he pointed out any beautiful object or place in the garden that he numbered among his favorites. Thomas paid little heed to his comments and mentally noted that Eric seemed to enjoy communing with nature and beauty. Within his mind, Thomas pondered all of the events that they had seen so far during their stay on the planet, and tried to rationalize an explanation for them.

As the group neared the front door of the castle Thomas heard Don say caustically, "I bet I know why this heap looks like an architect's nightmare, what with all those different styles put into one building. I bet they got bored with their first design and started on yet another. Then, they got bored with that one too, and started on yet another. And so by the time they finished, they had all those different styles rolled into one mess."

This time Thomas was not angry at Don for his outburst. Rather, he was somewhat glad for his statement, for it offered an introduction to some of his conclusions, which Thomas had formulated, on the the reason for the existence of the family's game.

"You may be right, kid," he said, "I do think that the castle's design ties in with everything else we've seen on this planet. Perhaps it's a clue to this game they talk about. As far as I can see right now, this game seems to be something like our sporting events. Some psychologists say that the playing or
watching of sporting events helps relieve a person's inner tensions. They call this idea the catharsis theory. And I think that maybe this game the family plays runs along the lines of our sports. Except in the game, there seems to be no dividing line between participant and spectator.

None of the family members showed that anyone was aware of the remarks made, and continued on their way to the dining room with the others following.

There in the dining room sat the rest of the family, waiting. The young members sat on the sides of the table with Granny and Grandad at the opposite ends. Eric and the others entered and found some seats towards one end.

After everyone was seated, there came a hand signal from Granny. All of the family members, including Eric, stood and lined up with their faces to a wall opposite of the table. Mabel, the old woman with the light, appeared and removed one chair from the table. Thomas was puzzling over this act when, at a signal from Granny, the actual purpose became clear, though the underlying one remained hidden.

At Granny's signal, all of the members of the family ran back to the table trying to find a seat. After the scramble was over, Patricia was left without one.

"I don't have a seat," she whimpered.

"Patricia," said Granny from her seat which she had not left during the chase. "The game has judged that you are not worthy of lunch today. Go to your room."

"But, oh, all right," she said and slowly began to shuffle
towards the door.

Thomas tried to stand, but Eric held him firm. "Look, this may be a part of your game, but I'm sick of it. Either you do the gentlemanly thing and give her your seat, or I will," he said, though his inner voice told him to keep quiet and let the game run its course. But the sight of the child-like old woman leaving the room crying because of the heartless rules of the family's game inflamed his anger. The thought that probably the rest of the family was finding enjoyment in Patricia's suffering filled him with disgust. Against his better judgment, he resolved to interfere in the family's game. He tried harder to stand and found with satisfaction that Eric's hold on him grew weaker as he increased his effort.

"No, don't," cried Eric in a hoarse whisper.

"It's either you or me," replied Thomas as he intensified his efforts. Now he was almost in a standing position, though Eric still clung helplessly to him.

"But they'll punish me," Eric pleaded.

"If you don't do anything, I'm going to interfere again. As I recall it, that fellow over there, Ronald, said something to the effect that he would beat the hell out of you if I interrupted the game again. So, kid, you're stuck. Instead of meekly waiting for your punishment, why don't you take it like a man and do the gentlemanly thing."

Thomas watched the effects of his words on Eric's face. His color turned white, while his hands began to shake uncontrollably. But slowly he raised himself to his feet.
"Patricia," he stuttered, "you may have my seat."

Patricia turned around, a shocked look on her face. Granny's mouth fell open and her eyes bulged in disbelief.

"Eric!" Granny shrieked, "You have broken the rules. You have interrupted the game."

"Yes, Granny," Eric replied in a low voice which disappointed Thomas.

"You must be punished," Granny continued. "Too long have I been lenient with you, when before you broke the rules. And this is what comes of my attempts to help you. Come here for your punishment."

As Eric walked over to Granny, Thomas spoke.

"Wait; I was the one that pushed him into breaking your rules to this game. If you're going to punish anyone, you should punish me."

"I'll deal with you later," said Granny. "The history of my son's attempts to either disrupt the game with his ideas or to ignore it altogether suggests that it was not entirely your idea that he commit this gross infraction. Therefore, he will be punished."

"He didn't want to do it. I forced him to," said Thomas.

"Silence! I've heard enough. Let this punishment be warning to all of you. The rules of the game shall not be broken. Come here, Eric."

"But you can't --." Thomas began as Granny made a little hand signal to Ronald.

With lightning swift speed Ronald dashed over to where Tho-
mas sat and bound his arms in back of him. Then he placed a cloth over his mouth and tied it securely. After this was done, Ronald stood aside and waited for further orders.

"Come here, Eric," repeated Granny once again.

Eric dropped to his knees with his head pointed up. Granny stood up and walked to the front of him. She withdrew a short, round, wooden stick from a pocket. With an incredibly swift motion she bought the stick down hard on Eric's nose and blood gushed up through the broken remnants of the organ. Screams of pain filled the silence of the room until they were drowned out by the blood filling Eric's mouth. Granny made ready to strike again, but appeared to think the better of it.

"Hear me, Eric," she said. "You will bear this punishment until it heals of its own accord. You will not heal it yourself. Now, go to your room and stay there until supper."

At the last words Eric seemed about to protest, but he merely nodded his head in defeat. He crawled from the room on his knees, leaving a trail of blood.

After he had left, Granny then looked at Patricia. Thomas watched as Patricia began to shudder and cry under Granny's focused attention.

"Since you are indirectly the source of the trouble," said Granny, "you must also bear punishment. However, your punishment will be much more lenient," she said in a kinder tone. "Go to your room and stay there until dinner."

Patricia left the room and Granny now turned towards Thomas. "You shall be dealt with after lunch, captain."
She turned towards the other members of the family and said, "Now we shall eat."

After only a few minutes, Thomas, bound as he was, and the other survivors had to take shelter beneath the great table from the various missiles launched from the members of the family in every direction. As they huddled under the table, Thomas imagined that he was again in the midst of one of the many battles in which he fought during his career. He felt Cindy trembling as he listened to the sounds of carnage overhead. After what seemed to be centuries, the din ceased. Cautiously, Thomas raised his head above the table and looked around.

The room was in shambles. All of the tapestries were torn and stained, while broken dishes lay on the floor amid gobs of food and puddles of blood.

He dropped down again to the underside of the table and waited impatiently as Don untied his bonds and removed the cloth from his mouth.

"How is it up there?" asked Cindy.

"I think we just endured the worst din --." Thomas stopped as a crash sounded in another section of the castle. The crash was followed by more of them and several screams echoed through the air. "Dinner fight there ever was. And, I might add, it sounds like it's continuing outside of this room."

"What are we going to do?" asked Cindy.

"Well, ideally we could stay here and hide," answered Thomas, "but I'm afraid they'll come back. So, maybe we'd better go to our rooms and lock the doors and wait this thing out."
"We're not going out into that?!" exclaimed Don.

"What's the matter, kid, I though you were the one that wanted to beat up Granny if she wouldn't tell us how to get off this planet. And here you are afraid of a little fight between her children."

"If you didn't push that Eric guy into interfering with the game none of this would have happened," retorted Don.

"Kid, remember what I told you under that fir tree? Well, it still holds."

"You didn't tell me I couldn't say anything to you. You said that I couldn't have any direct dealings with the natives." He spoke these last words in a manner that mimicked a little child.

"Kid, you talk to me like that one more time, and I'm going to break your nose into little pieces and make you eat it."

"You wouldn't...aagh," Don was unable to finish his sentence as Thomas grabbed him by the nose and started turning it.

"You were saying, kid?" said Thomas as he abruptly let go.

"Nothing," replied Don, quietly.

"Good. Now maybe we can do what I originally proposed, namely, get to our rooms."

He went to the door and looked around. Seeing nothing hazardous, he signalled for them to follow.

"How about something to eat?" asked Cindy as she passed by some untouched and unblemished food.

Thomas thought a minute and then said, "Yeah, bring some along. We'll eat it in our rooms." He waited until Cindy had secured some food on a few unbroken plates she found and then he
advanced into the corridor.

They had no problems reaching their rooms. All of the "action" seemed to be taking place in another section of the castle. As soon as they reached their rooms, Thomas directed the division of the food and the rooms. Then Thomas, after directing the others to do likewise, went inside his room and locked the door. Within his room he waited out the war that raged somewhere else in the castle.

Finally, the noise quit. But it was only when Kabel came around to inform them that dinner was being served that they left the safety of their rooms with Thomas in the lead of the parade to the dining room. Along the route to dinner, Thomas was surprised to see a complete lack of damage, despite the sounds of the afternoon. He noticed that even the dining room was back to proper order.

The three were again given the seats they had occupied at lunch. As Thomas waited for the family members to appear, he wondered how they would look, after the destructive acts they were engaged in during the afternoon. Despite the "everything's-back-to-normal" atmosphere of the physical properties of the castle, it still came as a shock for him to see the family file in as though each member had spent the afternoon quietly reading, or some such diversion. Patricia was conversing happily with Jody, apparently forgetful of her sorrow at noontime. The other members, save one, looked as if they were equally forgetful concerning their actions of the afternoon or the grisly punishment they all witnessed at lunch.
With a nasty look on his broken and swollen face, Eric entered the room and sat down apart from the others. He threw a harsh look at Thomas, and then stared down at the table. As if by plan, Thomas noticed, the other members of the family paid Eric no heed, but talked peacefully among themselves.

The evening ran smoothly for two courses, much to Thomas' relief. There was no food throwing, no fighting, or none of the other types of activity that marred the first two meals. But when Ronald made a cutting remark about Eric, Thomas thought he detected trouble.

Something about the statement clearly pricked Eric. Only Thomas saw him as he picked up a goblet of wine and threw it savagely at Ronald. It narrowly missed its intended target, but a forthcoming fist from an angry Eric did not. Ronald was knocked out of his chair and onto the floor where Eric jumped atop him and rained hard blows upon his chest. With clenched teeth, Eric withdrew a hidden knife. But Ronald saw the move, and desperately grabbed Eric's arms to prevent the fatal blow.

In his rage, Eric seemed to have tripled his strength. Thomas remembered Eric's struggle against himself as he saw the thin arms of Eric force the knife down slowly but surely despite the efforts of the well-built Ronald. In a last gamble just as the knife started to pierce his body, Ronald let go of one of Eric's arms and smashed a fist into his injured nose. But, at the same time, the knife plunged its point deep into Ronald's chest.

Eric's hands went to his face to try and smother the pain, while Ronald's tried to wrench out the knife. But Eric continued
to writhe in visible agony and Ronald only succeeded in cutting his hands as his breathing grew more and more shallow.

Thomas noticed that everyone in the room was stunned by the turn of events. He decided that it was time for this portion of the game to halt. As he rushed over to Ronald, he realized that it was his fault that the recent events had occurred. If he hadn't pushed Eric, then Ronald wouldn't be on the floor dying. With one impulsive motion, he jerked the knife out of Ronald. Once it was out, he gazed in fascination as the wound healed itself before his eyes. Gradually, Ronald's breathing returned to normal, and he slowly opened his eyes.

Ronald raised himself halfway up, and looked at the barely conscious Eric. He smiled, and in one fluid motion reached a standing posture. Striding to where Eric lay he stood above him, hands on hips, and spoke.

"You are a different person when you are angry, little brother. Yes, but then you were always different from the rest of us. "If I wanted to, I could crush your puny body into jelly right now," he smiled broadly.

"But we'll do things your way for once. We'll break the rules. Instead of punishment for you breaking the rules, we shall have a duel, between you and me. But this will not be a simple pistol affair, or one with swords. No, we shall have a joust as the knights used to. Yes, a joust with lances and horses. And we'll have it at dawn tomorrow in front of the castle. Agreed, little brother?"

"Yes," came a small voice.
"Good," Ronald turned and headed for the door. As he reached it, he stopped and faced Eric again.

"Oh, I almost forgot to remind you. Remember, little brother, Granny said you may not heal yourself. That's all." He turned again and continued on his way out of the room.

Thomas was startled by the weakness apparent in Granny's voice when she stated her opinion of the duel immediately after Ronald made his remark.

"I cannot allow this duel to take place," she said while trying to maintain an imperial tone. "The game has gone too far. It must end and these people must leave."

Ronald addressed her, "You have no say on whether the duel takes place or not, not this time. The game has entered a new stage which only I control." He left the room, ignoring Granny's calls after him trying to restore her authority.

Thomas saw her in defeat. First, her face became sad and bewildered. Then as her gaze swept the room and rested on Eric, her face was transformed into a red ball by her anger.

"You," she said. "You are the source of the trouble and you must pay. If Ronald kills you tomorrow, you will not heal, but rather shall die a death from which you shall never rise again.

"You have destroyed this game with the help of the three outsiders and, therefore, you must pay the price. The games must endure according to the law, and I am the law. All who forfeit the law must perish, so it was said long before all of you and even I came into being."

Her sermon at an end, Granny left the room with her head
held high.

For some moments no one moved or said anything. Then Eric slowly rose and headed towards the door. As he reached it, he turned and faced everyone in the room, but it seemed to the Thomas as if he faced only him alone.

"Whatever happens tomorrow," he said, "will be on your conscience." Then he went out of the room.

The dawn was chilly and Thomas rubbed his hands together. Overhead the sky was clear and the first hint of the bright sun peaking out over the horizon bathed the scene in a yellow light. Two riders on horses stood at the opposite ends of a long field in front of the darkened castle. Thomas and the rest of the spectators stood off to one side.

Just after the sun climbed above a certain prescribed point, Granny dropped a white handkerchief. Instantly, the two horses charged one another. One rider's lance struck the other's shield and splintered into many pieces. The other rider's lance struck his opponent's head. There was the sound of iron striking iron, and then a bloody ball fell from its perch.

The victor jumped off his horse and ran to the motionless body of the vanquished. He pulled off his helmet and said triumphantly, "You've paid the final price. This game is completed, and the new games will continue without you, little brother."

The corpse of Eric was then gathered and everyone followed Granny inside the castle. When everyone was fully inside, Granny addressed them.

"We've played by the ultimate rule which says that those
who break the rules of the game shall suffer death as their penalty. Thus, I declare this game ended. There now remain two things to do.

"You," she pointed to Thomas and the other two, "shall be sent to wherever you wish after, and in accordance with the law, you each collect a souvenir of your stay here.

"In the meantime, the body of my young son must be buried, so as to finalize the ending of this game."

"If it's just the same to you, I'd rather take off without a memento of your planet," said Thomas. "I've collected enough memories already."

"You must take along a souvenir, in accordance with the law. Otherwise," she gave them a sly look, "you may not leave."

"Okay, we'll get something, then," said Thomas.

Thomas thought that he would just make a quick dash outside and pick up three souvenirs among the first objects he saw, but Cindy said that she wanted to find something from a specific spot in the garden. He argued with her, but she remained adamant and finally he and Don agreed to follow her to the site.

The walk to the particular spot Cindy had in mind took a little more than fifteen minutes. When they got there, they found a reanimated Eric sitting atop a large rock.

"You're alive!" said Cindy.

"Yes," he smiled, "Granny is not as stern as she would have you believe."

"Then your death was a hoax?" asked Don.

"Somewhat. I was truly dead, by your standards. My life
being what it is, though, I can't die completely, or become non-existent. But I thought I did a good imitation. Granny changed her mind last night about me dying for good, or at in effect dying for good. Anyhow, we came up with this little charade, though the part with me being killed by Ronald was real enough.

"Also at the meeting I had with her last night, I convinced her that you should be given an explanation about us before you leave. And so here we are via a little mind suggestion tinkering with Cindy."

"What you're saying is that you went through all of this staged performance just to give us an explanation?" asked Thomas. "Why not just explain, without all of this nonsense?"

"That would have been no fun. This is the first time I've ever made up a game," he said proudly.

"Well, if you went through all that for an explanation, where's the explanation?" asked Don impatiently.

"Once long ago," Eric began, "long before I came into existence, there was a group of people who wanted to explore the universe beyond this planet. At the same time there was another group who wanted to stay here and solve the many problems that were plaguing their planet.

"There was a big fight between these two groups over who would make their philosophy the world's philosophy. The group which wanted to stay was the victor in the fight, and those who didn't agree with its philosophy were put to death. However, there is a legend that says some of these people did escape into space, but I don't know if that's true or not. Anyhow, the
dissenters who were found were put to death because the new leaders said they would contaminate the experiment.

"The experiment was to make this planet a paradise. To do this, the leaders took control of everything on the planet. Then one by one they solved all of the problems like crime and such. In the meantime, the scientists worked on making the people of that time live longer and with better mental capabilities.

"They succeeded far further than they thought possible. They created immortal people with tremendous mental powers. Gradually, as they learned to develop these powers, the immortals found that their bodies became more and more useless to them. So, they got rid of them and became immaterial beings of pure mental energy.

"The leaders, those who were yet alive, were able to share in the benefits and declared the planet a perfect utopia.

"But after some time, a problem developed. In order to keep the experiment pure, everyone had to stay on the planet. Otherwise, they would bring the influences of the outside universe in and ruin the utopia. The leaders, vast mental powers and all, couldn't watch everyone and so they decided to get rid of some of the people. Actually, they put to death much of the population in a gigantic war of mental powers. The remainder of the population was organized into small groups or families which the leaders thought would be easier to control.

"As time went on, some of the families became bored because they had nothing to do since they had done everything by that time. Then somebody in one family came up with a great new idea: each family would play games in which the family members would
act out roles. The head of each family would select a game and would then assign roles for each of the members. Later, as the games became an established tradition, the family heads were allowed to select -- if they were very cautious about how it was done -- a game about the outside universe. In these games, the family heads would probe the minds of other races as they passed by in their spaceships for background material and scenarios. The last game my family just finished playing was one of these, but it didn't work out so well.

"The games, on a whole, have worked very well. They have kept us busy and our mental faculties up. It is true that Patricia has declined...and still is, but I think that she was made wrong, or something like that.

"After a time, some of the families got out of hand as far as playing according to the rules and they had to be eliminated. So, because of these and some other reasons, the number of families has been reduced to around four, I think.

"And that brings us to the present. My family has survived, as you can see, although it now has less members than when I was created. But we are still here and still play the games.

"Do you have any questions? We still have some time left, though it is short."

"Are the leaders still around?" asked Thomas.

"No, they died long ago. The last of them died before the final step of becoming pure energy and spirit was attained. When the last leader died, the rule of the planet was passed on to a council made up of the heads of the families. Granny became the
head of our family around that time."

"You said you were created. How was that done?" asked Thomas.

"Two people came together and pooled some of their almost unlimited energy along with the guidance of a program guide to form me. A program guide is a list of characteristics that were suggested by the leaders as befitting a good member of a family and a good citizen of this planet."

"How many program guides are there?" asked Cindy.

"About five or six," replied Eric.

"Then there are only about five or six different personalities on the planet?" asked Don.

"Oh, no. The games and the roles involved in them lead to the formation of many more different types of personalities. These different ones, though, are still kept under control to keep them from getting out of hand."

"These games, then, are just your people acting out various roles?" asked Thomas.

"Yes," replied Eric.

"This is how you spend your lives, playing these meaningless games?" Thomas questioned further.

"They're not meaningless. From what we've seen of the outside universe -- from information picked up from the probing of the minds of creatures who have passed by here in their spaceships -- we have the best way of life in the universe. There are no problems or worries here," said Eric proudly.

"Bunk," said Thomas. "Sure you've solved all of your problems, though in a gruesome manner. But then you became bored
with the lack of challenges to stimulate you. You became complacent and satisfied with the position you had achieved. And when you found that you didn't like your perfect world, why then you went right back and recreated through your make-believe games everything your ancestors had worked so hard to get rid of. Now you have a 'perfect life,' but nothing to live for."

"Yes," nodded Eric, "I know. But what are we supposed to do?"

"Throw out your games and start work again on some real challenges," replied Thomas.

"What challenges are there left for us?" asked Eric. "We've solved all of the problems on this planet."

"There's always space," suggested Thomas. "With your powers and knowledge there would be no end to the list of meaningful things that you could do. Wouldn't that be much better, doing something worthwhile instead of just passing the time?"

"Yes, it would, but why do you tell this to me. I'm the youngest. Nobody listens to what I say. Why don't you tell it to Granny. She's the only one who has enough power to do something about the game."

"I intend to do that before we leave. But you will be here after we leave and can serve as a sort of watchdog on Granny. You can make sure she follows through on the effort instead of just making a shallow attempt to give your life some meaning."

"You want me to tell Granny what to do? But she won't listen," pleaded Eric.

"You don't tell her what to do directly," said Thomas. "You
use crafty ways. Just think awhile. You'll figure out some methods. Will you do that?"

"I'll think about it," said an unsure Eric. "It's time for you to go now."

"But you will --." Thomas began as Eric slowly disappeared.

"We shall use our powers to transport you to your original destination," said Granny when the survivors returned to the castle.

"Eric told us a short history of your planet," said Thomas. "It's clear that you have a stagnant society with its members leading lives of absolutely no value at all. But instead of isolating yourselves on this planet in order to live a meaningless life, why don't you go out into the universe and use your powers and knowledge to the benefit of the universe instead of keeping them to yourselves?"

"Eric is dead," said Granny. "It is time for you to leave."

"But we just talked with him, and I told him of my idea. And now I'm telling you in front of your family. Why don't you ask them their feelings?" Thomas carried his appeal to the other family members. "Don't you want to do something meaningful with your lives?"

But there was no reaction. Then Granny said, "We know, captain, that there are some problems with the games and we are working on those problems. Perhaps we shall consider your suggestion, sometime. And now, farewell captain."

"You will consider my idea?" asked Thomas in one last try.

"Maybe, captain, but I doubt if you will ever see us again,"
replied Granny...

Thomas found himself on the bridge again along with all of the members of his crew. His First Lieutenant stood at his side as the viewing screen showed the planet of Fedlar growing steadily larger as they neared it. Everything appeared normal.

"Well, look at that," said the First Lieutenant, "we're going to arrive fifteen minutes early. Can't understand where we picked up those extra fifteen minutes, though."

Was it a dream? But it had seemed so real to Thomas. But the ship was destroyed and the crew killed... If it was real, then how much power did the family really have? And how could such a powerful race let itself be trapped by the archaic laws of some shortsighted people.
Reference Notes


4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Eastman, p. 32.


8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.
Bibliography


