

# *SLANOLOGY*

*An In-Depth Guide to  
A.E. van Vogt's Most Famous Novel*

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# Introduction

*Slan* is justly considered A.E. van Vogt's finest novel, and the fact that it was his very first novel makes this achievement all the more noteworthy. Prior to this, his career as a science fiction writer was restricted mainly to "monster" type stories such as "Black Destroyer," "Discord in Scarlet," and "The Sea Thing." In each of these tales the monster was intelligent but a menace to mankind. Just when many readers of *Astounding Science Fiction* were becoming convinced that van Vogt was a one-track writer, *Slan* appeared, dramatically turning this theme on its head — the "monster" (here in the form of Jommy Cross) is intelligent but benevolent, and it is ordinary *mankind* that poses the menace. And just when the reader becomes convinced this is nothing more than a clever reversal of his usual theme, the apparent goodies-versus-baddies situation is revealed to be something far more complex, showing that neither the slans *nor* humanity are entirely good or entirely evil.

When the novel was first serialized in 1940, it quickly made its mark as a truly pioneering work in the science fiction genre, serving as a perfect example to other writers who wished to create more ambitious stories of their own. Aside from the realistically murky background filled with legends, garbled facts, lies, and counter-lies — just like the real world — van Vogt was one of the first writers to introduce tense and plausible political intrigue to science fiction. He laid the groundwork for later grandmasters such as Frank Herbert and Philip K. Dick, who honed science fiction's unique possibilities for intrigue to a fine art. And the novel's rich multilayered complexity was indicative of a genre that was rapidly becoming more sophisticated, largely thanks to John W. Campbell, editor of *Astounding* from September 1937 onward, who strove to push the limits of what science fiction could do. In line with this maturity, *Slan* was one of speculative literature's first serious treatments of telepathy and the role of the "superman" in society, the latter being a topic of much discussion during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As such, *Slan* reflects the strong Darwinian ideas of the Eugenics Movement, in that it portrays a superior race evolving that is destined to replace (or rule) regular *homo sapiens*, a theme which is continued even today in works such as the recent *X-Men* films.

Although often criticized for his shortcomings as a writer, van Vogt was indisputably a craftsman who excelled in his own special areas of expertise. One of his greatest strengths as a writer lies in his ability to create short but effective transition scenes. In numerous places throughout the novel, he very nicely encapsulates entire years in a few terse paragraphs. This very difficult technique

is sadly neglected among today's authors, who are perfectly content to rack up the word count with excessive detail, fleshing out parts of the story that would be far more effective when quickly summed up. And notably for a novel so short, *Slan* showcases van Vogt's fertile imagination — it contains a great deal of variety, switching locations quite often and with each setting being unique and interesting. There is also a nice blend of action, suspense, and even humor, with the unifying tale of Jommy's quest for truth offering ample opportunity for introspection and character development throughout the novel. And, of course, no discussion of van Vogt would be complete without touching on his ability to evoke in the reader a deep fascination and a sense of wonder that few before or since have been able to equal.

### **A Brief Explanation**

This booklet is meant to be read as a supplement to the novel, not as a replacement. *Slan* is perhaps van Vogt's most complex work with a rich but tangled backdrop to the story. This booklet sets out to "untangle" all this information and present it in an easily-consulted form, to enhance your understanding of this fascinating and influential novel.

Writing this study came about through a peculiar chain of events. I'm currently working on an extensive guide to the fiction of A.E. van Vogt, which I'm calling *The Sevagram Handbook*. (This will be several years in the making, so don't expect to see it anytime soon.) This guide will give a summary for each work, as well as a list of characters, places, and aliens, and information on the different versions of each text. Since I re-read *Slan* in January in order to properly review Kevin J. Anderson's new [Slan Hunter](#) novel, I ended up doing a "prototype" entry for *Slan* to experiment with the format I had in mind for the *Handbook*.

However, it wasn't until months later, when I was close to finishing my coverage of *Slan*, that I realized that this "entry" ran to 23,000 words and was far too detailed and bulky for the *Handbook*. I had become so engrossed in what I was doing that I failed to consider this "entry" in context. (Needless to say, the final *Handbook* entry for *Slan* is much shorter, coming to a much more manageable 1,500 words.) Fortunately, rather than letting all this effort go to waste, fellow van Vogt enthusiast Mark McSherry recommended that I offer this study as a downloadable e-booklet.

So I'd like to thank Mark for his wonderful advice, and to acknowledge my debt to Jean-Marc Lofficier, Lance Parkin, and Lars Pearson, whose *Doctor Who* reference works inspired both this booklet and the upcoming *Sevagram Handbook*, and to Michael McKinney who suggested the idea for a detailed timeline and a list of

gadgets... even though his suggestion was made years ago and for a completely different project!.

## **Page References**

Since there are innumerable references to specific sections of the novel throughout this booklet, I have used the 1975 Berkley Medallion edition of the novel. (Which contains the 1968 version of the story — for more on the various texts, see the **Different Versions** section of this booklet.) I purposefully selected an edition that has been printed numerous times with the same pagination, making it easy for you to obtain the same source through a used book seller.

A page number in parentheses — such as "(186)" — is placed after a bit of information to show where it came from. Sometimes multiple pages scattered throughout the novel are referenced for the same "fact." Also, sometimes multiple items of information were found on the same page — when this occurs, the page reference is given after multiple sentences.

# Plot Summary

**Setting:** Earth & Mars, from around 3529 to 3544 A.D. (see **Timeline**)

## **Chapter One** (pages 5-14)

Patricia Cross and her son Jommy travel to the city of Centropolis, capital of the world. The Crosses are slans, telepathic offshoots of the human race who are hated and feared by regular humans and exterminated on sight. Jommy has been entrusted with the task of assassinating Kier Gray, world dictator and persecutor of the slans. Only after Gray's death will slans be able to live normal, happy lives. To do this he will need access to a great weapon invented by his deceased father, hidden in the catacombs beneath the city. His mother has long prepared Jommy for this, since she suspects that she will not be alive to do it herself.

A group of men close in on them. They split up, his mother having already resigned herself to capture, but will do her best to allow her son to escape. Just as the authorities make their move, Jommy jumps onto the rear bumper of a passing car and is whisked away.

Unfortunately Jommy senses that the occupants of this car are John Petty, head of Gray's secret police force, and his chauffeur/bodyguard Sam Enders. Although Petty has the ability to block telepathy almost as well as a slan, Jommy senses Petty's thoughts: the police chief is a ruthless man and has decided he must kill Kathleen Layton, a young slan girl, in order to undermine Gray's authority.

Just then, the two men hear on the police radio that there is an escaped slan boy in the vicinity whose mother was just killed, and that the boy was last seen riding on a car that passed through the area. As the car screeches to a halt, Jommy jumps clear and runs while the two men fire upon him. He is hit, but manages to escape through a run-down warehouse district and into a poor housing development where some of the desperate residents try to capture him for the \$10,000 reward. He eludes them and finds a hiding place. He detects a nearby mind, filled with evil plots, focused on his hiding place, but whoever it is does not give him away as the searchers pass by. This individual is revealed to be a bitter elderly woman who calls herself Granny. She knocks him semi-unconscious and pries the weakened child out of the hiding place, all the while muttering to herself incessantly about how the slan boy will make her a fortune.

## **Chapter Two** (pages 15-24)

The next scene introduces the reader to Kathleen Layton, a young slan girl who is a prisoner of the state, protected inside the palace by Kier Gray under the pretext that she is a study subject. On the eve of her eleventh birthday she is warned in a roundabout fashion by Davy Dinsmore, a former friend of hers, that she is scheduled to be executed the next day, explaining that Gray had agreed to his cabinet that the slan girl would be terminated when she reached the age of 11.

Terrribly upset, she runs off to her room and tries to go to sleep. However, she detects the thoughts of an assassin sent to kill her. Although the man has some training in blocking telepathy, just enough leaks out to let her know that someone is afraid the execution will not be carried out and is determined to take matters into their own hands. Amply warned, she is able to evade his attack. She slips out a secret passage connecting her room to Kier Gray's office.

She comes upon the mysterious Gray as he is composing a letter. He has the most impenetrable mind she has ever encountered, but despite this barrier between the two and a great deal of fear on Kathleen's part, they seem to regard each other with respect, trust, and a certain degree of affection. She tells Gray of the attempt on her life, speculating that Petty was behind it. The dictator agrees, and explains that Petty's plan is to use Kathleen's death to discredit Gray. Now, all that Gray can do to remain in a strong position — and, indeed, alive — is to prevent Petty from killing Kathleen. Gray orders the Council to be awakened for an emergency session.

### **Chapter Three** (pages 24-36)

The twelve members of the Council — of which Gray is the senior member, elected into that role by his fellow members — convene late at night. John Petty already has the firm support of three other members and does all he can to make the situation seem hopeless for Gray and to swing the others by confusing the issue at hand. He attempts to portray Gray as a weak and paranoid leader unwilling to do what must be done to eliminate the slan threat. Gray points out Petty's schemes to replace him and reminds the council members that any change to the current power structure will necessitate the culling of the old political order, themselves included.

In the middle of this debate, the current situation on Earth becomes clear. The slans are winning the war despite all of humanity's efforts to wipe them out. In an attempt to strengthen their own position the government has taken strong measures during the last century or so which have been counterproductive, creating an ignorant and terrified population that is rapidly descending into desperate poverty. The slans' greater intelligence ensures their superiority in the

fields of science and invention, while human scientists are demoralized and unproductive. Gray expresses his regret that not a single slan scientist has been enlisted to aid them, and laments that the great slan scientist Peter Cross was murdered three years previously by the mob-like police before Cross' talents could be harnessed by the state. The only way to win the war is to either exterminate the slans once and for all, or to negotiate with them for peace — an option that Gray increasingly favors despite opposition. And lastly, to undercut Petty's schemes Gray proclaims that Kathleen will *not* be executed at all, but will be kept alive as part of his continued study of slan development.

Petty then moves to vote Gray out of office. Gray admits that he has known of Petty's plot for some time and has made preparations to counter it. All the members of the Council decide to support Petty's bid for power, emboldened by the knowledge that they each have a private army to back them should their elected dictator ever defy their collective will. They plan to frame Gray for treasonous collaboration with the slans, with his decision to keep Kathleen alive as evidence. Finally left with no other option, Gray reveals that he outwitted them all by "recruiting" the head of each Councilor's army and promising them a seat on the Council. At that moment the twelve "replacements" barge into the room and assassinate their superiors. Only John Petty survives this coup, and he agrees to cooperate fully with Gray's plans.

Kathleen's eleventh birthday passes without incident. Two days later she encounters Davy in the palace halls. He apologizes for his behavior of the last few months, explaining that at his father's suggestion he turned against Kathleen to protect his own life, and since she had long ago promised never to read his mind the only way to warn her of the threat on her life was to publicly taunt her with it. She thanks him for the warning and forgives him.

#### **Chapter Four** (pages 37-44)

Jommy awakens to find himself chained to a bed in Granny's house, out in the country on the outskirts of Centropolis. Granny threatens to turn him over to the police unless he does what she says.

Three days later they get ready to go into Centropolis. From a distance, Jommy gets his first look of the palace, Kier Gray's seat of power, although it was built by slans centuries previously. He remembers his mother telling him that although it is currently held by humans, it still contains many secret chambers, including treasure troves of technological devices and weapons that humanity thankfully remains totally unaware of. It will be six years before Jommy reaches the age of 15 — at that time he will be ready to carry out his task.

**Chapter Five** (pages 44-48)

Surreptitiously slipped into town in an old cart, at Granny's insistence Jommy begins his assigned task of shoplifting in a large and lavish department store, using his telepathic powers to avoid detection. While there, he learns the news that John Petty recently executed ten traitorous Council members. Petty is distrusted and disliked among the people, while Gray is respected and admired for his unwavering strength against the slan menace.

While in the department store Jommy bumps into a man rushing past. He reads the man's mind and discovers to his complete astonishment that the man is a slan. Yet as he follows the man and continues his probing, the man proves to be a very strange slan — he seems to lack telepathic abilities though he can close off his mind better than any human.

He follows the man out onto the street, and a few blocks further on sees him enter the Air Center, where all aircraft transportation in the world is controlled. Jommy is astonished — places like this have strict security to ensure no slans get through. Jommy risks entering and is shocked when he senses that all the men around him are slans, but that they lack telepathic abilities. When asked to leave Jommy removes his hat, revealing his tendrils. Although the men express pleasant surprise and welcome at seeing a fellow slan, their minds reveal something else entirely in the split second before all telepathic contact is blocked off: hatred and murderous intent towards the "snakes," slans with tendrils.

**Chapter Six** (pages 48-53)

His pursuers raise the alarm but Jommy escapes through a random door. He senses in their minds the fear that the true slans will become aware that Air Central is run by these "tendrillless" slans. He makes his way to the outside of the building, onto a window ledge. Using his strong slan hands and fingers he climbs the wall and reaches the roof, where in the descending gloom he sees a ship being launched into space from a nearby building. The conquest of space is widely considered a myth, something that never happened and is a pernicious slan lie — but obviously the tendrillless slans possess this ability.

Realizing that he must escape and get to safety, he returns to the department store where he steals a few more items to placate Granny's wrath at his tardiness. He now realizes that he will need the relative security of Granny and her house until he comes of age and decides to strike a balance with Granny — give her only enough wealth to keep her dependent on him. The rest of the money he uses for his own purposes.

## **Chapter Seven** (pages 53-67)

For the next six years Jommy lives with Granny as his "grandson," thieving for all their needs. He educates himself as best he can from a wide variety of sources, expanding his knowledge of engineering, geography, culture, history, and the various branches of science and math. He learns that supposedly during the slan war, a hundred thousand slans infiltrated human society at every level, quietly taking over control of the world, and that the only thing that ruined this scheme was the slans' insistence of converting human babies, which apparently caused such revulsion that humanity rose up in mass protest, toppling the slans.

He also continues to cautiously observe the activities of the tendrillless slans, learning that ships come and go on a regular nightly schedule. He also builds secret tunnels beneath Granny's house to provide for escape when she finally decides to betray him.

His fifteenth birthday finally arrives and he heads for Centropolis and the Catacombs. Once in town he discovers the streets deserted and defense guns being set up. A message comes over the public address system, warning that a slan ship has been seen heading for the palace and all citizens are to flee to safety.

He enters the Catacombs. His father had hypnotically planted critical information in his mind that comes to the fore as he makes his way into the tunnels. Unfortunately, the Catacombs are rigged to alarm (to deter slans and criminals from using them) so Jommy hurries in his search. And there is a further complication — the walls of the tunnel disperse thought waves, making it difficult to detect anyone else who may be down there.

He finds his father's weapon behind a secret compartment in a section of wall, and is almost immediately forced to use it to kill two guards who stumble upon Jommy. It is a potent weapon, a small rod capable of completely incinerating anything in its path. The weapon was stored with his father's notes. He leaves the tunnels, taking the weapon and notes with him.

The slan ship has come and gone, but the streets are now crowded with panicked people. Jommy overhears wild and conflicting reports on the radio — maybe the ship was destroyed, or landed at the palace with the slans now speaking with Kier Gray, or that it merely delivered a message and left.

He returns to his home and finds Granny in her usual drunken stupor. But her mind is awash with thoughts of betrayal — she has told the police about Jommy.

## **Chapter Eight** (pages 67-87)

The scene of the story returns to the palace. Kathleen is now a beautiful young woman of 17 and is being romantically pursued by her friend Davy Dinsmore. Although she and Davy are the same age, and share a very open friendship with her routinely reading his thoughts at his insistence, such a relationship would not work — being a slan, she possess the mind of a woman of 30 and he is still just a child to her. Since her near-execution on her eleventh birthday she has helped to rear him and mold his mind, taking on a more motherly role towards him.

Kathleen is also faced with the machinations of Jem Lorry, now the most powerful man on the Council, who is determined to make her the crowning glory of his collection of sexual conquests. Lorry makes it very clear that he will stop at nothing to possess her. They are interrupted by the report that a slan ship is on its way to Centropolis. The vessel drops a message capsule in the palace grounds and a Council meeting is convened. Lorry tells Kathleen that this is the opportunity he has been waiting for, the one thing that will ensure that he can have her. In order to gain admittance to the meeting, and thereby do her best to stave off Lorry's plans, Kathleen claims to have been in telepathic contact with the ship's captain, but this is only a bluff.

In recent years a dramatic change has come over Kier Gray. Before, he admired the slans and felt that peace was possible. Now he harbors a vicious hatred of slans that rivals even Petty's. Kathleen is appalled that her protector, whom she respected and trusted, has changed so completely.

The slan message contains many (clearly false) claims intended to ease tensions between the two races. They also renounce their previous attempts at conquest and express their simple desire to be left to live in peace. Gray rejects this proposal without any consideration, saying that years ago he would have been open to this possibility but now believes all slans must die.

Lorry on the other hand proposes accepting their offer, with the provision that slans be integrated into the human population by intermarriage. Furthermore, he intends to take Kathleen as his mistress to see if such a union can produce children — theoretically, such offspring should not be slans. There are already existing accounts of such attempts in the past — no children were ever born — but Lorry insists that they not rely on hearsay and that a more modern attempt should be made. The council offers no objection, and one councilor adds that should no children come from such a marriage that it would at least prevent the long-lived slans from reproducing with one another and within 200 years their race will be no more. In other words, any peaceful agreement with the slans that the Council might approve of would still end with their complete annihilation.

But whatever method they decide to use, they will negotiate through intermediaries who will have no idea that the peace deal is a trap, so the slans' ability to read minds will be of no advantage. Kathleen, however, has heard all their

plans, and Petty demands — and the Council agrees — that she must be executed at once to prevent her from relaying the information to other slans, especially those in the ship who will undoubtedly come again. Gray is clearly shocked at this, showing that for whatever reason he still needs her alive. He tells the Council that it is unnecessary to kill her, revealing that the ship was unmanned and fully automated. The ship was brought down using radio interference and will be taken in for study. Gray once again insists that he keep Kathleen alive for continued observation. When asked why she lied about being in contact with the ship's captain, she admits that she did so to oppose Lorry's machinations to possess her. Although slightly annoyed that he let his infamous womanizing interfere with Council business the other members decide to go ahead and allow Lorry to take her as a mistress.

After Kier Gray gives a brief lecture on the origin of the slans [see above, under Characters: Samuel Lann], John Petty states that it is imperative that they be exterminated outright: no intricate traps should be laid out in the guise of peace, for such schemes could easily go wrong. In light of this, Gray rules that the match between a slan and a Councilor would be inappropriate at this time and must be forbidden. As the councilors adjourn, a disappointed Lorry approaches Kathleen and tries to pursue a more "humble" approach to winning her, stating however that if he has to settle for simply possessing her body he will do so. He then leaves.

Finally, at Kathleen's request, Gray calls Davy's father and advises him to prevent his son from pursuing a romantic relationship with the slan girl, saying that such a match would adversely affect his son's budding political career.

## ***Chapter Nine*** (pages 87-97)

Jommy brings the besotted Granny, and all the money they have accumulated over the years, along with him as he escapes. He takes Granny with him — despite her betrayal, he cannot abide the thought of her being hanged as punishment for harboring him all these years. He makes his way through the series of tunnels he had created beneath their house.

Realizing his only route of escape is off-planet, he makes his way into Air Central via the roof where he boards one of the ships about to take off. He manages to launch the ship but remains in Earth's atmosphere to give him time to figure out all the controls before he ventures into space.

He suddenly senses Granny being knocked unconscious — someone else is on board. He pulls out his father's weapon just in time to prevent a tendriless slan woman from killing him. The situation is a stand off, as the two of them cover each other with their weapons and size up their opponent. He is reluctant to kill her, as he still considers the tendriless variety to be fellow slans and her great beauty

captivates him. She suggests that they both lower their weapons, and Jommy reads some of the thoughts leaked from her tight mind shield: she is apparently a newlywed and expectant mother unwilling to take needless risks. He agrees and they lower their weapons. However, she has another weapon behind her back and she chides him for believing the false story she fed him through the leak in her shield. He is forced to surrender.

## **Chapter Ten** (pages 98-114)

The woman's name is Joanna Hillory. During their lengthy, interrogation-like conversation he tells her his life story, which she does not believe. The tendrillless slans believe he is part of the organized slan movement, and she tells him that they allowed him to escape after his "reconnaissance mission" six years previously (when he stumbled into Air Central) so they could see what the true slans would do with the information he had gathered. With his current actions they conclude that he was sent to capture one of the tendrillless' ships, the true slans having no comparable technology of their own.

The story of the slan-tendrillless conflict also becomes apparent. According to Joanna, the true slans (or "snakes" as they call them) are unwilling to tolerate any kind of slan to exist other than the "pure" breed created by Samuel Lann's mutation machine. They have been mercilessly trying to wipe out their tendrillless counterparts for centuries, so Joanna's people have to take strict precautions to protect themselves. She explains that the "snakes" are also masters of deceit so they cannot trust Jommy, regardless of whether he's telling the truth or not — he must be killed. Joanna also tells him that slans alter human babies to create more of their own kind, with many horrible failures being a byproduct of the process. She adds that she herself has seen many such mutations. All of this is a revelation to Jommy and he is deeply shocked and disillusioned.

He offers to act as a mediator between the true and tendrillless slans to find a way to peacefully cooperate. While she thinks this is a waste of time, she agrees to let her superiors decide his fate. As Joanna contacts the tendrillless council over the radio and explains the situation, Granny awakens. Together she and Jommy overpower the tendrillless woman and regain control of the ship. When Joanna is knocked unconscious Jommy is able to briefly read in her mind that the tendrillless slans have taken elaborate measures to ensure he does not escape. Their ship is surrounded by seven battle cruisers that can track the vessel wherever it goes — they have caught him in a trap within a trap. He reassures the council that his intentions are still peaceful, but there is no response.

Some hours later, Joanna regains consciousness. A prolonged discussion follows and he again tries to persuade her of his good intentions. He has come to

doubt what she has told him about the "snakes" and he resolves to verify the truth about his fellow slans himself.

Just as he figures out a way to save himself from this trap, the battle cruisers open fire.

### ***Chapter Eleven*** (pages 114-122)

Jommy quickly takes the ship down into the lower atmosphere. Over the radio he negotiates with the tendrillless council to release Joanna if they allow him to return to high orbit.

He swears to Joanna that when he finds the true slans he will put an end to the senseless conflict between their two races. She, on the other hand, emphasizes that the tendrillless are the true masters of Earth, limitless in number and powerful, and some day they will openly take control and enslave the human race.

He puts Joanna in another room while he rigs his father's weapon into the inside of the ship's nose cone, facing outward. He then lands the ship and lets her off as agreed. Before she leaves Joanna tells Jommy that she has come to believe his intentions are pure, and that she hopes he will do all that he has promised.

His "hostage" now released, he takes off. When the battle cruisers open fire again, he uses his father's weapon to bore through the nose of the ship, allowing the beam to drill a hole in the ground beneath a nearby river which he then flies the ship into, evading the cruisers beyond their ability to pursue. Eight miles in, he stops. He hides the ship, and he and Granny split up, arranging to meet again a year later.

### ***Chapter Twelve*** (pages 123-128)

During the next two years he and Granny live on a ranch out in a rural valley, purchased with the fortune they had previously amassed. Using his father's notes on controlling atomic energy, he builds a variety of machines and devices in his laboratory. He builds a special car with heavy weaponry and impregnable armor and creates a subterranean fortress in a nearby mountain.

He spends a great deal of his time traveling from city to city in his special car, searching for his fellow true slans. He learns that the power of the tendrillless slans in human society is extensive, but finds no trace of the true slans anywhere.

He finally returns to the riverbed where his ship still lies. Over a period of three months he uses the inventions based on his father's notes to repair and improve the vessel. He takes a test flight to the Moon where he encounters a

heavy patrol of tendriless slan battleships and many small but potent space mines, one of which strikes his ship and forces him to land and make repairs.

When neighbors in the area of Granny's ranch become suspicious of Jommy, he hypnotizes them using special crystals to erase their suspicions and to make their attitude towards slans neutral. He also ends up doing the same for most of the people in the valley. He also changes Granny's mind, altering her memories and inclinations, doing his best to make her into a more benign and even-tempered little old lady.

### ***Chapter Thirteen*** (pages 128-133)

The scene returns to the palace. Over many years of reading files in Gray's desk, she has memorized lists of "secret" slan safehouses whose locations are known to the authorities and are now used to trap and capture slans. With Kathleen's 21st birthday coming up in the near future John Petty insists that she be moved out of the palace and into a more secure location. Kathleen is appalled when Gray offers no resistance to this suggestion, even though all involved know this means certain death for her.

She escapes the palace with ease, stealing a plane and traveling to a slan safehouse to the east. For two weeks she lies in wait, intending to capture the first car that comes her way.

### ***Chapter Fourteen*** (pages 133-144)

Jommy is excited to learn that a slan girl has been reported in the area. While searching for her and avoiding the police barricades, he comes across a message from a Porgrave thought-broadcasting machine that instructs him on how to find a slan refuge hidden beneath an abandoned farmhouse nearby. As he drives up to the farmhouse he makes mental contact with Kathleen. They are both filled with wonder at finally meeting a fellow slan.

Together, they take the large hidden elevator down (bringing Jommy's car with them) and explore the long-deserted slan refuge. It is a vast underground city featuring everything such a community would ever need. Their telepathy allows the two slans get to know and grow to love each other during their brief time together.

They decide to remain there for the night to avoid the police and tendriless slans above. Knowing that the refuge is only used as a trap that could be sprung at any moment, Jommy insists on remaining near or inside his car at all times. After a few hours of rest Kathleen leaves the safety of the car briefly to get them some food. At that moment John Petty and his men raid the refuge through a secret

door inside the kitchen and he shoots her through the head, killing her.

### **Chapter Fifteen** (pages 144-146)

Jommy sees her death and coldly accepts the fact that his life is going to be continually dangerous and he can form no relationships. Petty and his men fire on his car, but the armored behemoth deflects their attacks. He decides to let her murderers live and easily escapes by tunneling through the underground with his atomic beam.

Two of Petty's men are tendrillless slans who radio in detailed descriptions of Jommy to their superiors. By listening to their radio frequencies he hears that the tendrillless slans have now made him their top priority, that he must be destroyed before they can begin their open takeover of Earth. Joanna Hillory has been assigned the task of hunting him down, as she knows him better than anyone.

### **Chapter Sixteen** (pages 147-160)

Four years pass. Jommy's telepathic abilities have matured and been honed to an incredible degree: he can "see" through the eyes of others as well as sense the most minute "life waves" from all living things for miles around.

The tendrillless slans strike with a gigantic fleet of ships, including a crude but effective atomic cyclotron ship that destroys his mountain fortress in an instant. They have come to kill him and capture his scientific secrets. From his laboratory beneath their ranch house, he uses his arsenal of gun turrets hidden underground throughout the valley to disable, but not destroy, the cyclotron ship.

Granny remains in the house, protected from the tendrillless slans' questioning by the hypnotic blocks that Jommy has placed on her mind. Jommy flees in his ship, and sets all that he had built in the valley to self-destruct. The invaders will never know his secrets now.

His vessel, which can now be rendered invisible through an ingenious application of his father's atomic science, confuses then outruns his pursuers. He heads for Mars, then floats nearby silently, everything turned off, waiting for a period of months for the searchers to move on. He then lands on Mars where he hypnotically overpowers a tendrillless slan at an isolated mining outpost. He learns from the helpless man that after Jommy was sighted in the refuge where Kathleen was killed, the tendrillless slans began keeping careful watch on all those known to fit his physical description to make sure Jommy does not try to assume their identity at some future date. He learns the identity of a likely candidate, Barton Corliss, who regularly comes through that area. Jommy sets up an elaborate trap and

captures him, and over a period of weeks uses hypnosis to learn all he can about the man, enough for Jommy to impersonate him flawlessly. He is finally finished and sets out to replace Corliss in society when he is brought in for routine examination by the authorities.

### **Chapter Seventeen** (pages 160-175)

His ship is escorted to the tendrillless city of Cimmerium, where he is scheduled for an intensive battery of tests to ensure his true identity. He is carefully watched by his escort as they enter the city, and they attempt to trip him up. But Jommy has prepared well for his task, though — his knowledge of Corliss' life is complete and accurate.

Jommy, as Corliss, reminds his escort that the restorative surgery on Mrs. Corliss is due to be finished that morning. Corliss' wife had been severely injured some weeks earlier, her head crushed in a spaceship accident, and her brain is being painstakingly reconstructed. His escort gain authorization to postpone the exam, but their suspicions are heightened even further by the convenient timing.

Brain reconstruction is a delicate operation, and the presence of a spouse or close friend is required. Using a complex array of Porgrave machines, the spouse can aid in the rebuilding of the patient's brain and mind to ensure it is done properly. Jommy is brought to the hospital to oversee the last phase of her surgery. While connected to her mind he learns that the tendrillless assault on Earth is scheduled to begin in two months. This task accomplished, the examination is forestalled as he is then ordered to be taken before Joanna Hillory. In the years since they first met, she has become the resident expert on Jommy and is responsible for having tracked him down on Earth. Knowing that he would have been unable to withstand the examination, and with the certainty of being exposed by Joanna herself, Jommy is unsure what lies ahead.

He is astounded when Joanna greets him warmly and lowers her mind shield. She explains that their encounter had given her hope for the future. Since then she has secretly been working to aid him by misdirecting and delaying the tendrillless slans' pursuit. Together, they adopt Jommy's plan to use hypnotism crystals one at a time on his escorts, to ensure he passes the examination. Then, with Joanna's help, he will return to Earth and warn Kier Gray of the tendrillless attack.

At the Bureau of Statistics, Joanna brings up Samuel Lann's ancient text diary on the 'Stics Machine. The truth about the slans' origins is finally revealed: they are but one variety of natural mutation that began plaguing the world in the mid-21st century, and are neither artificial beings nor responsible for the continued infant mutations of the present. (For more details, see the **TIMELINE** from 2000-2250.) She also uses the machine to locate a secret entrance to the palace for

Jommy, and arranges to have him taken to Earth.

## **Chapter Eighteen** (pages 176-190)

Backed on Earth, Jommy infiltrates the palace grounds, dominating guards through hypnosis as he goes. After being guided by a nearby Porgrave thought broadcaster, he gains entrance to a hidden passage in the base of a large fountain that leads beneath the palace. It is one of the most ancient and dangerous secret passages, and has been booby-trapped since it was first built. The walls press together, forcing him into a small elevator. By using his atomic ring he is able to destroy the restraints intended for his hands.

The elevator takes him to Gray's private office where he has a prolonged conversation with the dictator. He is astounded to learn that Gray himself is a specially augmented slan, a descendent of the "prototype" variant of the tendriless slans, and one of the leaders of the slan race. He explains some of the more mysterious aspects of the slans' existence.

Random mutations began occurring in the human population around 2000 AD, but it wasn't until 2071 that Samuel Lann discovered the first truly beneficial mutations, whom he named "slans" after himself. Persecution of the slans, who were blamed for these mutations, was carried out with an unprecedented ferocity for 500 years. After various unsuccessful attempts to hide their true nature, some of the slan survivors began augmenting themselves to remove their tendrils and making their internal organs more human in order to avoid detection. Several varieties of slan were created during this 200-year project. Their telepathic ability was altered so that there were no tendrils, their mind-reading powers now residing inside the brain itself, although this ability was designed to remain dormant for centuries and the tendrils will eventually return.

During this "camouflaged" phase the slans contrived to secretly control the human government from within. It's known that mainstream humanity will soon die out, as the rise of natural sterility among the human population continues to rise. Gray explains that when this becomes common knowledge there will be a second vicious persecution of slans, but this time they will be prepared for it. The tendriless slans were purposefully antagonized and made ruthless to ensure their survival during this inevitable period of turmoil. And in a few decades the tendriless will find themselves possessing telepathic powers, and their descendants will eventually have tendrils again.

As Jommy begins to explain his father's scientific secrets, he meets other true slans who are part of Gray's organization... as well as Kathleen Layton! Her temporary death was engineered by Gray, now revealed to be her father, in order to protect her from John Petty and those like him who would never let her live.

Only by letting them kill her, then resurrecting her, would her final safety be ensured. Her brain was repaired using the same technique used on Mrs. Corliss on Mars, and she was "reborn" here in the secret parts of the palace where she can live in peace and safety.

# Trivia

- The term "visiplat," which occurs in numerous stories by van Vogt including *Slan*, was first used in 1930 by E.E. "Doc" Smith in his novel *Skylark Three* when it was serialized in *Amazing Stories*. It was merely one of many terms used to describe the same type of device, with authors such as F.K. Kelly and Murray Leinster using it throughout the '30s and '40s, as well as in additional works by Smith. For more information, see <http://www.jessesword.com/sf/view/446>
- *Slan* was the first serial to be given *Astounding's* "Nova" designation for outstanding work, and long remained a topic of discussion in the "Brass Tacks" section of the magazine where readers' letters were published. Throughout the 1940s Campbell would frequently make note of how hard it was to obtain the issues the serial appeared in, and that the Arkham edition was highly sought after, often selling for many times its cover price. The release of the 1951 Simon & Schuster edition was proudly trumpeted in a full-page ad in the January 1952 issue of *Astounding*.
- When planning the revision of the novel for Simon & Schuster in 1951, van Vogt marked up a copy of the 1946 Arkham edition. At some time this copy was part of Forrest J. Ackerman's collection, and is described by H.L. Drake in his non-fiction book [A.E. van Vogt: Science Fantasy's Icon](#) (pages 22-23). Especially in his early days as a writer van Vogt was a self-confessed poor typist, so he often used a printed version of the work as a working manuscript for his revisions. This tendency occasionally got the better of him, as he would sometimes cut up an old manuscript, inserting new pages and writing in the margins, thus destroying the original in the process.
- Many of van Vogt's heroes have an unfortunate propensity for taking control of their foes' minds, rather than achieving victory through war or diplomacy. Although this approach is certainly novel and rarely seen in literature, it nonetheless doesn't sit too well with many readers (myself included). It's one of the least likable aspects of his fiction.
- Best-selling author Kevin J. Anderson was commissioned in January 2006

to write a sequel to *Slan* based on notes and an incomplete draft by van Vogt and his stepson Gregory Brayman. Although the draft was entitled *Slan II: The Tendrilless War* the final result is entitled *Slan Hunter*. It was serialized in the online magazine *Jim Baen's Universe* and will be published in hard cover by Tor in July 2007.

## Unresolved Questions

- ***Why didn't the alarms at Air Central sound when Jommy entered to hijack the ship?***

This was most probably due to some unknown property of his father's weapon, but this is never definitely established (112, 115).

- ***Are slans really all that nice?***

Although many passages emphasize how guileless and non-violent true slans are in their everyday lives (101, 140, 187), they are also shown to be masterful manipulators and cold-blooded killers on a vast scale (187-8). The contrast between the idiotic pacifism of Peter Cross, and the machinations of Kier Gray — both "true" slans — couldn't be more striking, and is difficult to reconcile. Like people, perhaps they're more reasonable when they're not collected together in large, powerful groups.

- ***Who was living in all those old slan refuges?***

It's clearly stated that true slans are few in number by the time the main bulk of the story takes place, having been "replaced" by the tendrilless variety. The few true slans around are either part of the small but powerful organization secretly governing the human world, or "stragglers" who were scattered and fended for themselves since the slan government was overthrown over a thousand years previously. So who was living in the numerous and vast slan refuges scattered across the world, which are clearly newer than the tendrilless slan race?

## Slans: Traits & Characteristics

This focuses mainly on the slans' traits and characteristics. For more information about their telepathic abilities, see **Telepathy**. The relations between humans, slans, and tendriless slans are covered in the section **Slans in Society**.

### *True Slans*

Natural mutations, this offshoot breed of humanity is superior in almost every respect — their internal organs differ from those of normal humans (6), they possess two hearts that function as one (7, 84), and are endowed with tendrils, golden threads mixed in with their hair, which can detect thought waves and give them the ability to read minds (18). Tendrils are outgrowths from the more mysterious regions of the brain — these areas are underdeveloped in humans, though they nonetheless seem to grant vague and murky semi-telepathic powers that sporadically grant intuition and suchlike (84). Tendrils often wave slightly when they detect thought waves (18).

Slans are 2-3 times more intelligent than humans (24) and mature at a faster rate — a 9 year old slan has the mind of a 15 year old human (5), and a 17 year old possess the mind of a 30 year old (68). Slans have superb photographic memories, and they are able to memorize large amounts of data in a short period of time, with perfect recall (131).

They possess phenomenal stamina and strength, which is attributed to the neural connections to the muscles rather than the muscles themselves which are identical to humans' (84). Even a slan child can outrun an adult human male (10). Their strong hands and fingers allow them to climb walls (50, 92). At age 15, Jommy was able to climb 30 stories with Granny on his back. Doing this, however, pushed him to his limits (89).

Slans can go for long periods without sleep (154). When ill or injured they go into a deep sleep to allow the body to repair itself. During this time their subconscious can detect nearby danger and awaken to deal with the emergency (39). When slans are sick they become highly emotional and often think and act without due caution (40, 46).

A slan's average lifespan is 150 years (79). Owing to their longevity and intelligence, they take the long-term view with their plans, some of which can take over a century to run their course (118). Generally, slans are not considered fully mature at 23, but hardship can accelerate the maturation process (164). Slan adults are more alert and possess greater telepathic skill than their children (6, 147).

Attempts to crossbreed humans and slans result in failure. Such attempts have been made more than 100 known times over the centuries (78-79, 84-85).

### ***Tendriless Slans***

Genetically engineered offshoots of true slans, initially created as a means of hiding their true nature from hostile humans (186). They are identical to true slans, only without the tendrils (47). They therefore lack the slans' telepathic abilities (46, 96) while still being stronger and more intelligent than humans (96-7). The tendril gene was designed to lay dormant for centuries, and is scheduled to show up in tendriless offspring within 50 years of the story's end (186-7).

They are very advanced technologically, possessing weapons and ships far more sophisticated than humans (100, 148-150). As well as a complete dominance over most of space within the solar system, they have explored the surfaces of the Moon, Mars, and Venus and gone as far out as Jupiter's moon, all without encountering any indication of true slans or extraterrestrial life (100). They possess heavy weapons so powerful they could reduce even their own mighty spaceships to dust (117). They maintain heavy patrols within the solar system at all times, vigilant for signs of the slans. Such is their fear that they have extensively mined areas of space near Earth (126).

Although they do not possess telepathic abilities, they are capable of using effective shields around their minds which can be raised and lowered at will to prevent their minds being read (93, 98). The cunning tendriless slans can use this to their advantage, however, by leaking specific thoughts to deceive true slans (97). They have compensated for their lack of telepathic abilities by honing the science of psychology to an extreme degree (99). They used this extensive knowledge in their many newspapers; the subtle difference between tendriless and human styles was detectable (124).

The tendriless also have a very efficient system for physical descriptions;

within a matter of seconds they can catalog a person's precise features and relay that information on (145).

Both the true slans and tendrillless slans are ruled by their own council (101, 116).

Although their great city of Cimmerium is on Mars, they secretly control much of the human world (116, 123), including the Air Center (49), all channels of communication (146, 183), numerous popular newspapers (124), and important positions in the government (145). The tendrillless go to great lengths to conceal their activities from humanity, though they do take the occasional risk when forced to (112, 120, 149). So powerful and vast were the tendrillless' capabilities that they estimated all of Earth's defenses could be wiped away in a mere two months of warfare (116). Once openly in control, they would enslave mankind (117).

While true slans are generous and altruistic even in the face of relentless hatred (140), the tendrillless are conniving, ruthless, and xenophobic (101). Jommy idly speculated that their lack of telepathic abilities caused their minds to be closed and secret to others, just as human minds are (111). Deceit and selfishness therefore have free reign; free contact between minds may by its very nature ensure honesty and consideration for others.

# Telepathy

The slan telepathic ability is made possible by the tendrils in their hair. These "pick up" thought waves and relay them down into the brain. Slans without tendrils are therefore unable to read minds. Slan telepathy is purely passive except with other slans.

However, Jommy could use his hypnosis techniques to dominate others— for more details, see GADGETRY: Hypnotism Crystals. Also, thoughts could be recorded and broadcast using Porgrave machines, even between non-telepaths. For more details see GADGETRY: Porgrave Thought Broadcasters.

## ***Key Facts***

- Some topics are easier to convey through telepathy than others; technical information seems to be difficult to transmit (137).
- Slans can rapidly exchange large amounts of information directly between their minds (190).
- Some environments can "diffuse" thought waves, hindering a slan's ability to detect them except across very short distances (61).
- People who are asleep "radiate" less thought than those who are awake, but they can still be sensed (18). Their dreams can be read by slans (19).
- Slans can use their telepathic abilities to easily avoid detection, by taking advantage of gaps in people's attention (44, 132).
- Being in contact with a mind is likened to flipping through a book with an infinite number of pages. Recent memories are the easiest to read (111, 135).
- Slans can detect thoughts up to a fourth of a mile away (141). They can also sense the minds of animals and even identify them that way (42). All living things give off a "life wave" that can be sensed by mature slans, and often at great distances (147).
- Even when sleeping, a slan's mind can subconsciously detect danger, and

he will awaken to deal with it (39, 141).

- Slans can sometimes even *feel* the physical sensations others are experiencing (9, 21, 148), as well as seeing through others' eyes and hearing through others' ears (88, 142-3, 148, 169).
- Adults slans mature to the point where their tendrils can oversee their surroundings for many miles in incredible detail, their superior brains being able to handle the massive amount of information coming in (147).

### ***Telepathic Interaction***

- The presence of other minds is sometimes described as a "weight"; this seems to be partly due to number, though imminent danger can be a contributing factor (88). In crowded places, the thoughts of so many minds creates a kind of vague background murmur (5-6, 45) that makes it difficult to distinguish specific minds, though it can be done with effort. This could be compared to trying to filter out a single conversation in a crowded room. Adult slans can easily pick specific thoughts out of crowds and over distances, though children have more difficulty (6, 31).
- Emotions come through clearer than thoughts, and often cannot be withheld from slans through willpower. However, emotions also tend to obscure the clarity of other thoughts in the mind, so the emotion is often the only thing that can be read (28, 59), although if the emotions are intense enough other thoughts might leak out for a short time (48-9). Sudden unexpected events can cause brief emotions that are impossible to "cover up" with a mind shield (32).
- Sensing the emotions of others can be overwhelming (18-9, 20, 24, 45); this is intensified by the nature of the emotion (20), the proximity (19), and the number of people feeling it (25, 45). Sometimes this "overload" can manifest itself in the form of physical pain (20, 25).
- Fatigue or pain, as well as the emotional state of those around them, can hinder the precision of slans' telepathic ability, regardless of their age (10, 25). Slans, especially children, can become fatigued by intensely focusing their mind on another's (6, 19).

- When minds become shrewd and calculating it is more difficult for slans to read them (27).
- Speaking focuses the thoughts, and spoken words can often cut off easy access to the other areas of the speaker's mind (111-2).
- Much as one might halfheartedly listen to someone else's conversation, so can a slan maintain "casual" contact with someone's mind (66).
- Slans can transmit emotions as well as thoughts to one another, making the other slan feel these emotions themselves as if they were their own (7). Slans can instantly sense others of their own kind nearby, and can pick out which individuals in a crowd are fellow slans (39, 46). They can even sense tendriless slans in this fashion (46-7, 114).
- When two slans share a close relationship, their thoughts can freely bounce back and forth and mingle with other, creating the impression that they share a single mind (141-2).
- Slans can "open" and "close" their minds to all outside thoughts (16, 93). However, even when a slan chooses to do this, a certain amount of "background noise" always makes its way through (18, 45).
- When a person is knocked unconscious, a slan watching that person's mind will notice it "slowing down" until it stops (95). For a brief period after a person loses consciousness, thoughts rise to the surface allowing the slan to read them, obviating any mind shield (108). The sensation of being in contact with a dying mind is different than anything else a slan can experience, leaving no doubt as to exactly what has happened (142).
- It is possible to channel individual thoughts to a specific slan (27, 106). The clarity of this "transmission" depends on the mental discipline of the person attempting it. A person with a cluttered mind also lets miscellaneous thoughts into the message (106), while those using mind shields can do so without letting any of their other thoughts out. One does *not* have to be a slan to direct their thoughts in this manner (27).

### ***Mind Shields***

Slans have the ability to shield either all thoughts (46) or only specific ones

(5, 140) from each other. Doing so, however, is a skill that improves with practice, and those who have never done it before have great difficulty at first (135).

Some individuals, such as tendriless slans and humans, have disciplined their way of thinking to such an extent that they can "camouflage" their thoughts, making them hard to read or impenetrable even to the most skilled slan (8, 19-20, 22). They do this by several methods, such as thinking about several things at once to make their individual mind blend in with the variety of thoughts from multiple individuals (19-20), or by thinking only specific thoughts on the surface of their minds (22). Sometimes these surface thoughts can come through so clearly that the slan can experience some disorientation when such an individual speaks — it can seem as if the words being spoken were only being thought (22).

Some thoughts always leak from any mind shield; the combined "noise" from such leaks from numerous individuals can be overwhelming in the same way that a smaller group of unblocked minds would be (93). Exceptionally cunning people can use the very faulted nature of mind shields to their own advantage, deliberately leaking out false information (98). Mind shields can be lowered at will, either partially (only allowing a slan access to certain information) or completely (102-3, 111, 136, 171, 190).

Using a mind shield is a basic practice among both true and tendriless slans (46, 96, 182), but was far less common among humans — specific humans who could do this include John Petty (8), some of his secret police (20), Kier Gray (22), and Jem Lorry (35). There is a difference between the mind shields used by humans and those used by slans; an experienced and skilled slan can spot the difference immediately (144-5, 182).

# Slans in Society

Like many of van Vogt's works, throughout the story he gives legends, then garbled truth, and then the full truth... which may or may not actually explain everything, or be entirely consistent with what came before. While this technique tends to enrich the story and make it more realistic, it nonetheless can cause a certain degree of confusion for the reader.

Here, I've set out the most commonly accepted legends about slans and world history and contrasted them with the true history as revealed towards the end of the book.

If history has taught one thing, it's that how people *perceive* history and the world they live in dictates how they live and treat others. As a result, legends are accepted as fact and people act on them, not knowing their fears and beliefs are baseless. This section discusses these legends and how people acted on them.

For just the straight facts on early slan history, see the [TIMELINE](#).

## ***Slans: Lies & Legends***

It is universally believed that a scientist in the distant past named Samuel Lann used a "mutation machine" on his wife resulting in the birth of the first slan infants. Furthermore, it is believed that the slans themselves continue this practice on regular human women, converting human babies into their own kind (39, 55, 84, 185-6), with the "failed" conversion attempts being the presumed cause for the vast majority of mutations that occur. The exact opposite is true — it is the *mutations* that are responsible for the existence of slans (174-5). Most of humanity's hatred of slans arises from this single misinterpretation, jumping to conclusions by mixing up cause and effect.

The majority of people seem confused as to whether slans naturally give birth (slan women are referred to as "breeders" on page 31) or whether they reproduce solely through mutating human babies. For this reason, slan women seem to be more greatly feared than the men (31). Even the tendrillless believed these random mutations to be the failed results of the slans' use of mutation machines (104-5).

Surprisingly for a story dealing with telepathy, the slans' telepathic ability was *not* the main reason for their persecution. This fear of having their infants "slanized" is consistently stated as the single greatest reason for humanity's fear of slans (28, 30-1, 39, 55). Slans in China were tolerated until the natural mutations began there about 100 years prior to the story (55). According to Petty, slans are still tolerated as fellow humans in the more "primitive" parts of the world, and the more remote areas may harbor secret slan colonies (75-6). Slans were also hated due to their perceived artificiality, as the twisted products of experimentation (40, 85). Petty also expresses mankind's feelings of overall inferiority as the reason why slans must be exterminated (85).

It is commonly believed that the conflict between slans and humans has only lasted a few centuries; the figure usually given is at least 400 years (78). Slans supposedly have existed for "over six hundred years" (84) — in truth, they have been around for almost 1,500 years (185).

The slans' history is very confused: While some were in hiding for centuries and engineered the various slan offshoots (186), others openly tried to conquer the world (5, 43, 56). Also, some secretly controlled the human government in order to keep their augmented offshoots from conquering the world (182) — while at the same time deliberately antagonizing them and making them stronger for the eventual, inevitable final showdown with humanity (187) — while other slans lived in secret refuges that were sought out and destroyed by that very same government (131, 137). And then there were always some stragglers who were never in contact with other slans (183). This disparity can perhaps be explained due to various slan factions being active and ignorant of each other's existence and activities. However, it should be emphasized that these contradictions are *not* resolved within the novel, leaving it to the reader to ponder and speculate long after he has finished reading it.

Humans believe slans tried to conquer the world (52). Although the facts have been greatly distorted over the years such an attempt was indeed made. This was supposedly done by a mere hundred thousand of them (55). During the time of chaos and upheaval following the mass of natural mutations that began appearing, slans infiltrated numerous vital organizations and took over. Considering the kind and "humanitarian" nature of the slans this was possibly done to restore order, though it was no doubt partially due to Samuel Lann's insistence that his "children" were entitled to rule the world (76, 175). During this war, slans did *not* use atomic weapons (73). During this time Centropolis was their capital and they built the magnificent palace (5, 43). But when the mutations continued unabated, and indeed

only increased, slans were seen as the perpetrators and were overthrown (56).

The bulk of humanity believes that space-flight was never mastered, though there are many legends that parts of the solar system were explored at some time; the government derides these legends as slan propaganda (50). (It's possible that the slans themselves were the ones exploring space — for further discussion, see TIMELINE 2100-2200).

### ***Slans & Humanity***

Compared with the general population, the government had a more realistic attitude towards slans; they foisted emotional propaganda on the ignorant populace to keep them under control (35, 127). The government saw it as a simple clash between two races, only one of which could be dominant (72), and the slans' innate superiority made it necessary to create a fearful mob mentality among the populace as a counterbalance, to fight the slans through sheer hatred and force of numbers. Although this strategy was effective in a crude fashion, Kier Gray recognized that such a policy had definite major drawbacks in that valuable opportunities were irrevocably lost whenever the mob asserted its unthinking hatred (30). Kier Gray's description of the common citizenry as a "poor, bewildered mass of fools" (35) is quite apt, as they are deliberately fed lies that often contradict each other, and they have a hard time trying to decide what they should believe.

Persecution of slans seem to have been focused mainly in the large urban areas; slans in outlying places were considered too hard to get to and too far from mainstream civilization to pose a serious threat (76). Kier Gray has consistently fed the council and the public the idea that the slans are vastly superior technologically, yet Petty states that they have never seen such gadgets (31). This insinuates that slans are few in number, as well as being well-hidden by this point.

According to the message capsule dropped on the palace, there are 1 million organized slans in the world and an additional 10 million living on their own (75). Since this capsule was created by Gray and his slan associates (183), this information may be false or merely exaggerated; others estimate the number of slans at five million altogether. By comparison, the current population of humans in the story is estimated at 3.5 billion (79).

The standard test administered by humans to detect slans is to remove their head covering to reveal tendrils (59). It therefore became a standard slan practice to routinely wear false hair pieces (120). The tendrillless became aware of this practice and instituted what I call the "toupee test" to check for false hair (166-7).

All mutations among the human population are routinely killed (presumably at birth) by the medical authorities (113). (This is illustrated quite dramatically in Kevin J. Anderson's novel *Slan Hunter*.) According to the figures given by Petty, about 100 slans are capture globally on a monthly basis (75). Apparently, most of these captures are done by trapping slans in the hundreds of abandoned slan refuges that are kept under close automated surveillance by the authorities (131). The precautions taken to trap even a single slan are elaborate, including blocking off all highways to a major metropolis (89). Whenever a slan ship is reported near Centropolis, it seems to be common practice for the government to broadcast radio interference to prevent slans from spreading "lies," and attempt to shoot them down with gun emplacements scattered across the city (60).

Through Kier Gray, the slans tried their own counter-propaganda, attempting to assuage mankind's fear of them by posing as less of a threat. Such attempts were universal failures, though the appearance of an obviously sub-standard slan ship did succeed at least in making the tendrillless slans nervous about the true slans' real capabilities and postpone their invasion of Earth (76-7, 183).

### ***True & Tendrilless Slans***

Tendrillless slans fear and hate true slans even more than the humans do (95). Slans are called "snakes" by the tendrillless slans (48, 95); this epithet was never used by humans. According to the incomplete and inaccurate knowledge of the tendrillless, their own race has existed for over 400 years (102). They were supposedly a later creation of the same mutation machine that created the true slans (104). In their early days they lived in remote areas to avoid persecution. However, the true slans — with whom they had had no previous contact — attacked the tendrillless communities without mercy, forcing them to flee into the urban centers where they could hide. True slans, since their tendrils were difficult to conceal, rarely ventured into the cities. Because of this, the tendrillless have a definite and concrete reason why they fear and hate true slans — since those days, the tendrillless have killed slans on sight. No contact between the two races has ever been established, and the tendrillless have never come across a

single slan community in 300 years (102). This conflict is supposedly racial — according to the tendrillless, some captured slans have said that no variation of the "perfect" slans should be allowed to live (104).

There are undoubtedly millions of tendrillless, far greater in number than true slans. Jommy encountered countless tendrillless slans on his extensive travels on Earth and Mars. On the other hand, the purpose and location of the true slans is the world's greatest mystery (102). The truth is that the true slans are very few in number, the tendrillless having, by design, practically replaced them. But since the tendril gene was designed to lay dormant for quite some time, the tendrillless slans will eventually "become" true slans again (186-7). Apart from the "stragglers," who belong to no slan organization, many of the true slans secretly rule the human government (182-3).

The tendrillless consider the elusive slans the greatest threat to them (145, 165) — even their massive arsenals of ships and weapons were small comfort (161). They had elaborate precautions to detect true slans in their midst — in addition to their large fleets and arsenals, Porgrave thought receivers were rigged to alarm systems throughout their cities (157). Thorough medical examinations were routinely given to individuals matching Jommy's physical description, which included tests on skin, blood, hair, fingerprints, and X-rays (162). After their dealings with Jommy they deduced that the slan organization no longer posed an obstacle and that Jommy himself was more important; they therefore felt free to begin their plan to openly invade Earth (145).

# Timeline

This table sets out the major incidents mentioned in the novel. Page numbers are given in parentheses to show where in the text the information originated.

On page 185, Gray tells a 23-year-old Jommy that "nearly fifteen hundred years" have passed since Samuel Lann discovered the first slan mutant in 2071. Since this is an approximate estimate and allows for some flexibility in dating the story, I've arbitrarily chosen 3520 as Jommy's birth year to make the calculation of dates easier.

Please note that due to the chaotic nature of the novel's backstory, and the centuries of lies and propaganda that have themselves become garbled, many of these facts do not create a consistent whole. I have, however, made an effort to make sense of it all. As such, this Timeline is my own interpretation of the information, and should not be taken to be the final word on the matter.

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<b>2000-2250</b>		Over this period of 250 years, random mutations appear in over a billion human children all over the world, a spontaneous burst of blind evolution brought on by the inability of the human mind and body to cope with the terrible pressures of modern civilization. Slans seem to have been the only beneficial mutations to arise. These abnormalities trigger a period of chaos and war that lasts five centuries. (184-185)
<b>2000 ?</b>		According to hearsay, in the distant past the population of China was decimated by several wars. Since these conflicts purportedly were not mutant-related, they may have predated Lann's discovery of the slan mutant. (54-55)
<b>2071</b>	May 31	The first natural slan mutations are born. They are triplets, a boy and two girls (174)
	June 1	Samuel Lann begins his study of the triplets (174)
<b>2073</b>	June 7	A journalist falsely reports that the mutant triplets were

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created by Lann using a "mutation machine" on their mother. This gives rise to the long-lasting legend that slans are artificial beings (174) and that slans increase their numbers both by breeding and by corrupting human infants.

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**2073-88**

Lann raises the slan infants. He does his best to cultivate them into a new race of supermen who will rule the world. (174)

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**2088**      May 31

The triplets' 17th birthday

Shortly thereafter, there is a successful mating between the boy and his sisters

Around this time, Lann begins discovering additional slan mutations, which will give him more breeding stock to work with in future. (174)

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**2090**      August 18

Each girl gives birth to triplets (174-175). Twins and triplets would become common with slan mothers for the first century of their race; afterwards, the average became one child born per pregnancy (185). Also, polygamy was not uncommon among early slans, undoubtedly part of Samuel Lann's breeding program to rapidly boost the slan population (172).

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**2100-2200 ?**

The epidemic of mutations around the world causes mass confusion, mayhem, and chaos (56). Slans are routinely blamed for the continued natural mutations (55).

The 'Stics (Statistics) machines are created by the slans, containing a vast repository of knowledge. These machines are later taken to Mars and used by the tendrillless slans. (173)

The conquest of space (50). The solar system is explored, and various moons and planets are terraformed using asteroids composed of ice and frozen oxygen (footnote, 153). *[Said to have taken place "before or during the slan-human war." Since space exploration and terraforming are major efforts, I have placed this period before the war. I*

*have to wonder whether the slans themselves, rather than humanity, were the ones exploring space. This would also explain why stories of these accomplishments are later dismissed as slan propaganda.]*

A relatively small group of slans openly take over the world around this time (56). They make Centropolis their capital (5) and build the palace (43).

Shortly thereafter the War of Disaster overthrows the slans. During this time of confusion, many slans were cut off from their fellows and forced to fend for themselves; their descendants included the Cross family. A more organized group of slans lived on in secret.

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**2200-2700 ?**

**The Nameless Period** (104). For five centuries (185) slans are universally hunted down with a savagery unprecedented in human history.

During this period the calendar is rendered inaccurate by as much as several centuries, and myth and propaganda replace fact. Only the slans retain knowledge of how many years have truly passed (185). Presumably a new dating system came into use during this time to replace BC/AD [*this is confirmed many places in Slan Hunter*], though some form of the Gregorian calendar remains in use ("April 4th, Earth reckoning," 169).

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**2200-2400 ?**

During this dark age, over a period of 200 years some slans began augmenting themselves to remove their tendrils and make their internal organs more human, in order to avoid detection. Their telepathic ability was rendered dormant, with the tell-tale tendrils being absent. Both the tendrils and telepathy have been "programmed" to eventually resurface in the tendrillless slan population. (186)

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**2400 ?**

Tendrillless slans became dominant around this time, a product of the slans' efforts begun centuries ago to make themselves undetectable among the mainstream human population. For the most part, they choose to live peaceful

lives, as though they were ordinary humans. (183)

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**2500 ?**

The true slans begin purposefully antagonizing the tendrillless slans, to make them ruthless to survive the inevitable showdown with humanity. This final conflict will occur around the end of the 36th century when the natural (and inevitable) sterility of ordinary humankind will be blamed on the slans, resulting in a final, tremendous war between the two races (187).

True slans insinuate themselves into the human government to prevent the tendrillless slans from taking over the world ("For hundreds of years," 182)

Some of the secret passages leading into the palace are rigged with thought broadcasters to lead slans safely through them (178, 180). The passage that Jommy uses in Chapter 18 was one of the most ancient and least-used passages (183), and was thick with many years' worth of dust (180).

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**2500-3100**

*[It's worth noting that however one interprets the historical information in the novel, one is left over with about 600 years that sit around doing nothing! Even though the new Dark Ages undoubtedly lasted a long time, one can't get around the fact that the timeframe for the back story is definitely overextended.]*

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**3100 ?**

The slan refuge found by Kathleen and Jommy was built around this time (141)

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**3200 ?**

For about 300 years leading up to the story, in their conflict with the true slans the tendrillless were unable to locate a single true slan community. (102)

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**3430**

Durable plastic houses are constructed in the poorer neighborhoods near Capital Avenue in Centropolis (10)

Multiple-pulse jet engines are abandoned by the tendrillless slans as being an obsolete technology (113)

According to popular legend, slans were tolerated in China until they began to turn human Chinese babies into slans (54-5). This probably means that the natural mutations occurring elsewhere in the world didn't reach great proportions in China until this time and the slans, as usual, were blamed for it.

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<b>3453 ?</b>		The woman later known as Granny was born. <i>[Page 148, which takes place in January 3544, states her age as at least 90.]</i>
<b>3460</b>		Old Man Darrett, a former history professor from whom Jommy learned a great deal, was born around this time (55)
<b>3473-3493 ?</b>		Granny's career as a beautiful and famous stage actress. Her wild and careless living lead her to ruin and poverty. (14, 38)
<b>3505</b>		Joanna Hillory is born around this time <i>[Said to be about 15 years older than Jommy on page 172.]</i>
<b>3514</b>		The slan refuge later found by Kathleen and Jommy was raided and abandoned around this time (137).
<b>3518</b>	October 4	Kathleen Layton Gray is born to Kier Gray and an unknown slan woman. Davy Dinsmore is also born around this time (15). Shortly thereafter, Kathleen is brought to the palace and kept there, ostensibly as a study subject under Gray's personal protection (16).
<b>3520</b>	May	Jommy Cross is born to Peter and Patricia Cross (67)
<b>3526</b>		Peter Cross is captured and killed by the police (30)  After a brief attempt by Davy to bully her, he and Kathleen become friends (17)
<b>3529</b>	Summer	Kathleen decides to block out the thoughts of those around her in the palace. This allows the plot against her life to flourish without her being aware of it (16).

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**3529**      October 20      **Story begins.** *[On page 41, winter is said to be approaching, so the story begins probably in summer or autumn. Dating throughout the book indicates an autumn birthday for Kathleen and an early summer birthday for Jommy. Based on their ages at various places in the book, I've picked October as the most likely starting point for the novel. To make relative dating easier, I've picked October 20.]*

Patricia Cross and her son Jommy leave their home in the suburbs and enter Centropolis. That evening, they are ambushed by the secret police. Patricia is killed and Jommy is taken in by Granny.

October 22      In the evening, Kathleen is warned of her upcoming execution scheduled for the next day, her 11th birthday. That night she eludes a man sent to murder her.

An emergency council meeting is called around 2 o'clock in the morning. These events spark a political crisis resulting in the assassination and replacement of Kier Gray's entire cabinet except John Petty.

October 26      Some days later, Jommy awakens from his fever (37)

October 29      Three days after that, Jommy begins shoplifting for Granny. That night he discovers the existence of tendrillless slans, and learns that they dominate Air Central and at ten o'clock every night they secretly launch ships into space. (41-51)

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**3529-3535**      While living with Granny and thieving for their needs, Jommy educates himself as best he can, and spies on the activities of the tendrillless slans. (53-57) Jommy is able to live in relative peace and security during this time (63).

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**3535**      Around this time, humanity begins to experience sterility. This is a natural phenomenon, and will be not known by the masses for perhaps a few decades longer. (186)

May 1      At 2 o'clock in the afternoon on his 15th birthday, Jommy

sets out to find his father's hidden weapon in the Catacombs beneath Centropolis (57).

Around that time, a slan ship is seen over Centropolis, causing widespread panic and rumors (59-60, 65-6, 73). It drops a message capsule in the palace grounds. A council meeting is held shortly afterwards (74).

Hours later Jommy finds the weapon and around 7:30 pm returns home. Once there, he learns that Granny has betrayed him to the police (66-67). They escape, and reach the roof of the Air Center a few minutes before midnight (90). They make off with a tendriless slan ship, but are in turn captured by Joanna on board. After a complex series of events they escape, Jommy releases Joanna, keeps the tendriless ship, and Granny and Jommy separate. (95-114)

Joanna Hillory begins her study of Jommy, and spends the next seven years trying to find him (174).

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**3536** Granny buys a ranch in a secluded valley, and meets up with Jommy about a year after their encounter with Joanna (122). Jommy perfects his father's secrets, fortifies the ranch, and creates numerous inventions (123).

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**3538** July-October Jommy spends several weeks repairing and vastly improving the tendriless ship he captured three years previously. He then takes it to the Moon as "test drive." He is forced back to Earth by tendriless slan patrols and space mines (124-5).

Jommy begins using hypnosis to make his neighbors in the valley feel neutral towards slans, and to improve Granny's character (127).

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**3539** October 16 1 week before Kathleen's 21st birthday, it becomes clear that Gray will no longer protect her from John Petty. She escapes from the Palace (130-3).

November Early winter. 15 days later, she meets Jommy in the early evening. They explore the slan refuge together and she is

killed by Petty around 10 o'clock pm (135-144).

Tendriless slans begin the hunt for Jommy in earnest. Known individuals matching Jommy's physical description are put under routine observation and submitted to regular examinations, to prevent Jommy from changing his identity (146, 156).

Soon thereafter Jommy embeds harmless commands into the minds of the people inhabiting the valley, allowing them to be used as an "early warning system" of sorts to notify him of unusual activity nearby as well as imminent attacks by the authorities or tendriless slans (148).

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**3542** About three and a half years later, the tendriless slans learn of Jommy's whereabouts. They spend a few months preparing their attack on the ranch (147).

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**3543** July 1 Jommy has been 23 years old for two months exactly on the day they attack. It has been about four years since the day Kathleen died (147). Granny is approximately 90 years old (148).

The tendriless slans attack the valley in force. Jommy destroys his inventions to keep them from discovering the secret of controlled atomics, and escapes to Mars in his ship. Granny is left at the ranch, protected from the tendriless slans interrogation by a hypnotic block (149-152).

The garbled reports of this attack are enough to heighten security at the Palace (177).

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**3544** January Jommy spends several months drifting in space near Mars to avoid detection. He then lands on Mars (154).  
March Over a period of about a month, Jommy learns all he can from Corliss to enable him to impersonate him successfully (159).  
April 4 Jommy tries to infiltrate the tendriless slan city of Cimmerium as Corliss (169). He is brought in for routine examination by the suspicious authorities. He is able to

avoid detection, and with the assistance of Joanna Hillory secures his return to Earth. He is still 23 years old (164) and it has been 7 years since he met Joanna (174).

May Jommy is returned to Earth and infiltrates the palace (176). He meets Gray, learns he is a slan, and meets the resurrected Kathleen (182-190). *[The date is given as "May" in the 1940 and 1946 texts of the novel]*

June 10 The scheduled date for the tendriless slans' open military takeover of Earth (169).

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**3590**

Around this time tendriless slan children will again possess tendrils and the ability to read minds, a trait which had, by design, lain dormant for centuries. Also in the near future, the natural sterility that had begun in humanity around 3530 will escalate, signaling the end of the human race and a second terrible persecution of slans. After the end of this conflict slans will replace homo sapiens, the inferior race having naturally died out. (186-7)

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# The First Law of Atomic Energy

Jommy's father Peter Cross was a great scientist who made a single but vastly important discovery: the first law of atomic energy. Unlike earlier attempts to harness atomic energy, this employed concentrating the forces rather than dispersing them. (This is explained in far greater detail on pages 137-8 and 189-90.) Apart from building a hand weapon employing this technique, Peter also made extensive notes on his research. Both were hidden away in the catacombs beneath Centropolis for his son to find. Jommy elaborated on his father's discoveries and found a wide variety of applications, creating new devices and weapons:

- **Ten-Point Steel** — Jommy uses a point system for measuring the maximum strength of a metal, with 1-point being the strongest possible. In the story, human civilization has reached the level of producing 750-point steel, and the tendriless can produce 500-point steel. The latter seems to be the highest level that can be achieved through ordinary refinement techniques. Using his father's first law of atomic energy, he has been able to create 10-point steel. Less than an inch of this material can withstand a point-blank nuclear explosion, though it will be a little battered and radioactive afterwards (126, 138). Using one of his inventions, Jommy was able to convert the foot-thick hull of his captured tendriless spaceship from 500- to 10-point steel (125). Likewise, his automobile's exterior is also made of 10-point steel (134). Much of the structures on Granny's ranch were given a similar treatment (149).
- **Disintegrators** — The Weapon built by his father was the first functioning model employing the first law of atomic energy. Its principle was adapted and duplicated by Jommy to create a variety of larger weapons, attached to vehicles or as immobile emplacements, as well as devices to render craft invisible by incinerating photons that came into contact with his ship's hull (152-3).

# Characters & Organizations

Listed in alphabetical order by surname where known, otherwise by first name.

## **Barton Corliss**

A tendrillless slan living on Mars. His physical attributes matched Jommy's precisely, and was therefore kept under close observation by the tendrillless authorities to cut off any attempts at substitution and impersonation.

He worked at the spaceship factory in Cimmerium, and was married to Mrs. Corliss. During his frequent time off work he would pilot his small ship out into the wastes on Mars, presumably to enjoy the scenery (158-9).

*Appears on page 157*

## **Mrs. Corliss**

A tendrillless woman on Mars, a commander in the their military (169). When her head was smashed in an accident, her brain was painstakingly reconstructed and restored (157, 167-9).

## **The Council or The Cabinet**

A group of twelve ministers, one of whom is elected dictator by the other eleven. In order to ensure political stability, each has a private army that can be used against the others or against the dictator. On the eve of Kathleen's 11th birthday ten of the Council members will killed and replaced by their subordinates on Gray's orders — only Gray himself and Petty remained. Councilors named in the story are Kier Gray, John Petty, Mardue, Harlihan, and Jem Lorry. Far from merely ruling from their palace, members of the council would often travel elsewhere on state business (75).

*Appears on pages 24-36, & 74-86*

## **Jommy Cross**

Since this tale is primarily Jommy's, most details on his life are included in the summary. I focused here more on miscellaneous details and on his gradual change in outlook.

His full name was John Thomas Cross (171, 184).

One of his favorite things to do during his first six years with Granny was to

sit and watch the beautiful palace at night, an act which seemed to reaffirm his aims and striving (91).

Rather disgusted by his father's pacifistic ideals he decided to do whatever was needed to protect himself and his fellow slans (64). But after he was forced to kill in self-defense he became determined to avoid needless bloodshed (140). He felt all slans to be brothers, regardless of whether they had tendrils or not (110) and went to great lengths to avoid killing the tendrillless even when doing so put him at greater risk (144, 150). Even with the apparently hopeless situation, he worked to reconcile humans, slans, and tendrillless so they could co-exist without slaughtering one another (108, 116). He intended for his father's science to benefit everyone (123).

Although he could have escaped from Granny early on, he decided to stay with her despite her untrustworthiness since she was the best way he had to avoid detection (42). He stole just enough to keep her dependent on him while secretly keeping a great deal for himself (53). While Granny wasted her money on dubious pleasures (53), Jommy used his funds in a more practical fashion, fixing up Granny's shack and preparing a secret escape tunnel (57). When Granny betrayed him to the police, he was unable to leave her to meet her fate; even though she harbored him for her own gain, Jommy was nonetheless grateful for it (88-9).

Early on, Jommy had two driving forces in his life: First, to find his father's weapon (5, 12, 42), and second, to contact other slans and discover the truth about his race's origins (55, 95, 113, 116, 122). He at first speculated that the true slans must be living mixed in with the human population (123-4). When this proved to be incorrect, he then believed that the true slans were living alongside — or perhaps even ruling — the tendrillless on Mars, but that they were careful enough to avoid being suspected (166, 186). But after having searched long and hard for other slans with no results, Jommy deduced that they must be in the last remaining place: the palace itself (158, 182-3).

*Featured in Chapters 1, 4-7, 9-12, & 14-18*

### **Patricia Cross**

Experienced slan, widow of the great slan inventor Peter Cross, and Jommy's mother. She and Peter, neither belonging to any organized slan group, met on the street and instantly were able to know each other as slans (39, 136). They married and spent most of their lives working on Peter's invention (10).

Described as sensitive and intelligent, she raised and trained her son to continue his father's legacy (7, 12). She and Jommy were tracked by the secret police from their home in the suburbs and ambushed in the streets of Centropolis (6-7). She submitted to her fate to allow her son to escape (7). She was killed shortly after he made his getaway (9).

*Appears on pages 5-7*

### **Peter Cross**

Great slan inventor, wife to Patricia and father of Jommy. Although interested in the slans' origins he was too busy with his research to investigate it, figuring it would be a demanding and time-consuming task (40, 104). Had their son grown up alongside his parents, it would have been Jommy's task to find the slans (104). Inherently peaceful and pacifistic, Peter invented a potent weapon but chose not use it even to protect himself (39, 64, 138). He felt that the greatest problem in the world was how slans and humans could peacefully co-exist without either side forcing enslavement on the other, and he feared the slans' inherent superiority might lead them down that dark path (64). He left behind his weapon as well as detailed notes on his scientific research for his son to later find and use (63-65, 101). Peter was captured and killed by the panicky police 3 years before the beginning of the story (30); in line with his ideals, he did not fight back against his captors (64).

### **Davy Dinsmore**

A childhood friend of Kathleen. They were both the same age (15). After an early and unsuccessful attempt to bully her, he and Kathleen become cautious friends (17). At one point, in order to respect his privacy, she promised never to read his mind (16). A few months before Kathleen's eleventh birthday, Davy was warned by his father to avoid Kathleen for his own protection. Since she was unwilling to read his mind, he had to contrive another means of warning her of her impending execution (15-6, 36). After he had apologized for the show he made of hating slans, and explained the reasons behind doing so, she forgave him and he invited her to begin routinely reading his mind in order to keep him honest with her (36, 67).

As they matured at different rates, Kathleen took on the role of parent and teacher to him, rather than that of a friend. She did her best to undo the influence of propaganda and lies that dominated life in the palace (68).

By the time they were 17 he fell in love with her and wished to make her his mistress, though Kathleen by that point had matured far beyond the point where this would be possible (67-70). She kindly rebuffed his advances and took measures to ensure that his father dissuaded him from further pursuits (69, 87).

*Appears on pages 15-17, 36, & 67-70*

### **William Dinsmore**

Davy's father, an administrator in the government (68). Although he apparently had nothing against Kathleen personally and didn't object to Davy associating with her most of the time, he considered her a social and political liability since she was a slant (36, 68, 87).

## **Granny**

A stage actress in her youth, her depraved and careless lifestyle led her to poverty and ruin. She ended up living the life of a junk woman. Once beautiful, her hideous features now reflect her inner self (14, 38). Habitual theft seems to have been one of her lesser crimes, with murder being one of her worst (38), and each crime made it easier to perform the next one (107). Greedy and materialistic, her conniving mind instantly saw the potential in capturing and using a slant to steal for her and hid the orphaned Jommy from the police. Granny used a significant amount of the money they stole together to finance her addiction to alcohol and her frequent trips to pleasure resorts (53). Jommy used his funds in a more practical fashion, fixing up Granny's shack and preparing a secret escape tunnel (57).

She seemed to recognize the worth of only material possessions rather than information, as Jommy's accidental mention of his father's weapon completely failed to register with her (40). Granny had an abnormally strong survival instinct (92); the prospect of losing her money, as well as the threat of imminent death, sobers her in a hurry no matter how drunk she may be (89). Anything but brave, she was nonetheless able to take greater temporary risks to ensure future survival (107).

When unable to coerce others to her will she would resort to skillful manipulation, trying different tactics until she got results (41). In her early years with Jommy she was cruel to him, but as time went on she spent most of her time in a harmless drunken stupor (58). When drunk, her mind would dwell on her past experiences, most of which were scenes of great wickedness and degradation (57-8).

Granny's horse is named Bill. Not surprisingly he is old, unhealthy, and badly taken care of, though undoubtedly a lot nicer to have around than Granny is (42-4).

Even in spite of the reconditioning of her mind by Jommy, many of her more unpleasant personality traits still lingered near the surface. By this time she was around 90 years old, and the age of her mind may have been a factor in this (148). After the tendriless attack on their valley ranch, Granny was hypnotically commanded to forget all about the many modifications Jommy had made to the area, to prevent her from being interrogated by the invaders (151).

*Featured in Chapters 1, 4-12, & 16*

## **Kathleen Layton Gray**

Young slan girl. Although ostensibly Kier Gray's protected prisoner, she is in reality his daughter though she does not know it. Significantly, her room connects to Gray's office through a secret passageway (21). Gray was not beyond employing Kathleen's telepathic abilities for his own ends, using her at least once during a Council meeting to "spy" on the members' minds and report the information to him using hand signals (31).

Although a prisoner, she is allowed free access to a large part of the palace (132). She spends much of her time looking down on the city and imaging what life must be like outside the palace walls (17). At some point she read and memorized the complete works of Isaac Newton (71).

A few months before her eleventh birthday she began to routinely block out all telepathic contact with the hateful humans around her. Doing this meant that the plot against her life flourished and grew without her being aware of it (16).

Kind and altruistic like most slans, her difficult circumstances did not embitter her (135). Whereas Jommy had always lived in an atmosphere of imminent danger, Kathleen was relatively safe in the palace under the protection of Kier Gray. As a result, Kathleen had difficulty adjusting to Jommy's lifestyle when she fled Centropolis — her former security made her incautious, leading to her being shot by John Petty (142). All of this, however, was part of Gray's plan to permanently get her out of harm's way by engineering her death and then restoring her to life in secret (190).

*Featured in Chapters 2-3, 8, 13-14, & 18*

## **Kier Gray**

Dictator of Earth, rules from the palace in Centropolis. He physically appears to be about the same age as Petty and Petty's supporters (29). However, since he is in fact a variety of tendrillless slan he is undoubtedly much older.

Described as "magnetic" and "tigerish" (25), he is an immensely popular and trusted leader who is "worshipped and feared" among the people (22, 45). His fellow councilors, however, were always jealous of his superior intelligence and abilities and they felt he made them insignificant by comparison (34). This atmosphere made it easy for men like Petty to manipulate them into trying to replace Gray.

An eloquent man, he had the ability to appraise every situation with mild humor in the form of understatement and irony (26). When faced with unforeseen difficulties his first reaction is not panic, but quick thinking (32).

At some point the tendrillless slans X-rayed Kier Gray from a distance and established that he is not a true slan, lacking the distinguishing characteristics of that mutant race (175). He is, in fact, an augmented variety of slan similar to the

tendriless; he therefore lacked tendrils and was unable to read minds, though his daughter Kathleen had these traits (182, 188-9). Like Petty, Lorry, and other highly-trained humans, Gray had a mind shield, making it impossible for a slan to read anything but his surface thoughts (22). As a slan himself, his own mind shield was subtly different than theirs, a difference easily spotted by Jommy when they first met (182).

His deceased wife, Kathleen's mother, was a true slan who was killed by the secret police. He raised Kathleen publicly in the palace to test whether humans and slans could live together peaceably, though he had to ultimately admit it wasn't possible (189). During the years between Kathleen's 11th and 17th birthdays, Gray's public stance towards the slans changed from being favorable into an intense hatred that came close to John Petty's (73). Before, he admired the slans and felt that peace was possible (30) — this was part of his experiment with Kathleen, as well as an attempt to counter anti-slan propaganda. Switching stance was a carefully calculated choice, done (at least in part) to allow Kathleen's permanent "escape" from Petty through her public death and secret resurrection (189-90).

*Featured in Chapters 2-3, 8, 13, & 18*

### **Joanna Hillory**

A young and beautiful tendriless slan woman, about 15 years older than Jommy (172). On board the ship stolen by Jommy, she captured him and interrogated him. At first cynical and hateful, she came to believe that Jommy truly wanted to make peace with her people (117, 172). After this encounter she became the tendriless' expert on Jommy, being made a military commissioner and entrusted with the task of hunting him down (146, 170), though she was able to delay their progress for many years to give Jommy time to prepare (172). She was later instrumental in his return to Earth after his visit to Mars (173).

*Appears on pages 95-119, & 171-5*

### **Samuel Lann**

Much of what is said about Lann in the book is legendary hearsay, greatly distorted from the facts. For the legends, see **Slans: Lies & Legends**. For the true story of Lann and his work, see the early part of the **Timeline**

### **Mrs. Lann**

A legendary figure, supposedly Samuel Lann's wife and the subject of his mutation experiments that created the first slans. Samuels' diaries indicate that

in reality there was no Mrs. Lann — the children were someone else's entirely, and were no relation to Samuel. What little was known of the children's true mother was undoubtedly distorted into the figure of Mrs. Lann (84, 104).

### **Jem Lorry**

One of the replacements for the old councilors, he quickly rose to prominence, becoming minister of state (75) and the most powerful member of the cabinet (70). Described as "touch, calculating, and ambitious" (35), he nonetheless had some degree of integrity as Kathleen considered him "the most honest and decent" cabinet member next to Gray himself (70). Like a few of the other councilors he possessed the discipline needed to shield his mind from slans (35). Efficient and with a will of steel, he nonetheless was able to always remain on the winning side of any political conflict by being flexible (86), and was one to quickly realize when a confrontation would do more harm than good (70).

Lorry routinely used his attraction and charm to become a very successful womanizer, and was determined to possess Kathleen — her clear superiority, in addition to her beauty, made her an irresistible prize to be won (71-2). Supposedly, this sex mania was the result of not being given enough affection by his parents as a child. He used his mistresses to spy on his fellow administrators. One was the wife of the commander of the armed forces, one was the wife of a fellow councilor, and one was a widow whom Lorry tried to manipulate into marrying another prominent official (72).

*Appears on pages 35-6, & 69-86*

### **Mardue & Harlihan**

The Cabinet minister of transport and airways, respectively. Both were older Councilors (Mardue was the oldest of the group) and were firm supporters of Gray until the political situation changed in Petty's favor; their jealousy of Gray's abilities made it easier for them to turn on him. When the Council tried to overthrow the dictator they were killed by their own aides whom Gray had secretly recruited.

*Appear on pages 24, 29, 33, & 35*

### **Miller**

A tendrillless slan miner on Mars, mentally dominated by Jommy. Through Miller, he was able to capture and impersonate Corliss in Cimmerium.

*Appears on pages 155-8*

## **John Petty**

Chief of Kier Gray's secret police (8, 132). A volatile and conniving man, he possessed great intelligence and resourcefulness. He preferred to reach his ends through manipulation of others (usually through playing on their hates and prejudices) and by the stage-management of events (26). He would rather catch you in a legal or logical trap, so his own plans could appear to be legitimate and impartial (80). He was feared and distrusted among the people (22, 45).

When he tried to overthrow Gray, his accomplices and most of the Council were killed and replaced. Always one to remain on top of any upheaval, he managed to remain in his position by swearing allegiance to Gray (35). Although he initially tried to have Kathleen killed merely to undermine Gray (8), he soon became obsessed by her continued presence in the palace and did all he could to have her removed to another place where he could safely dispose of her once and for all (132).

*Appears on pages 8-10, 24-36, 75-86, 128-32, & 143-5*

## **The Secret Police**

The secret police wear civilian clothes to blend in with the normal population (7). Many of them are trained to make it difficult for a slant to read their minds (18). The secret police were in charge of the guards outside Kathleen's room at the palace (20). John Petty was head of this organization (8).

# Science & Gadgetry

## Antigravity Ships

Designed, built, and used by the tendriless slans. Considered to be their greatest invention, they are powered by their unique antigravity screen technology to make them weightless, although rockets are still used to propel the vehicle. The tendriless slans have the means of detecting their antigravity screen technology when it's present in other ships; they can therefore track any ship when this technology is in use (109, 121).

The tendriless ships patrol space within the solar system. As well as a complete dominance over most of the space within the solar system, they have explored the surfaces of the Moon, Mars, and Venus and gone as far out as Jupiter's moon, all without encountering any indication of true slans or extraterrestrial life (100).

The Air Central is the hub of their ship operations on Earth, where they are launched nightly at 10 o'clock, with others coming in at 2:30 in the dead of night (56). These particular ships go to and fro between Earth and Mars. Only twice in the space of six years was there an interruption, when there was a month-long period of inactivity when the red planet was on the far side of the sun (57).

The tendriless ships come in the form of transports (93), destroyers (126), battle cruisers (109), troop transports (149), atomic cyclotrons (149-150), and gunboats (161) among many others. Their ships possessed weapons capable of quickly reducing spaceships to dust (117). The battleships were formidable, over a thousand feet in length and weighing 100,000 tons (109, 125). The cyclotron was the largest, roughly half a mile wide. Its wheel-shaped bulk carried a weapon in the form of a massive atomic accelerator capable of leveling mountains (149-51). Some of their ships also lay **space mines** (126).

The ships of both the true and tendriless slans are most often described as torpedo-shaped (50, 60, 119). The true slan ships were in fact decoys of a sort, merely winged rockets far less advanced than the tendriless vessels (113). Their main purpose was to make the tendriless uneasy by forcing them to suspect that the slans couldn't possibly rely on such primitive technology (183).

## Atomic Revolver

This functions like a regular electric-energy gun until its atomic function is engaged. Like many of Jommy's other inventions, it was designed to self-destruct if it fell into the wrong hands (160-1).

### **Atomic Vibration Decoy**

A device invented by Jommy. It broadcasts radio waves designed to mimic the vibration put out by atomic engines, so the tendriless slans tracking him would home in on the motor, thus allowing him to maneuver his spaceship unnoticed. After use, it was rigged to self-destruct (158-9).

### **Atomic Wedding Ring**

The smallest of Jommy's weapons, this was capable of unleashing atomic destruction within a two-foot range. Like many of his other inventions, it was designed to self-destruct if it fell into the wrong hands. This was the only device Jommy took with him into the palace (160-1, 176).

### **Brain Reconstruction**

A complex surgical technique used by slans (both tendrilled and tendriless) to rebuild a brain that has been severely damaged. Injuries as grave as bullet wounds and crushed skulls can be repaired, given sufficient time. The body is put on artificial life support while "tissue-building rays" are used to heal the damage. **Porgrave machines** are used by the tendriless in this operation to ensure the brain is being rebuilt correctly; a spouse, close friend, or relative is brought into the operation room to observe the patient's thoughts and give feedback to the surgeons. Jommy's hypnotism abilities could have done this task in a far shorter time than was required through Porgrave machines (167-9).

### **Electric-Energy Guns**

Standard weapons used by the tendriless slans. They come in various practical sizes (99), and hopefully in a variety of stylish designs.

### **Electric Filing Cabinet**

Standard electronic information storage and retrieval machines. Similar to ordinary filing cabinets, the desired information could be called up onto a display screen through keyboard entry. This seems to be a tried and true technology — the **Statistics Machines** date from the mid-21st century, yet similar devices are still used 1500 years later (171, 173-4). This technology may have been preserved by the slans through the Nameless Period of the early 3rd millennium (see TIMELINE).

### **False Scalp**

A method of disguising tendrils used by true slans. A liquid is applied over the scalp, which then hardens and resembles skin; the tendrils are laid flat and covered while the hairs still up through the material. This will stand up under the "toupee test" administered by the tendrillless slans (167).

### **Heated Clothing**

Used by Jommy on Mars (157)

### **Hypnotism Crystals**

These small crystals irresistibly fascinate anyone who looks at them, and they burrow a "tunnel" into their mind that allows true slans to totally circumvent any mental defenses the viewer may possess (155-6). They allowed for quick domination of an individual, though Jommy later gained such skill that he was able to reach the same effect, but at a slower speed, without the crystals (127, 176-7). To dominate a slan mind in this manner required the target to be already weakened; Mrs. Corliss, whose brain was being reconstructed, offered few obstacles to this crystal-less method of control (168-9).

Artificially manufactured using his father's scientific discoveries, they are described as being "atomically unstable" and had to be stored in metal containers (154-5).

### **Hypnotic Education**

A method of education used by Peter Cross to impart knowledge to his son (46). Apparently, great masses of knowledge could be implanted in a short period of time. In some cases the knowledge would only be "activated" by certain prearranged conditions. For instance, Peter was able to determine the exact day and time (2:00 in the afternoon on his 15th birthday) when the weapon's secret location would be released into Jommy's conscious mind (57). One's immediate surroundings could also trigger specific knowledge (61). Sometimes the instructions can be so specific and insistent that they override what one would do otherwise (46, 62).

### **Jommy's Car**

Described as a "battleship on wheels" (124) it was a modified 7500 model automobile (146), completely refitted using his father's scientific discoveries.

Larger than most cars, it was built out of the special ten-point steel to be virtually indestructible and had a powerful arsenal of weaponry at its disposal (134). The weapon in its nose could drill holes through solid matter, allowing it to flee any situation (136, 145). It was also capable of flight (140).

### **Jommy's Ship**

An antigravity ship stolen from the tendriless slans. It seemed to be a transport having at least four rooms, most of them used for storage of equipment and supplies (93-4).

The ship was improved by Jommy, adding a tougher exterior made of ten-point steel (125) and refitted with his father's atomic drive that was very powerful and required very little fuel (152, 154). It also carried a larger version of the disintegrator gun allowing it to traverse through solid matter (150), and "wall disintegrators" on the exterior of his ship that destroyed anything that came in contact with the hull. This served to destroy space mines on contact as well as rendering the ship invisible by eradicating light waves after they bounced off (152-3). He was therefore able to see outside the ship while remaining undetectable as long as his atomic drives were offline.

Although it lay hidden in the mountain fortress near Granny's ranch, its ten-point steel exterior ensured its survival from the tendriless attack, and its automated systems piloted it through the ground to the laboratory where Jommy could board it out of harm's way (150).

### **Magnetors**

A device on Jommy's ship that could immobilize and pull along other ships (158-9).

### **Multipneumatic Chairs**

Undoubtedly very comfortable indeed. Probably yet another vastly superior slan invention (171).

### **Mutation Machine**

A device supposedly used by Samuel Lann on his wife, allowing her to bear the first slan children (84). In fact, no such device existed (175).

### **Paralyzing Ray**

A hand-held weapon, one of Jommy's inventions. When fired it knocks the person unconscious and causes total paralysis of voluntary actions (155-6).

### **Porgrave Thought Broadcasters and Thought Receivers**

Recording machines invented by slans to record and broadcast thoughts.

These devices were used by the slans to notify fellow slans of the locations of refuges (131, 134) and safe passageways (178). In some instances the recorded message continuously broadcasts, looped to repeat at regular intervals (134). Although unable to "hear" the messages themselves, the human government deduced the existence of these machines in certain areas, based on the number of slans able to find hidden refuges (131).

Such was the fear of the tendrillless for the true slans that thought receivers were used extensively in their cities as a means of detecting the presence of a true slan; when certain thoughts were registered, the alarms rigged to these machines would go off (157). A person of sufficient mental discipline could avoid detection by these machines by limiting the emotional nature of their thoughts to whatever would be natural in the current situation (165, 168).

Both varieties of Porgrave machines could be used in tandem to transmit thoughts and emotions between individuals who have no telepathic ability. Such communication, however, was far from perfect, marred by distinct lapses in what could be conveyed. They were used in this capacity during **Brain Reconstruction** surgery (168-9).

### **Radio Telephones**

Long-range communication devices. Known to be used for official state business, so secure lines might be one of their features (75).

### **Robot-Propelled Ships**

Ships piloted by automated mechanisms on board. This control can be subverted through using radio signals to scramble the automated guidance. Such ships were used to drop messages purportedly from the slan ruling council (82).

### **Space Mines**

Potent nuclear devices (138) laid in orbit around Earth by the tendrillless slans. They are spherical, roughly three feet wide. They are designed to follow and collide with ships that come nearby (126) and are powerful enough to destroy even a battlecruiser (138).

### **Statistics Machines or 'Stics**

Electronic information machines. These ancient **electric filing cabinets** were created in the 21st century and contain a vast repository of knowledge, and would eventually include Samuel Lann's diaries (which revealed the truth about the slans' origin) and the locations of several secret passages leading into the palace. After an indeterminate period of time on Earth, these machines were taken to Mars and used by the tendrillless slans (173-4).

**Terraforming** — see under PLACES: **Mars**

### **The Weapon**

A rod-like metal device that gives off a faint glow and is small enough to fit in one hand (63). Invented by Peter Cross, Jommy's father, it was hidden in the catacombs for Jommy to later obtain (5, 63). Based on Peter's discovery of the first law of atomic energy, upon the activation of a simple button it spouts incredible raw energy resembling white flame and is capable of completely incinerating anything in its line of fire (63-4). It may also possess additional unknown abilities, such as creating "blind spots" in security systems (115).

When rigged inside the nose of the ship stolen from the tendrillless slans, it was able to drill a tunnel through solid matter to allow the ship to pass through the ground as though flying through open air (121).

This weapon was based on Peter Cross' discoveries which he explained in detail in his notes. The process required very little fuel and could be used to generate power and vibrations as well as destructive force (123). Jommy was able to put these discoveries to a wide variety of uses (123), including an unusual type of invisibility shield (153).

### **Wrist Radio**

Portable device used by the tendrillless slans for easy communication (164)

# Places

## **Air Central or Airways**

The hub for world transportation. Taking up a square mile of Centropolis, it is a vast industrial complex with landing areas (47). Secretly controlled by the tendrillless slans, they surreptitiously launch ships into space while the rest of the world believes space flight is legendary or has never been accomplished (47).

## **Bureau of Statistics**

A repository of information in Cimmerium, containing vast storehouses of knowledge on countless subjects. Census statistics on the tendrillless slans living on Mars were held here (156), as well as important historical records (174-5).

## **The Catacombs**

An extensive network of caves beneath Centropolis. Slans had created secret passages into the catacombs. Peter and Patricia Cross knew some of these routes, but both died before they could show them to Jommy (57). Fortunately, as part of the **hypnotic education** given to his son, Peter included detailed instructions on how to reach the weapon hidden in the catacombs, regardless of the entrance point (61). The catacombs were accessible through numerous locked entrances in public places. Now abandoned, they are protected by automated alarm systems that alert the authorities when they are entered (60).

## **Centropolis**

Capital of the world, located somewhere on the Eastern coast of North America, about one hour's flight east of the Rockies as the slanship flies (73). It is a vast city with an enormous population, notable for its many parks and skyscrapers (5). Controlled briefly by the slans, who built the palace there (5).

Flowing through the city is a single wide, deep river that goes right by the palace (15, 176). Mountains are visible on the horizon (15). It is surrounded by suburbs, one of which was the residence of Jommy and his mother for a while (5).

## **Cimmerium**

A large tendrillless slan city built into a canyon near the Mare Cimmerium on **Mars**. Like most cities on Mars, it was covered by a protective dome. Although not very large as cities go, with a population of 200,000 (162), it was probably the

tendriless slan capital. Cimmerium was the location of a major spaceship factory (157) and was the staging point for the tendriless' planned invasion of Earth. This staging field extended for at least a hundred miles and was heavily fortified with fleets and massive gun emplacements (161).

The architecture in tendriless cities was beautiful, and of a style that Jommy compared to poetry (165). The tendriless retained the secret of the building material that the true slans used to create the **palace**, and employed this material to construct their cities (170).

The city was many levels deep, with the bulk of the city being underground (165, 170). Cimmerium's landing field and vast underground hangar is interesting: each ship is stored in a slot and could be brought out by machines by dialing the number of its parking space (162).

### **Cugden Machine Works**

A location where devices and machines can be dismantled and reverse-engineered. They undoubtedly also do many other heavy-duty industrial tasks. The slan ship that dropped the message at the palace was forced down and taken to Cugden for study (82).

### **Granny's Shack**

A small, dirty, ramshackle house and barn surrounded by piles of junk, sitting near a meadow situated somewhere within Centropolis. The palace was visible in the distance (41-3).

### **Granny's Valley Ranch**

Located in western North America (148) this ranch was purchased using some of the funds collected during their years of thieving (122). Jommy and Granny lived in this secluded valley for seven years (124, 147). Apart from being a fully functional ranch on the surface, beneath the ground there was a vast network of weapon emplacements (151), storage space for his ship and car (126), and his laboratory where everything was controlled (123, 150). The inside of a nearby mountain was converted into a fortress (123). His ship was hidden 20 miles away from the ranch, near a mountain (147). The house and laboratory were constructed of ten-point steel, thus protecting them from much of the destruction of the tendriless attack that leveled the mountain fortress and obliterated everything inside it (149). After the attack, Jommy left his laboratory and all of his devices to self-destruct behind him to prevent the tendriless from acquiring his research and inventions (151-2).

## Mars

A cold and barren world, it was terraformed in the distant past by bombarding its surface with asteroids composed of ice and frozen oxygen (153). The seas created by this process are described as being "unclean" and "unbeautiful" (161).

Long ago Mars was made into the stronghold of the tendrillless slans, the only race to have space travel capabilities when the story takes place. Its surface is a mixture of desert and small seas, dotted with domed cities and smaller, more isolated settlements. Mining operations on Mars were mostly automated, requiring very little supervision (154). The largest city is **Cimmerium**, built in the Mare Cimmerium.

## The Palace

Built by slans during their golden age hundreds of years in the past, it is a vast, magnificent, delicate-looking structure 1500 feet high. Made out of an unknown material, its exterior softly glowed and constantly shifted colors at random (43, 90). The tendrillless slans retained knowledge of this substance and used it in their cities on Mars (170). The main structure is 1,000 feet high, topped with a 500-foot tower (43, 90). There were airplane hangars at the 1,000-foot level (132) and battlements at the 500-foot level. Kathleen was not allowed to go any higher than 500 feet in the palace, but often enjoyed looking out onto the magnificent view of the city from there (15). Her bedroom and Gray's office were on the same floor, somewhere below the battlements (17).

It can accommodate about 10,000 people (177). Since the slans secretly controlled the government, there were usually at least 100 slans living in the forgotten areas of the palace at any given time (188).

Heavily defended by guards and large weapon emplacements, the palace is well-nigh impossible for intruders to gain entrance. Each group of guards is under a separate jurisdiction, and passes are required for free passage from one area of the grounds to another — these precautions were created in response to rumors of the tendrillless attack on the valley where Granny and Jommy lived (177).

Although currently held by humans, it still contains many secret chambers, including treasure troves of technological devices and weapons that humanity thankfully remains totally unaware of (43). There are many tunnels and passageways into the palace, most of them long forgotten and unknown. A vague record of many of these passages is retained in the **Statistics Machines** (173, 175). Some passages were marked with **Porgrave machines** to guide nearby slans to them (178). These vast underground areas were once functioning parts of the palace, but have since fallen into disuse and obscurity (180).

Also called the grand palace (6).

### **Slan Refuge**

A vast subterranean city, one of many in the world. It is self-sufficient, containing "factories, gardens, and residences" (134). It has its own water supply in the form of an underground river (137). A **Porgrave thought broadcaster** sends out looped automated messages directing slans to its secret location (134). The city is beneath an uninhabited farmhouse which was specially constructed to give the appearance of being dilapidated (135). Apart from the two main entrances, there were multiple secret exits to allow quick escape from any point in the city (139).

The refuge was probably centuries old (141). It was discovered and raided about 25 years before Kathleen and Jommy visited it, its inhabitants fleeing (137). One of dozens of such refuges known to the government, it was used as a trap for stray slans (131). It was two hours' southwest of Centropolis by flight (133).

## Different Versions

All revisions made to *Slan* over the years can be categorized as minor, and the overall story is substantially the same regardless of which version you read.

A total of no fewer than 5 different versions of the novel have seen print, but one, the text contained in the Summer 1952 issue of *Fantastic Story*, can be mentioned only in passing since it could safely be described as nothing more than an irrelevant curiosity.

Although the chapter divisions were redone in 1946, most of the significant alterations were done in 1951 and 1968.

<b>1940</b>	Magazine serial	<i>Astounding Science Fiction</i>	Original version
<b>1946</b>	Hardback book	Arkham	Slightly revised
<b>1951</b>	Hardback book	Simon & Schuster	Streamlined & revised
<b>1952</b>	Magazine reprint	<i>Fantastic Story</i>	Abridged 1940 text
<b>1968</b>	Paperback book	Berkley Medallion	Further revisions

### Chapter Division Chart

The chapter divisions for the serial are different than any other version. This chart shows how these correspond to the book versions of the novel.

The abridged 1952 reprint found in *Fantastic Story Magazine* is not included here — since a fair amount of material was removed from the novel, its chapter divisions do not correspond to any other version. But since this text is a "blind alley" of sorts, and of limited interest, I've decided to exclude its chapter divisions from the chart.

		1940 Serial		1946 Onward	
Part I	Chapter I				Chapter One
	Chapter II				Chapter Two
	Chapter III				Chapter Three
	Chapter IV				Chapter Four
	Chapter V				Chapter Five
Part II	Chapter VI				Chapter Six
	Chapter VII				Chapter Seven
	Chapter VIII				Chapter Eight
	Chapter IX				Chapter Nine
Part III	Chapter X				Chapter Ten
	Chapter XI				Chapter Eleven
	Chapter XII				Chapter Twelve
	Chapter XIII				Chapter Thirteen
	Chapter XIV				Chapter Fourteen
Part IV	Chapter XV				Chapter Fifteen
	Chapter XVI				Chapter Sixteen
	Chapter XVII				Chapter Seventeen
	Chapter XVIII				Chapter Eighteen

## ***The 1940 Magazine Serial***

*Serialized in four parts in [Astounding Science Fiction](#), September thru December*

The original 1940 text had many of the characteristics of Van's early magazine work. It comes across as "first draft" material, written very quickly with very little looking back, streamlining, ironing out inconsistencies, or cutting out unnecessary detail. This was undoubtedly because these were written on a tight deadline, and he did not have the luxury of going back over previously written material as meticulously as he would have liked. The fact that he revised so many of his magazine texts indicates that he never really considered these serials to be the "final" version, and that he was finally afforded the time to "finish" the novel properly for book publication.

Rather confusingly, chapters were split in half between installments, so that the first half would appear at the end of one installment and be resumed in the next. (The usual procedure with serials was that chapter breaks were used as installment breaks.) Each of these "breaks" was later made into a regular chapter break in 1946. As a result, the chapter divisions and numbers are unique in the 1940 version.

Each part of the serial contained the same full-page illustration for the title page, and two illustrations within the text. All were done by Charles Schneeman, and can be viewed in the [Illustrations section](#) of the Icshi website.

### **Style:**

- Uncharacteristic use of slang. This makes the material feel juvenile and dated. A good example of this is Jommy calling his father "the big man" in Chapter XXIII of the serial where he's talking to Kathleen (Chapter 14 from 1946 onward). Oddly enough, this was changed to "big shot" in 1946, but was changed to the more mature "great man" in 1951.
- Granny is described in more grotesque terms; reference is made to her "thin scab of a face."
- Phrasing tends to be a little rough and rambling, lacking the polish of the 1951 text. A lot of the extraneous adjectives and adverbs were removed

in 1951.

- A profusion of exclamation marks where a simple period would suffice.
- Heavy use of commas and semicolons
- Frequent scene breaks (perhaps put in by the editor)
- Paragraphs are shorter in the serial, perhaps because these look better in narrow columns than long paragraphs do

### **Content:**

- In the first showdown between Gray and Petty, three dictators are named in their conversation: Napoleon, Hitler, and Tharg. Tharg was undoubtedly a figure meant to have ruled between our time and Jommy's. This was changed in 1951 to mention only two dictators, Napoleon and Stalin.
- This and the 1946 text contain an amusing anachronism, considering the far-future background of the story. In Chapter I, John Petty's car is described as a "sixty electro Studebaker." Although rather fun for its pure bizarre value, this reference was sensibly removed in 1951.
- In Chapter I, the intersection where Jommy alights from Petty's car is 437th Street, described as being "near the outskirts" of the city. In 1951 this was changed to "57th Street" and was close to the city's center.
- Dates are often different in the serial. For example, prior to 1951, seven years rather than three elapsed between Kathleen's death and the tendriless attack on the ranch, making Jommy's age at the end of the novel 26 rather than 23.
- Although the "minus energy principle" is mentioned in the last chapter of every version, an additional reference to it is included in the serial during the tendriless attack on the valley. Why this was removed in 1946 is something of a mystery.
- The city of the palace is unnamed in both the 1940 and 1946 text. Only in

1951 was it given the name Centropolis. In the 40's versions, this city is specifically described as being 80 miles across in size and having 30 million inhabitants. This description was removed for some reason in 1951.

- One of the more interesting scenes removed in 1951 was where Jommy sees for himself a room full of "failed" mutant infants in Cimmerium while waiting to be shown in to Mrs. Corliss at the hospital.
- While waiting to see Joanna, Jommy consults the Statistics Machines on his own and learns of Lann's diaries. In 1951, Joanna showed him these records at the end of the chapter.
- Originally, Lann's diaries begin in the year 1971; in the Simon & Schuster edition this was changed to a hundred years later, 2071. Also, these journal entries in 40/46 are more subjective and show signs of paranoia on Lann's part. In 1951 they were rewritten to be more objective and rational.
- In 40/46, the date of Jommy's arrival at the palace grounds at the end of the novel is given as "May." In 1951 this was changed to "late spring."
- The final chapter of the novel is markedly different in the original, and was revised considerably in 1951. The original version, I feel, is stronger and more lucid, and I think it's a shame that he changed it. The differences are too many to enumerate individually, but here are the major ones:

— When Jommy has just entered the tunnel, there is a rather obscure sentence that was removed in 1951: "**There were doors and corridors, and great stately rooms, like long abandoned funeral homes, like the temple of the dead-lost Chiir-folk that stood through all eternity in the shadows of Mount Gog in the upper Saemones Valley.**" If this is an actual place, I have been unable to find any reference to it.

— The signs throughout the underground tunnel make it clear that these passages come under the jurisdiction of the slans, not the humans, and that *slan* law forbids unauthorized entry. From 1951 onward, the reader merely gets the impression that these signs warn of the danger to slans from humans within the palace.

— It's also made clear that these warnings are current, not dating from the slans' control of the palace, as they mention Kier Gray by name. Even more startling, when Gray meets Jommy he tells him that the penalty for unauthorized use of these passageways is to have the tendrils removed by order of the slan council within the palace, supposedly done for the slan's own protection.

— Gray also makes the rather ludicrous assertion that only his (non-slan) cleaning lady is allowed into his most private and closely guarded inner chambers! In 1951, it's made clear that no one at all is allowed there but Gray and his slan associates.

— Samuel Lann's wife really was the mother of the first slan children, though no "mutation machine" was used on her. In 1951, the mother was *not* Lann's wife. This was perhaps changed because van Vogt deemed it too much of a coincidence for the only perfect mutations to be born were born to a scientist.

— More explicit emphasis is placed on the idea of humanity functioning as a single interconnected organism with many parts, to explain the sudden universal outburst of mutations. This is one of the many sections in the final chapter which were, for whatever reason, muddied and made more vague in 1951.

— It is clearly stated that the tendrillless slans *are* the true slans, but camouflaged or in a dormant state of sorts. Jommy asks Gray **"Are you trying to tell me that the tendrillless slans are the true slans?"** A slight but significant change was made in 1951; Jommy instead asks if the tendrillless **"will eventually be"** the true slans.

— Gray offers solutions to both the problem with humanity and the tendrillless attack. Again, this was made revised in 1951 to be more vague and open-ended. Mark McSherry has suggested that this may indicate that van Vogt was intentionally making things less certain, to pry the door open to allow for a sequel.

The original passage reads as follows:

**"Your hypnotism crystals, of course, are the final solution to the human being problem. Not one of us but**

can have pity for their position. Thank Heaven, in less than a hundred years, long before the situation becomes acute, there'll be enough tendrilled slans to hypnotize every human being; and so their passing will be painless and happy.

"As for the imminent attack, we have spaceships. We shall fit them with your atomic drivers and projectors, and make a big noise with a small force. My colleagues have a few tricks of their own that they've been saving for this moment; and the combination, plus a speech by you on the tendrilled slan radio, should provide us with that fifty-year delay.

"You can tell them that ever since their attack on your valley, human factories have been turning out weapons, but that you have given away no secrets . . . that should make them feel basically safe."

### ***The 1946 Arkham Hardcover***

This was very similar to the contents of the 1940 serial. Some of the roughest aspects of the "first draft" feel of the serial was done away with, with stylistic changes — rather than alteration of pertinent story content — accounting for most of the revised material. These stylistic changes were carried over to the 1951 version, as well as there being additional alterations.

The text of the Arkham edition was reprinted once, by the Science Fiction Book Club in 1978. Since the Arkham text is so close to the magazine version, buying this book club edition is an affordable alternative to the more expensive issues of *Astounding*, to say nothing of the rare Arkham edition.

#### **Major changes made for this edition:**

- Frequent rewording of phrases
- Extraneous and redundant details cut out, excess words deleted
- Most of the slang usage was removed, using more cultivated and less "juvenile" words instead
- Since this edition was released the year after the end of World War II, van Vogt added a few references to atomic bombs (on pages 78, 154, & 167 of the Arkham edition). Some of these descriptions were further refined in 1951 when more was known to the general public about atomic weapons.

## ***The 1951 Simon & Schuster Hardcover***

I know little about the background to this edition, but it seems to have been given a similar, though far less extensive, treatment to the Simon & Schuster revised edition of van Vogt's other famous *Astounding* serial, *The World of Null-A*.

### **Style:**

- Most of the stylistic changes made in 1946 were carried over to this edition, though sometimes with slight alterations. Many additional stylistic changes were also made, making this the smoothest and most streamlined version of the text yet.
- Many details were changed from the 1940 and 1946 versions. For example, the infamous Studebaker reference was removed from Chapter One.
- New details were added, enriching or clarifying the story's background.
- Many descriptions are fuller and clearer.

### **Content:**

- The apartments in the derelict section of town are now described as having been built out of plastic 100 years previously (10). All subsequent references to plastic are likewise new.
- Jommy's self-education at the beginning of Chapter 7 is described in greater detail than in previous versions.
- More details about the valley ranch have been added to Chapter 12.
- In Chapter 14, it is now made clear to Jommy that it is a *slan* girl the authorities are searching for. In previous versions, Jommy only knew that it was a girl.
- Chapter 18 is substantially changed. For aspects found in the 1940 and 1946 versions, but not afterward, see the list under the 1940 version.

The ten paragraphs following "**He reached toward a buzzer button on his desk, and pressed it.**" near the end of Chapter 18 are new to this edition and were retained in 1968. This section includes details on how the passages into the palace were made (and kept) secret; a little information about the slans living in the palace; Kathleen's life and death, as well as some references to Gray's late wife, are also discussed. This section also makes it clear that tendrilled slans are kept in the palace mainly as a means of showing the tendrillless slans what their descendants will be like. And lastly, a paragraph is added near the very end, describing the telepathic exchange of information between Jommy and three of Gray's slan associates.

## ***The 1952 Fantastic Story Reprint***

*Appeared in the Summer 1952 issue*

This is an abridged reprint of the 1940 serial text. Minor scenes are eliminated, and numerous descriptions are tightened up by discarding the occasional word and phrase. There are some sentences that have been altered or newly added by the editor to better bridge the gaps where material has been removed. These alterations were undoubtedly done by Samuel Mines, the editor of the magazine at the time. Also, the chapter divisions here are different than any other version.

This version was a one-off item that was never reprinted, and due to its oddities this text is just a minor curiosity. Some excellent illustrations by Virgil Finlay, (which can be viewed in the [Illustrations section](#) of the Icshi website) are the only features of real interest.

## ***The 1968 Berkley Medallion Paperback***

This is essentially the 1951 text with some further, very specific revisions to two of the minor characters. Van Vogt may have decided to make these alterations as late as 1968 because of his study of Dianetics that took up much of his time from 1950 to 1970. His deeper interest in people and their motivations for doing things may have inspired him to work on his characterization techniques.

### **Content:**

- Two minor characters, Davy Dinsmore and Jem Lorry, are given substantial overhauls. While they remain minor players in the story, they are given fuller back stories and more interesting roles.

—Davy was a straight villain in previous versions, who tormented Kathleen when they were children and pursued her as a young adult for her physical attractiveness. In 1968, he is turned into Kathleen's friend, pupil, then suitor as they grow up together. He still taunts her in Chapter 2, but his motivation for doing so is to warn her that her life is in danger since she will not read his mind and has been himself warned that openly being her friend during this time could endanger his own life. Also, in previous versions he taunts her alone, whereas in 1968 he has a gang of friends with him. All of his appearances after that are basically ground-up rewrites of his original scenes.

—Jem Lorry is given more of a background than he was given in the original, and the conversation between him and Kathleen in Chapter 8 is more intelligent and in-depth. It's also shown how he manipulated his many mistresses for his own political agenda.

- A lengthy footnote about the terraforming of Mars using ice asteroids was added to Chapter 15. When the novel first appeared in 1940 it was thought that Mars and Venus had naturally breathable atmospheres. During the early 1960s more was learned about these two planets, and van Vogt inserted this new information to bring the story more in line with the latest discoveries about the actual nature of Mars. Interestingly, just two years later when van Vogt revised *The World of Null-A* the same technique was used in the story to terraform Venus.