

SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION

FIRST MAN
IN A SATELLITE

by CHARLES W. RUNYON

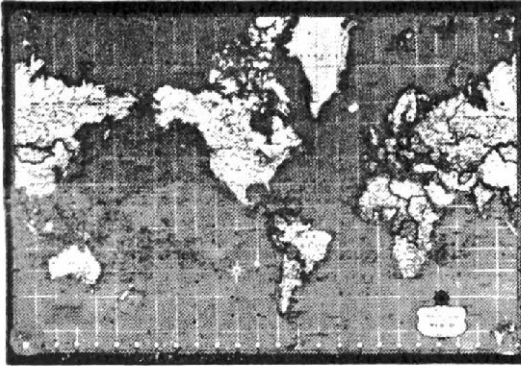
DECEMBER 35c

IND



THE ALIENS WERE HATERS
by ROBERT SILVERBERG

**THE UNIQUE AND
TERRIBLE COMPULSION**
by CALVIN M. KNOX



INTERNATIONAL WALL-SIZE WORLD MAP

IN FULL COLOR

SPECTACULAR VALUE

This Great Map Perfect For Schools, Playrooms, Business and Civic Organizations, Decorative as a Mural for Dens.

Giant-Size up-to-the-minute 11½ sq. ft. World Map shows every corner of the Earth in explicit, colorful detail. Names nations and cities. Used by Govt. and news reporters for strategic and briefing purposes. Heavy duty stock only \$1. Special — 2 maps only \$1.85. Same Size Map of U.S. same price. **MONEY-BACK GUARANTEED!**

PIONEER PUBLICATIONS, INC.

1790 Broadway, Dept. MD-12, New York 19, N. Y.



Have Fun! Thrills! Romances!

Anyone Can
Learn **to Dance**

Square Dances
Fox Trot
Waltz

Samba
Jitterbug
Rhumba

ONLY
\$1.98
POSTPAID

**LEARN TO DANCE IN 5 DAYS — OR
PAY NOTHING**

Right Now—it's easy to learn dancing in The Privacy of Your Own Home without embarrassment. Now You Can **JOIN THE FUN**—think of the great pleasure you'll get when your friends see you do the latest dance steps with ease.

16 COMPLETE DANCE COURSES—each worth as much as you pay for the entire book. Written in simple language full of easy-to-follow illustrations.

Simple AS ABC

Here's how this exciting book can help you become a smooth dancer. It's full of easy to follow diagrams and instructions.

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

ORDER TODAY—only \$1.98! Yes, you'll learn to dance from the great Betty Lee in 5 days or return book for immediate refund!

PIONEER PUBLICATIONS, INC.
1790 Broadway, Dept. DD-12, N.Y. 19, N.Y.

SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION

Vol. 3 — No. 1

December, 1958

CONTENTS

NOVELETTE

THE UNIQUE AND TERRIBLE COMPULSION

by Calvin M. Knox 40

It just had to be experienced to be believed

SHORT STORIES

THE ALIENS WERE HATERS *by Robert Silverberg* 2

If a doctor heals you — blow his head off!

FIRST MAN IN A SATELLITE *by Charles W. Runyon* 22

An utter loneliness such as no man ever felt before

THE FAST-MOVING ONES *J. F. Bone* 72

They moved with a blur of speed, nightmare speed!

EXILED FROM EARTH *by Richard F. Watson* 86

Never, never again would we see our home planet!

CREATURE FROM SPACE *by Harlan Ellison* 102

A more horrible monster could not be imagined!

THE UTTER STRANGER *by Alan E. Nourse* 121

All, all alone in a strange, strange world

FEATURES

COMPUTER CAPSULES *by Scott Nevets* 21

SCIENCE SHORTS *by Edgar P. Straus* 85

NUCLEAR NEWS *by Steven Rory* 128

COVER by Kelly Frees

ILLUSTRATIONS by Emsh. Orbon and Bowman

W. W. Scott — Editor

SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION is published bi-monthly by Headline Publications Inc., at 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial office at 1750 Broadway, New York 19, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Holyoke, Mass., August 21, 1956, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Single copy 35c. Subscription rates, \$4.00 for 12 issues. Not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts, and all such material must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes. All stories printed in the magazine are fiction, and any similarity between the characters and actual persons is coincidental. Copyright 1958 by Headline Publications Inc. All rights, including translation, reserved under International Copyright Convention and Pan American Copyright Convention. Printed in the U.S.A.

THE ALIENS

WERE HATERS

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

illustrated by EMSH

You can't always expect gratitude. In some cultures, when the doctor has healed you, the thing to do next is to blow his head off — a death in return for life

IT was the third day out from the settlement that Massi found the alien spaceship in the jungle, and by that time he was the only member of his team who was still alive. There had been four of them when they started out from the American settlement on Kothgir II, and probability had it that one of the four would meet death in the jungle on the trip. Probability was wrong. Three out of four were gone; and, thought Massi, he himself had a long way to go before he got home safe.

Massi had half a million dollars' worth of raw weed in his rucksack, though — *latimeria* stems, which were shipped back to Earth to be processed into pain-killing drugs. *Latimeria* grew only in the rain-jungles of Kothgir II, where the temperature never dipped below 100 and where the stingbugs went for your eyes if you didn't watch sharp. Once a month, a team from the settlement came out into the jungle to gather the weed. Massi didn't stop to wonder why it should be that three men had



to lose their lives picking plants for Earth; it was his job, and so he did it. And Lurton, Weber, and Collins, who had all been alive three days ago, were dead now. Stingbugs had gotten Lurton. Weber had dropped suddenly into a covered pit in the road, and had been half digested by the inhabitants of the pit before anyone missed him. As for Collins, he'd been finished by a golden-eyed scissor-hawk swooping down.

That left Massi. He was on his way back through the jungle to the American settlement. He had twelve miles to cover on foot, and with luck he'd make it—if he avoided getting in the way of the local wildlife, and if none of the snipers from the rival Brazilian colony shot him down from behind. Massi wasn't worrying. This was his twentieth trip into the jungle, and he figured he had the game beat.

Just lift one foot after the other, keep going, and know what's happening all around you. That was all. Massi was a big square blocky man, thick-muscled but not thick-headed,

with a shock of unruly brown hair gradually turning yellowish-white from too much alien sunshine. He was about thirty and was a native of Earth—St. Louis. Since the age of nine he'd been working in the out-worlds. Kothgir II was his fourth job. He had come here three years back, in 2187. He intended to stay a while.

He kept picking one foot up and putting it down ahead of the other, and by noon of the third day his pocketscope told him he was only a dozen miles from the American post. The rival Brazilian outpost was forty miles back the other way. Since it was noon, Kothgir was right overhead, pouring out its yellow radiance. Kothgir was a young sun, full of life. And Kothgir II was a young planet, tropical in its temperate zones and unbearable in its tropical zones. Massi shook a dribble of sweat out of his eyebrows and kept going. And at two minutes past noon he found the ship in the middle of a clump of tangles.

It was lying on its side, a conical tube thirty-five feet long. Whoever had brought it

down had made a lousy landing. The tailfins were crumpled for good, and the ship itself was bent in the middle like a broken cigar. There was writing on the side of the ship in flowing dark-green letters, and the writing was in no Earthly alphabet Massi had ever seen, not Arabic nor Hebrew nor Greek nor Cyrillic.

The ship could only be alien, from some other intelligent civilization. The thought sent a ripple of surprise through the normally stolid Massi. If his guess were right, it meant the first contact between Earthmen and another intelligent species. Although mankind had reached seventy worlds of other stars by now, not once had sign or trace of intelligent aliens been found.

Until now. Massi wondered who or what was inside that crumpled little spaceship.

Then he stopped wondering for a moment. His keen ears picked up the twig-breaking sound of footsteps behind him. He turned quickly, one hand sliding to the blaster at his belt. Three men and a girl were coming toward him, and they

had blasters too. Massi waited for their arrival.

They were Brazilians, from the other settlement. The conquest of space hadn't been any unified global effort; it was strictly on an each-nation-grab-what-it-can basis. A Brazilian ship and an American one had landed on Kothgir II just about simultaneously, and since neither would retreat they had shared the world between them ever since. Little love was lost between the rival settlers.

"Hello," the girl called to him.

"Hello yourself," Massi answered. He stood his ground, facing them, between them and the ship.

He looked at them. The girl seemed to be the leader. She was tall and rugged, heavily tanned, with wide mannish shoulders and coarse features. Thick black hair tumbled untidily over her shoulders. She wasn't any beauty, Massi thought. Girls who went spacing never were.

The men were in their twenties, and all looked like brothers: slim olive-skinned youths with big noses and dark curly

hair. They all carried blasters.

The girl smiled, showing crooked teeth, and said, "You are minding our ship for us, American?"

"*Your* ship? Damned funny design for a ship homing in Brazil. And that stuff on the side is the new Brazilian alphabet, I suppose. Yeah."

"You make the mistake. We did not *build* the ship. We only claim it. We watched it fall from the skies two nights ago. It is ours."

Massi saw the setup. He shook his head quickly. "You got the wrong idea. I found that ship and I own salvage rights."

Two of the men began shouting and gesticulating, hurling a stream of rapid-fire Portuguese at him. Massi understood about every fifth word, but he got the general drift. His speaking vocabulary included some fifty Portuguese words, ten of them obscene and eight of them profane. He used each one, loudly and singly, and the Brazilians were so astonished by the performance that they shut up.

"Okay," Massi said in the

sudden silence. "Now look here. I found this ship. I. I got here first. The ship is mine."

"We saw the ship land. We have come here to examine it," said the girl sullenly. Her English was passable. "The ship is not yours but ours."

"The law says first finder can claim."

The biggest of the three Brazilian men chuckled amiably. "You Americans like to vote. Let us vote. We vote the ship is ours. You vote the ship is yours. We win, four to one, no? Democratic process!"

Massi glowered angrily at them. Overhead birds wheeled and screeched. Remembering the way Collins had died, he glanced up to make sure no scissor-hawks lurked up there. Then he looked at the Brazilians again. Sweat was rolling down his body, and he felt tension starting to mount inside him. Four against one was a hopeless struggle. Maybe he had found the ship first, but that didn't matter if they decided to take it away from him. He wanted the ship now so bad he could reach out and touch the yearning. It was *his* ship,

dammit! They weren't going to steal it!

He decided to play along. He knew the jungle might have a way of reducing the odds, if he waited long enough.

"Okay," he said, letting his tongue run around the rim of his dry mouth once. "It's too damn hot to argue. Let's open the ship up and see what's inside. Then afterward we can decide who gets it."

"No agreement is necessary," the girl said evenly. "The ship belongs to us."

"We can settle that later."

"It is settled now."

Massi scowled. He realized that loudmouthed stubbornness would only land him a burned gut. He was outnumbered, and maybe soon the Brazilians would realize he had a fortune in weed on his back. That would give them a double motive for killing him, and he was sure they wouldn't hesitate. Better a live liar, he thought, than a dead hero.

"The ship is yours," he said. "I just want the right to stick around and see what's inside it."

"Okay," the girl said. "All

right. You are wiser than I thought you were."

She stepped forward, walking around Massi, and made her way up the little ramp of dirt that the ship had ploughed up in crashing. There was an empty hatch halfway up the side of the ship.

Massi watched the girl. She was wearing tight shorts and a man's shirt. From the back she didn't look bad at all. It was only when you saw her face, with its rough skin and beaked nose, its sprawling black eyebrows meeting at mid-point, that you realized why she had gone to the outworlds, where men have different standards of beauty.

She leaned over and pushed at the hatch. It didn't give. It was part way open, having buckled when the ship landed, and she grabbed the upjutting flange and tugged. Muscles stood out on the surface of her gleaming sweaty skin, but the hatch refused to budge.

Massi came up alongside her and peered into the dark ship through the opening in the hatch. Nothing but darkness showed.

"You'll have to cut the hatch away," he said. "It's the only way to get in."

She looked up, eyes fiery. "I thank you for the advice! I would never have known!"

Glaring angrily at him, she spun around and gestured to one of the three men waiting below. She crackled some Portuguese at him and he responded by tossing her a small hand torch. Clicking it on with obvious skill, she began to cut a rectangular opening in the side of the ship. The job took about five minutes. Finally she nodded in approval and tossed the torch casually back to the man below. A neatly squared opening, its edges still cherry-red, had been cut where the hatch had been.

She looked at Massi and for an instant a kind of challenge passed between them; she was saying without words, *This is a ship from another star. Do you have the guts to go in and have a look?*

"Yes," he said. "Let's go in."

He stepped around her and started to lift one jackbooted leg into the ship. She gripped

his shoulder and pulled him back.

"Ladies first. You may follow."

"Your pleasure."

He followed her into the ship.

IF there had originally been some alien kind of atmosphere within the ship, it was gone now. The air of Kothgir II, which was Earthlike air but for the presence of helium instead of nitrogen, had entered when the wall of the ship had ruptured. There was a faint mustiness in the ship, as of some lingering gas.

Massi and the girl moved cautiously. The ship was tilted, which made movement difficult, and to complicate things the single passageway was not high enough for either of them to stand upright. They shuffled up the corridor, half-crouching, moving step by step as if fearing an alien booby-trap.

Jungle cries came from outside, breaking the silence within. A dim reddish light glimmered in the ship. Massi's eyes adjusted to it quickly. He could

see a kind of control panel further ahead, at the uppermost end of the ship, and some sort of cabinet facing it. Gradually they worked their way along the 45-degree slope of the floor to the front of the ship.

There they saw the aliens.

"Children!" the girl breathed in surprise, with a tenderness Massi had not thought her capable of.

Indeed the aliens did look like children, but nightmare children. There were two of them, lying in some sort of acceleration cradle, floating on a liquid bath like two enwombed fetuses. They were no more than three feet long, naked, their bodies covered with glistening green scales. Small legs terminated in splayed three-toed feet; the arms seemed almost boneless. Their eyes, protuberant, were covered by transparent lids. A strut of the cradle had broken loose in the crash and had fallen across them, apparently breaking the arm of the leftmost alien. They both seemed to be alive, but badly jarred by the crash, unconscious, and probably suffering from in-

ternal injuries. Massi heard the sound of soft moans.

"The poor ones," the girl murmured. "They are hurt!"

Massi eyed her strangely. It was odd that this strapping ugly six-footer of a girl should feel so moved by the sight of a couple of froglike green aliens. But perhaps it wasn't so odd after all, he decided. Perhaps somewhere in that well-muscled breast beat a woman's heart, sensitive to the plight of two pathetic creatures from some other star.

For a moment all considerations of national rivalry seemed to fade. The argument over who owned salvage rights to the ship was forgotten. The girl looked at Massi and said, "We must help them."

"How? I'm no doctor."

"We will radio for a doctor. But meanwhile—they are in pain."

Massi stared at the wide slack mouths, the floppy forearms. These two pitiful creatures had piloted this ship from what unknown star, he wondered? Deneb? Betelgeuse? Rigel?

He was starting to get

cramped from bending over so long. The ship's musty air bothered him. And he did not share the girl's maternal sympathy for the aliens. They were spacemen who had cracked up. Too bad; but why weep over them? Nobody was weeping for Weber, eaten alive by a swarming pitiful of acid-tongued insects. Nor for Collins, sliced in half by the beak of a swooping bird.

These were alien beings. For all he knew, the advance scouts of an invasion. But yet the big rawboned girl was looking at him sharply, and possibly for the first time in her life her eyes were misting with tears. Massi felt a sudden inexplicable gush of compassion—for her, for the two battered little aliens, for the three dead men back in the jungle, for the whole damned universe.

He said, "I've got a batch of *latimeria*-weeds in my rucksack. Maybe it'll ease their pain a little. Or maybe it'll kill them. We could try it."

She nodded. "Si. It would ease their pain."

Frowning at himself and wondering why he was doing

this, he hunched around and said to the girl, "Undo the straps and take out one of the stems. Just one."

She fumbled with the thick straps, pulled the rucksack open, and lifted out a stem. Turning, he took it from her. It was thick and succulent, dripping with the sap from which drugs could be made. The stem he was holding had a market value of \$1000, cash down. Three men had died so he could bring it back. And now he was giving it away.

Shaking off the thoughts, he broke the stem in half and, bending, thrust one half into each of the drooping alien mouths. He pinched the outer end of the stalk to start the sap running downward. Raw, the sap was strong stuff, but it did afford relief from pain.

As the first drops of the fluid fell into their gullets, the aliens emitted small sighing noises. Massi nodded. The treatment would soothe them.

"Let us go," the girl whispered. "We shall radio for a doctor. These beings must not be allowed to die."

Massi raised an eyebrow.

"Do we radio for an American doctor or a Brazilian one? We haven't settled that matter yet."

Her look was venomous. "You agreed to relinquish your claim!"

"So I did. But at least we ought to notify both settlements. You Brazilians have no right to keep this thing a secret. Not when it's as big as finding a couple of live extra-terrestrials."

As they climbed through the opening in the side of the ship she said, "Perhaps you are right. You may notify your base—a little later."

TWO minutes after they had quitted the ship, the three Brazilian men were setting up a midget radio transmitter, while the girl stood to one side and snapped orders and what Massi took to be coruscating insults. She was definitely the boss. She knew it and her three men knew it, without question.

Massi had run across her sort often enough in the outworlds. They were the women who were too big and plain to be attractive to most men, and

too rough to admit to themselves that they didn't like the situation. They were as strong as men in most ways, and out here in the pioneer worlds they did men's work.

Massi was willing to bet this specimen had never let a man lay a hand on her—or, if she had, she had made the man crawl for it first.

At another time, Massi thought, taming this girl might be an interesting challenge. Now he was just interested in getting out of the jungle alive and in letting the American outfit know what was lying here in the jungle.

He watched while they rigged up the transmitter. When it was ready, a minute or two later, the girl snatched at the microphone and shouted harshly into it:

"Allo! Allo! Capitan Jacopetti here. Are you there?"

That was as far as the conversation got. Captain Jacopetti never had a chance to find out whether the people at the other end heard her or not. For suddenly one of the men gasped and said, "Quick! Look over there!"

Whirling, Massi looked over his shoulder in the direction the panicky Brazilian was indicating. He saw the two alien beings standing at the lip of the cut-away entry hatch. They were surveying the scene with big glittering froggy eyes, clinging weakly to the ship to support themselves with one hand. In the other they held stubby metal tubes that looked like weapons.

Massi didn't wait to find out whether they actually were. He sprang forward, bowling over Captain Jacopetti, knocking her away from the transmitter. Together they rolled over into a cluster of foul-smelling shrubbery. The three Brazilians weren't so fortunate. They remained standing, one pointing in fright at the alien, the other two fumbling for their weapons.

The aliens held out the metal tubes. Abruptly a sheet of bluish radiance came fanning out from them, and swiftly and noiselessly the Brazilians evaporated above the waists. For one weird moment three trunkless pairs of legs stood erect; then they crumbled.

Hidden in the underbrush, Massi knew he had a moment or two before the aliens fired again. Yanking out his blaster, he adjusted the aperture to wide-beam, stepped down the intensity to a stun-bolt, and lifted the weapon to fire. He was too late. Before he could fire the woman at his side had squeezed her own weapon twice. Charred patches the size of baseballs appeared in the throats of the aliens. Like marionettes with their strings suddenly cut, the diminutive creatures went limp and toppled forward, falling from their perch in the hatchway and landing sprawled on the ground.

Angrily Massi snapped, "You shouldn't have done that. I was just going to stun them!"

"How could I know what you intended? Killing them was best!"

"If we had stunned them we could have brought them back alive. Questioned them, find out where they were from. But no. You had to kill them."

"They murdered Riccardo and Paolo and Carlo. They deserved to die." Anger made her

voice quiver. Flecks of spittle appeared on her chin. "I wish I could have killed them slower!"

SHE rose from the underbrush, and Massi followed her. The three dead Brazilians weren't pleasant to look at; the blue radiance had simply sheared off the upper halves of their body, demolecularized them in an instant. Massi noticed that the beam had also destroyed the radio transmitter.

The girl was inspecting the aliens, prodding them roughly with her booted toes to see if they lived. It was hard to believe that this girl was the same one who had called the aliens children fifteen minutes ago and who had, misty-eyed, implored Massi to ease their pain. She stooped and pried one of the metal tubes from a dead alien hand. Massi snatched up the other, and together they examined the weapon.

"Better be careful," he cautioned. "No telling which way you're pointing that thing."

"It is not pointing at you. Fear nothing."

Indeed the danger of an accidental discharge seemed slim. The tube he held seemed to be hollow and open at both ends. Holding it gingerly, he explored its surface, finding no triggering device of any sort. It was just a hollow metal tube. He shrugged and tucked the tube away in his rucksack. Let the scientists back at the base puzzle out how it works, he thought. He could testify that it *did* work, somehow.

He grinned cynically and looked down at the dead aliens, who looked now like a pair of rag dolls. "That's gratitude for you, isn't it? Give them medicine and the minute they're strong enough to walk they blow your head off." He scowled. "But I guess I shouldn't expect gratitude from them. Not from aliens. Maybe in their culture the proper thing to do is to kill the doctor who fixes you up."

"There would be few doctors in such a culture."

"Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe they saw the radio operating and didn't want you to send back word about them."

"Or perhaps," the girl said,

"they are Haters. They were so consumed with hatred for other beings that they destroyed on sight."

"I still say you shouldn't have killed them. Maybe there was some misunderstanding—"

She laughed scornfully. "Fool! Woman! I killed them because they deserved to be killed!"

"Stunning would have been good enough," he said, ignoring the insults. "But you were bloodthirsty, weren't you?"

"And you are softhearted, then."

She seemed to be regretting her moment of weakness in the ship, Massi thought. Maybe that was why she had iced up so swiftly. Well, no sense arguing with her about it. It had been hotheaded to kill instead of stun, but the aliens were dead and that was all there was to it.

She said, "Besides, my blaster is not equipped for stunning. It can only kill. I did not know hand-blasters could do both."

"The new models can. The new *American* models, anyway."

"May I see your weapon?"

He shrugged and handed her the gun butt-first for inspection. The instant he parted with it, he knew he had made a mistake, one of the few really boneheaded goofs he had ever made. She grinned coldly at him, flipped the safety off, and said, "Put up the hands, please."

"What the hell are you pulling?"

"We are forty miles from my settlement, only a dozen from yours. In the nature of things you will reach your people many hours before I reach mine. That would not be so good for me. I would still be walking through the jungle when your men had come to view the ship. You will come with me, therefore. Or I will kill you here."

Massi's jaw sagged. Rage coursed through him, rage directed only at himself. Underestimation was fatal when dealing with this girl, it seemed. He hadn't even considered the fact that the alien ship was far closer to the American settlement than the Brazilian, and that unless she stopped him he would have been able to no-

tify his base long before she could reach hers. So she had tried a trick so old it had long white whiskers, and now she had both guns and he had none.

There was nothing for him to say. He was too choked with shame to want to speak. She had called him a fool and a woman, and she had been right. He bit down hard on his lip in impotent frustration. His eyes could not meet her dark, mocking ones. Tricked, gunless, deprived of the biggest prize in the universe by his own unaccountable stupidity, he was sick with self-reproach.

"Okay," she said, grinning gaily. "You will walk ahead of me. We should reach my settlement in two days if we do not waste time."

IT was mid-afternoon when they set out, Massi in the lead and the girl directing him from behind. The temperature was slowly dropping back from its noonday peak, but it was well over 100 anyway. Grimly Massi forced his bitter self-anger to subside; he was going to need his wits about him just to survive the jungle trek.

He said nothing, nor did she make conversation. At least she had the thoughtfulness not to taunt him, Massi thought.

He considered the situation. A small alien ship had wandered into the Kothgir system and had crashed. Obviously it was an advance scout of some kind. It was imperative that he get word back to his base about the landing; the Brazilians might or might not decide to let the other space-colonizing nations know about the possible peril, but he couldn't risk that. He had to get back to his settlement and bring the news. Besides, the colony could use the metal of the ship, if nothing else. He didn't want all that good metal to fall into the hands of the Brazilians.

So he had gone and handed his gun over to this brawny wench, and now he was on his way eastward, heading in the wrong direction for him. He cursed himself bitterly. He wondered about ways of winning back the advantage.

They covered eight miles by nightfall. It was slow work, hacking a path through the thick jungle, keeping your eyes

cocked for unfriendly wildlife, taking each step slow for fear of a hidden pit. Massi was bone-tired by the time Kothgir slipped below the horizon and the pale blue moons had risen, two of them brightening the sky. Night-cries sounded in the jungle now. The bigger carnivores, having slept through the steaming day, now would prowl in search of their night's meal.

Massi wondered what the girl was planning to do. Usually two people slept in shifts in the jungle, one standing guard at all times. But the girl would never dare relax. She would have to remain awake all night for fear Massi would seize the blasters. But if she dozed, even for a moment, he thought—

They settled down in a clearing by the bank of a small turgid stream for the night. But neither slept. They sat cross-legged ten feet apart, watching each other. For a while Massi pretended to be asleep, watching the girl through slit-
ted lids to see if she would relax guard. She remained awake, staring at him coldly, never easing up.

The girl was superhuman, he decided. She was about as feminine as a tank, and twice as deadly. When the sun finally scattered the night, she was fresh and ready to go, seemingly not at all fatigued by her sleepless night. And Massi was perfectly willing to believe she intended to stay awake until they reached the Brazilian base.

But in that case, he thought, why doesn't she kill me? It would be much simpler for her that way. He could supply two possible answers: either she feared making the trip through the forest alone, or else there was some lingering sentimentality about her that kept her from cold-bloodedly shooting him.

He wondered what sort of strength lay in those lean, flat, whiplike muscles, in that wiry unwomanly body. He wondered too whether she would shoot him down as readily as she had the two aliens. By mid-morning of the second day, he was desperate enough to try her out.

They were advancing through heavily wooded flat-

lands, marshy and spongy underfoot, infested with snakes of all sizes from the needle-thin and deadly Little Fry to the barrel-thick Swallowers. The heat had slacked off a trifle, but it was a long way from being comfortable.

He stopped suddenly. Behind him, the girl said, "Why do you hesitate?"

"I think I hear something. Swallower, maybe. You hear a gurgling sound coming from the left?"

She was silent a moment. "No," she said finally.

"I do. We better hold up a second." He took a deep breath and realized to his great surprise that he was apprehensive about what he was going to do next, that though he had entered the jungle twenty times without fear he felt fear now, not for the jungle's presence but because of the girl behind him.

He pivoted suddenly, shouting, "Here comes a Swallower on your right! Look out! Look out!"

ONE good ruse deserved another, he thought. Despite

herself, the Brazilian girl glanced to the right; the drawn blaster she carried wavered hesitantly, and the hesitation was just enough. Massi sprang at her, collided heavily, and threw her to the ground. He had been right: she had weakened when it came to drilling him in the middle with the blaster.

They landed on an oozy patch of marshland, Massi on top. He was two inches taller than the girl and better than sixty pounds heavier, and he made his advantage count. One hand reached out and clamped itself round her wrist, bending it back and forcing her to release the blaster. The other snaked round her throat. Slowly he levered himself to a sitting position, his knees planted on her arms, his body astride her chest, his hands gripping her shoulders and holding her flat. The fall had gone to him hands down.

She writhed, slapping her feet up and down and trying to thrust her knee into his groin, but she was helpless. All she could do was spit. She did that. Massi grinned and

slapped her, hard. A trickle of blood started to run out of the corner of her mouth. She spat again and a second time he slapped her, even harder. He felt a savage joy in what he was doing. He had never hit a woman before, but this was hardly a woman. More like a wildcat.

Gradually she accepted the fact that she was beaten. Massi leaned back cautiously, slid a hand down her thigh, and yanked the other blaster from its holster. She muttered incoherent curses at him.

"Hurts to get fooled bad, doesn't it?" he asked. "Now you know how I felt yesterday."

Working quickly, he unclipped the blasting chamber of her gun, cracked open the power-housing, and held it against the marsttop long enough for it to be thoroughly ruined. He tossed the useless blaster into the bushes. Then, holstering his own weapon again, he released her.

She rose, rubbing her split lips and sore arms, and favored him with as murderous a glance of hatred as Massi had ever

seen. Shrugging it off, he said, "I hate to leave you stranded like this without a weapon, but it's your own damn fault. Still, even though you're a woman—"

"I am a soldier, not a woman."

"As you prefer. You're on your own, Captain. I'm afraid we split up here. I'm going back the way I came. You have thirty miles to travel and I have about twenty. Want to bet on who gets there first?"

"You will. But if I ever see you again I will kill you. No man holds his body against mine and lives."

Massi chuckled. "You're lucky all I did was wrestle with you. Tell you what: if I ever see *you* again, I'll do my best to finish the job!"

"I would kill you first."

Suddenly she turned, as if afraid tears might come to her eyes in a moment, and dashed wildly off into the thick brush. Massi watched her go, and shook his head thoughtfully. She had put up a good fight, all right. She was a regular wildcat. But a good big man can lick a good big woman any

time, he thought. He wondered if he ever *would* see her again—and who would walk away from the encounter alive. By whipping her, he had restored his faith in his manhood—but he wasn't sure the man had been born who could successfully bed that girl down.

He started to cut his way through the jungle, back toward the American settlement. Moving rapidly through the path already hewn, he reached the alien spaceship by late afternoon. The ground about the area seemed different: as if it had been trampled down, it seemed. He wondered whether others had found the ship. Certainly there had been visitors recently—in the last hour, perhaps.

Shrugging, he pressed on. Only twelve miles to go; he could cover two or three more before it became too dark to walk.

HE was ten miles from the base when a sudden explosion shattered the jungle silence. He froze; a moment later a second explosion came, shaking the ground beneath

him. The first explosion had come from behind him, the second from directly in front. As if raiders had bombed first the Brazilian, then the American colonies.

A flash of brilliance above caught his eye. He glanced up. Against the hard blue backdrop of the sky he saw a ship rising heavenward and vanishing, a big ship, a strange ship. And suddenly he knew what had happened.

The colony was still in flames when he reached it, late that night, after a forced march through the dark. There was nothing left but rubble. The alien ship had been very efficient. Fifty years of work blotted out in a moment; three thousand human beings dead. And he knew it was the same way fifty miles away, at the Brazilian colony.

Massi stared up at the bleak stars. From one of those stars an exploratory ship had come, and following it a larger one. The explorers had crashed; the mother ship, following its smaller companion, had landed to find both of their men

dead at the hands of the planet's inhabitants.

The Brazilian girl had been right: the aliens *were* Haters. In wrath they had visited flaming death on the only two settlements they could find. Perhaps the murder had been expiated, or perhaps the incident would provoke the first interstellar war.

But Massi did not worry about that possibility now. He was abruptly conscious of his position. He was alone, the only American to have escaped the holocaust. No Earth ship would call at Kothgir II for at least a year. It was a long time to spend in the jungle by yourself. And there had been another survivor. She was back there, perhaps only now first discovering what had happened to her people.

Massi wet his lips and checked his blaster charges. He was alone and he didn't like to be alone, not while another person yet lived on the planet. He was surprised to find this need in himself: he had always thought himself self-sufficient, but now, standing at the edge of the fiery ruins of the American colony, he saw that he wasn't.

He didn't have to be alone. He wondered if that Brazilian girl could possibly be tamed. Taking a deep breath, he turned his back on the blazing dead colony and headed off into the jungle again, as morning began. Maybe the girl *could* be tamed. Massi was going to find her and try.

THE END



COMPUTER CAPSULES

by SCOTT NEVETS

A super high-speed memory device which can respond in a hundred millionth of a second is the latest miracle of the mushrooming science of cybernetics. Developed by IBM, the device uses a miniature printed circuit of metallic lead at temperatures close to absolute zero (minus 459.7 degrees Fahrenheit). The device brings us that much closer to the era of robots.

Test cells operating on this cryogenic principle function a hundred times faster than standard ferrite-core memories, and require less than half as much drive current.

Known as the "Trapped-Flux Superconducting Memory," its astonishing speed of response will make possible startling new developments in high-speed, high-capacity electronic computers.

A computer designed to measure human IQ has been

perfected by the National Cash Register Company of Hawthorne, California. Its developers hope that the machine will lead the way to a comprehensive theory of the intellectual processes of man, with special insight into creativity.

The computer bases its findings on more than forty established factors of intellect, providing a "many-sided" picture of intelligence in place of the old single-score test. Its high-speed electronic "mind" greatly reduces the time needed to analyze test scores, making it possible to obtain quick test results from large groups of people.

As test data are fed into the computer, punched paper tape bearing correlated results emerge immediately. The tape in turn operates an automatic typewriter which rapidly delivers the interpreted results in tabular form.

FIRST MAN IN A SATELLITE

by CHARLES W. RUNYON

illustrated by E.M.S.H.

An utter, utter loneliness, the like of which no man had ever felt before, an utter isolation from all of life, from all of Earth — this was his lot in space

BREAKOFF.

The thought blended with his trailing scream, and Max jerked his eyes from the port. His breathing slowed as he stared at the curving metal walls of his capsule, eighteen inches away.

Breakoff. Jet-jockeys had given the name to the tearing loneliness up where the blue sky edges into black. They knew how he felt, Max thought, like a man with measles knows how it feels to die.

"How long did it last?" he

mused aloud. His voice was hoarse, but he was relieved to find the panic gone. He decided to risk looking out again.

Directly below, the fat globe was shading from dark to light. On his left, Kamchatka dangled from Siberia like a goat's udder, and the Aleutians groped across a metallic Pacific. Scattered clouds over the ocean reminded Max of soap scum in a dishpan.

He watched California bulge toward him, the central valley like a finger mark on a dusty shelf. Stateside again.



"Look, Marie, I'm flying!" He tried to visualize her with pride shining in her blue eyes, but he could only see her as she'd last appeared, hurt and crying. Besides, she didn't even know where he was.

He reached up to cover the port and cracked his knuckles on the thick plastic. Lord! After five days, he'd forgotten to allow for weightlessness. For five days, he'd wheeled around the earth like a man on a merry-go-round, and in five more days, the brass ring would be his.

"Face it, Maxie," he said aloud. "All you want is down."

He seemed to be talking to himself more and more. But Doc had said not to worry. "Your personality's splitting, Max; you've probably always had a mild neurosis. It'll join again when the pressure's off."

Meanwhile, it was something to do. He pulled the cover over the port and the capsule darkened. His stomach twisted with the familiar sense of falling, and he gripped the bar just above his chest with both hands. His stomach settled.

His wrist circlet vibrated

gently, and he knew it was recording the brief flutter on his pulse to be relayed to the base in the Caribbean when he got in range.

His leg itched where a tube entered a blood vessel, recording pressure. Gradually, his awareness spread to the dozens of electrodes, cardiograms, and meters which pierced and pressed his body.

For the hundredth time, he wanted to rip them loose and escape, but he was immobile from his armpits down, swathed in pressure suit and nylon crash harness; strapped inside a five- by three-foot capsule, suspended inside a stubby-winged ship he'd never seen. He was a passive guinea pig, punched and probed in a satellite that circled the earth every 118 minutes, from 250 to 1200 miles high. He was a three-foot-tall, 75-pound guinea pig, but nonetheless. . .

"Stop complaining. Max," said his voice. "You volunteered."

So he had. And if he'd been normal size, as he'd wished every day since he was fifteen, he'd never have gotten the job.

As Doc had explained, "We can cut total thrust to one-eighth with you. You eat less, drink less, and breathe less."

Old Doc, the first space psychologist. He'd be in range soon. Max could almost see him behind the mike at the base, pulling at his earlobe and pursing his lips while he thought up questions to ask.

Max wondered how long they'd be able to talk this time. It varied so much according to his altitude that he could never keep track.

HE felt the vibration behind his ear, then the voice came clear above the faint sizzle of solar static. "Max?"

"Here, Doc."

"With us again? Good. How do you feel?"

"You tell me."

"All right. Hold on." His voice came back after a minute. "Here we are Max. Your temperature's normal; breathing normal. Oops! Watch your pulse. It took a jump nine minutes ago."

"I had a dizzy spell. Uh... how long was I out?"

"Oh." There was a pause.

"You roared overhead twice, but you weren't—"

Twice. That was nearly four hours. "The longest yet," said Max.

"True, but the first in almost two days. And I started to say you weren't babbling either time, as you've done before."

"What did I say?"

"You were under the impression we were revolving around you. Without you, you said, we'd fall into space. But we weren't to worry, because you'd stay and take care of us. I felt...humble."

Max heard the chuckle in Doc's voice and felt his ears grow hot. "That's heady stuff."

"Better than the time before though, when you were mad at us mortals. I was grateful you didn't have a bomb with you."

"You shouldn't listen."

"My job, Max. I'm learning a lot I couldn't learn any other way."

"You think I'm—flipping?"

"No. You're adapting, changing to meet a new environment. If you didn't, you'd really flip."

Max could hear the fatigue

in his voice. "When do you sleep, Doc?"

"When you're on the other side."

Max shivered at the sound of the word. *The other side*. The silent, lonely time. *Soon*. He pushed the thought away.

"Hey, Doc, I'm composing a song to pass the time. I'll call it 'Meet Me at Perigee'. Think it'll sell?"

Doc grunted. "They'll pay you ten grand a week to sneeze when you get down, Max, until there's a new novelty."

Doc was right, too. Yesterday's hero is today's cold turkey. He'd have to make his wad and get out of the public eye fast. And take Marie with him, if he could find her.

He opened the port and saw the British Isles far to the left, hovering over Europe like a mother hen. The dark African coast was below and the vast, gleaming Sahara seemed to be tipping up toward him.

"We've only got another minute, Max," said Doc. "Anything else?"

"No." Max said the words that had become ritual. "I'll see you around."

Then there was only static, and Max sighed, hating the end of it. The conversations were all that kept him sane, he figured. Doc knew his trade.

HE remembered when he'd first seen him. He and Marie had an act in San Francisco; tumbling and a song and dance routine. One night, Harry, a waiter, had come into the broom closet they'd given Max for a dressing room.

"You got company, Shorty. Two guys."

Scouts, Max thought, slipping on the tailored suit he'd gotten in New York during their try for TV. He checked himself in the mirror: Even features, straight nose, slight shadow of beard. How did people mistake him for a kid? They didn't look, that was it.

He'd known they weren't scouts when he reached their table. One man—Doc, he'd learned later—appeared too thoughtful, and his suit too rumpled. The other was heavy-shouldered, unimaginatively immaculate, and looked like he'd never laughed in his life.

Neither smiled as Max clam-

bered into the chair and put his arms on the table.

"Canning," said the heavy man, "we may have a job for you."

He had a high, nasal voice, and Max had disliked him at once. "What does it pay?"

The heavy man frowned and started to speak, but Doc broke in. "Care for a drink?"

"It's coming," said Max. Nobody spoke until Harry had set his scotch-on-the-rocks on the table and departed. Max sipped his drink, becoming annoyed by the inspection. "Well?"

"How old are you?" asked Doc.

"Twenty-nine."

The heavy man grunted. "Too old."

Doc shook his head. "You saw his act, General. He couldn't do that if he weren't in top physical condition. And he has...uh, the other requirements."

Max thought he should help. "I keep in shape."

Doc nodded. "We *do* have a job for you. We can't tell you what it is now. But the pay is wide open. Three month's

work, and you'll be fixed for the rest of your life."

"You'll be able to withdraw at any time within the first six weeks," Doc continued. "But you can't talk to anyone about it, and you can't bring anyone with you. You have a family?"

Max hesitated. "No."

Doc had caught the pause. "The girl—you can't tell her anything. You understand that?"

Max hesitated longer this time. He lifted his glass with both hands and drained it, feeling the ice cube against his nose. He set it down. "I'm with you. And I won't back out."

He hadn't backed out, during the long dry run in the capsule, eating concentrated rations, drinking the same reconditioned water again and again, breathing the same recycled air, day after day. The dry run had taught him something about loneliness, too—but it wasn't like this.

HE watched the shadow creep across Saudi Arabia. Night lay beyond it, with

stars strung out like jewels on black velvet. *Darkside coming up*, thought, and fear was a bright blue taste on his tongue. *Oh, God! There was nothing like this!*

He gripped the bar and squeezed his eyes shut, feeling tears gather at the corners and hang there, unable to fall. After several minutes, he jerked his head and watched the twin globules float away, catching the fading light as they drifted toward the air recycler. Tomorrow's drinking water...

On the dark side, he had nothing to do but think, and he had time to make his thoughts vivid. When he thought of steak, he heard the sizzle as it broiled, and felt the juice running over the back of his tongue. When he thought of a drink, he felt the moisture on the outside of the glass, and heard the muffled clink of the ice cubes as he raised the drink to his lips. When he thought of Marie...

A red flag fluttered in his brain, but his thoughts rolled recklessly back to the time he'd left her...

She was standing beside him

while he packed, and the rusty gold fringe on her costume skirt shook against the tiny, perfect thighs.

"Maxie." He could hear her voice, full and throaty, lacking the thin, piping quality so many had. "Maxie, if you've got a chance to do a single somewhere, okay. I'll take care of your costumes, help with your makeup, or anything. But I want to be with you."

Max sighed. "I said it wasn't that, Marie. All I can tell you is that when I get back in three months, we can get married."

"We can now."

"No." He thought of explaining again how he hated to put her on display for those... other men. And what would they do when they got old? He'd seen too many of the old ones, still in the trade, riding a downward spiral. He thought of telling her that this might be their only chance to get out of it. But he'd already said that.

He locked the suitcases and walked to the door. "I can't say what I'll be doing, Marie. And that's final. But I'll be back."

"This is final too, Max. I won't be here."

Her voice was tight, and she'd called him Max instead of Maxie. He looked at her white face and saw the glint of moisture in her eyes.

"Try to understand," he said, his voice gentle. "I'll be back."

She bit her lip, teeth white against the red, and golden waves danced as she shook her head. "I won't be here, Max."

The remembered scene stayed in his mind several minutes before he forced it away and looked out the port. There was nothing to see in the shadow of the sun, but he knew that India was somewhere below. He thought of the millions watching his pale streak across the sky, perhaps saying to each other, in whatever language they used: "There goes Max."

Then he remembered they wouldn't say it, because nobody knew there was a human aboard. Why? He wondered for the hundredth time if they expected something to go wrong.

But nothing would go wrong,

he told himself. He tried to relax, dreading the ripping frenzy of another breakoff. But fear nibbled at his calm.

Maybe, the thought made him cold inside, *they didn't even plan to bring him down*. It would be much easier, and they were learning all about him from his swaddling of instruments. That would explain the secrecy about him, too.

Then he thought of Doc. He'd trust him, he decided, even if he didn't trust that chicken general. Doc had been with him constantly during the two and a half months before takeoff, and never once had Max caught him with the mocking smile behind his eyes that so many had.

Max smiled, recalling the time he'd passed out in the centrifuge. They'd gotten it up to twenty gees and Max had wanted to go back in and try for more.

"You don't have to prove anything to me, Max," Doc had said. "Relax. Few people can take over fifteen."

Three days before takeoff, Doc had come into his room, set a bottle of scotch on the

night stand, and pulled two glasses from his pocket. "This came out of our medicinal appropriation. It's the last chance you'll have for a drink before takeoff."

Later, Max had gotten a little maudlin. "Doc, if I don't make it—"

"You'll make it."

"Sure. But promise me you'll find Marie if I don't and give her whatever's coming to me."

Doc raised his eyebrows. "I promise. It'll take some legal boontwaddle, since she's not a relative. Is it that important?"

"Yes. It's the main reason I'm doing this. I want her out of the rat race, even if I don't make it."

After a reluctant judge-advocate had gone back to the officer's club, leaving Doc with the will he'd drawn up, Max had loosened up. He knew, as he looked back on it, that he'd loosened up more than he'd intended.

"Doc, for a three-foot man, women aren't like streetcars. Even if they were, Marie would be for me. You saw her. Perfect figure, the nicest...

well, nobody mistook *her* for a little girl."

He filled his glass. "She was sixteen when I met her, eight years ago. I was doing a trapeze act with the circus, and I worked her in. She was perfect for it; patient and dependable. My opposite, exactly. When the circus folded, we worked up a night club act. It was good, but I could never handle the hecklers. I wanted to throw things, and once I hit a customer with a bottle. After that, I just let Marie handle them. She never had any trouble."

Max had thought about himself a moment. "Doc, you know what I'm like. Will I last up there?"

Doc filled his glass before answering. "If you had to pilot the thing, I wouldn't let you go. You'd probably blow up. But all you have to do is lie there; in fact, that's about all you can do. You'll make it. The Rhesus monkey did."

Max had grinned. "Thanks a lot, Doc. I'll try to live up to the example."

JUST lie there. It has sounded easy, but it wasn't. His

leg itched again, and the capsule seemed cooler. He should be over Australia now. Or would that be the next time around? It didn't matter. Nothing mattered now, except the end of it, four days and twenty hours from now.

He fell asleep thinking about it, his hands tight on the bar.

PING!

The sound woke him from a dream of falling. Air exploded from his lungs, tearing at his throat, and he felt the skin stretching taut across his stomach.

A meteor! He heard the hiss of escaping air, and felt the pressure in the capsule dropping. He tried to scream, but his lungs were empty.

He was sinking into a soft, black cloud when the hissing stopped. A gasp relieved his collapsing lungs—the air was still thin, but better than nothing. The capsule had resealed itself, and he could feel air coming in from the emergency tank.

He explored himself mentally. His stomach was sore, but it seemed normal. He shuddered. A minute longer and

he'd have exploded like an overinflated balloon. His heart felt like a typewriter in his chest, but it was slowing down. He seemed healthy, but he wondered how low the pressure had fallen.

"Don't borrow trouble," he told himself.

God! One chance in a hundred, and he'd caught it. No, once chance in a million. The meteor bumper would have stopped anything smaller than a BB, and his was bigger.

He was relieved to hear Doc's voice again. "Hello, Max. How was the trip this—"

Max cut him off. "Doc, what's the reading on me?"

There was a pause, and Max heard Doc mumbling off-mike. Then he came back. "They're unscrambling it now, Max." His voice was casual. "What's eating you?"

"I caught a meteor."

"What? Hold on!"

Five minutes later, he was on again. "You're in good shape now, Max. Pulse and blood pressure still high, though. Better calm down."

"Calm down? Doc, what about the meteor?"

Doc's voice seemed strained when he answered. "Yes, one penetrated the forward section, about the size of a black-eyed pea. You were in vacuum 12 seconds; not enough to vaporize cell fluids, so you're not damaged. Pressure's normal now. How do you feel?"

"Shook up. But I'm healthy if the ship is."

There was silence on the other end.

"Doc?"

Doc's voice had a decisive sound. "Max, I think you should know this. You lost a lot of air and it's cut your safety margin. They'll try to bring you in earlier than planned."

"What?" Max's voice rose an octave. "How much air? And what do you mean, they'll try?"

Doc cleared his throat. "Your air will last 38 hours, Max. At your present speed, it would take five days for normal air drag to bring you in. They'll try to turn your ship so the stern is forward, then fire one of the landing correction rockets to slow you down. Gravity and air drag will do the rest."

Max considered it. "How can I land without the rocket?"

"We'll sacrifice the ship. Your capsule will be ejected at 50,000 feet, and you'll come the rest of the way by parachute."

At least, Max thought, he'd be on the way down. "When do we start?"

"In thirty seconds. Get ready for the blast, Max. It'll hit twenty gees."

Like jumping off a five-story building onto a trampoline. He'd done that, too.

He gripped the bar and waited, counting off the seconds. "...Twenty-eight." He tightened his stomach. "Twenty-nine." He drew in his breath, pulling his lips back from set teeth. "Thirty!"

Nothing. It was like climbing a dark stairway, expecting a step that wasn't there. A minute passed.

"Doc! What's wrong?"

"We don't know yet, Max. They're checking the equipment."

Three minutes passed, then Doc came on again. "They'll try again, now. Get ready."

Max did. This time, the let-

down was multiplied by ten.

"Doc?" The word was plaintive.

Doc's voice came on a minute later. "Max, they think the meteor knocked out one of your receivers. They can't control your ship from here."

"My God!"

"It was a million-to-one chance, Max."

"I know," said Max, trying to keep his voice calm. "As you told me once, odds have nothing to do with individuals. What now?"

"I'm no technician, Max. Maybe..." He trailed off.

"If the trouble's up here," said Max, "It would have to be fixed up here, wouldn't it?"

"I should think so."

"Well, ask them how!"

DOC'S voice was leaden when he returned a minute later. "No chance, Max. The receiver's outside the shell of your capsule. You couldn't get near it, and even if you could—"

Max grabbed at another idea. "Is there any way I can control it?"

"Manually? Max, you said—"

Max bit his lower lip, feeling the taut fabric of his patience stretch and tear. "I KNOW I CAN'T OPERATE A KIDDY CAR! BUT I DON'T AIM TO DIE UP HERE!" He swallowed, tasting blood. "Ask them, will you?"

Several minutes passed this time before Doc came back on. "The general is willing to try anything, Max. He'll give you instructions."

The familiar voice, high and nasal, wasted no time on preliminaries. "Just above your chest, there's a plate about five inches square where we put wiring for manual controls. Now get that plate off..."

The voice faded.

"Yes?" said Max. No answer. He was out of range, and there was nothing to do now, but wait.

No, he could be taking off the plate. He tore off his wristlet, smashed it against the shell, and salvaged a strip of strong steel. After twenty minutes of prying, the plate was off. He put his hand inside

and felt the mass of wiring, coiled like a plate of spaghetti. Was he supposed to make sense of that?

Oh, Marie!

He relaxed, and was surprised to find that he was tired. He might even sleep...

Doc's voice woke him. "Max? They're ready to try."

Max shook his head to clear it. "Let's go."

The nasal voice came on. "You got the cover off?"

"Yeah, but all those wires..."

"Six are all that concern you. Find one with a green strip on white, another blue on white, one solid red, one yellow, one blue on yellow, and one solid green. Strip the insulation off the ends, *but don't touch them together!*"

It was a tough job, picking around in zero gravity. His hands would begin quivering, then build up to jerking spasms. He stopped four times to bring them under control.

"Got them," he said finally.

"Very well. There's a wheel in the middle of the ship which turns when the proper circuit is established. When it

turns one way, the ship turns another. You've no way of knowing when you're in the right position, so we'll watch the meters from here. When I say 'go', you touch the green-white and the blue-white wires together. If I say 'stop' you separate them. If I say 'back' touch the red and yellow wires together. It will mean you've gone around too far and must come back. When I say 'fire' it means you're in the correct position. Touch the blue-yellow and the green wires, and your rocket fires. Got that?"

"Hell, no." Max was irked by his crisp matter-of-factness. "Run through it again."

The general did, adding: "Let me emphasize one point. If you fire when your ship is not exactly parallel to the orbit, you may be propelled entirely out of earth's gravitational field, or you may be driven into the atmosphere at too great a speed and burn up. Is that clear?"

"Yes," said Max, swallowing. "It's clear."

"All right. Go."

Max brought the two wires together and held them, hear-

ing a faint sound somewhere near his feet. Something was happening. His hands began to tremble.

"Stop."

Max separated the wires.

"Back!"

He fumbled for the red and yellow wires; finally brought them together.

"Stop." He did.

"Go!" He grasped two others and held them. His hands shook, then began jerking.

"You're breaking contact! GO!"

Max ground his teeth, and dewdrops of sweat formed on the backs of his hands.

"STOP!"

For a moment his muscles refused to obey his mind, then he broke contact.

"You went too far," said the general. "Back."

"Wait a minute." Max kneaded his hands and flexed his fingers. "All right, let's try again."

"Go."

Max grabbed for a pair of wires and touched them.

"NO!" I said go! The other wires!"

Max found the right wires

and brought them together.

"You're turning like a pin-wheel, now." The general sounded discouraged. "Just hold it for awhile."

Max looked out the port and saw the earth whirling below him. He couldn't even tell where he was.

"You're slowing down," said the voice. "It could have been worse. Lord, what if you'd hit the firing wires instead?"

The sunshine kid, thought Max, not answering. He'd punch him in the nose, first thing he got down.

"You're almost there... STOP! Now we'll try to get you back on the beam again. GO!"

Max tried to get the wires in his fingers, but his hands were jerking again. "Wait a minute."

"All right."

The general spoke again, his voice muffled and distant but still audible. "Doc, this is pointless. It would take a trained pilot with proper controls to bring that capsule down..."

Max strained to hear the reply, but Doc's voice was in-

audible. He looked at his hands. Still quivering, but they seemed stronger. "I'm ready now. It's beginning to get dark."

"We'll have to wait then," said the general. "Can't risk having you touch the wrong wires in the dark." He cleared his throat. "Frankly, Canning, I think you'd better reconcile yourself—"

The voice stopped abruptly, and Doc came on. "Try and get some rest, Max. We'll do better next time."

THEN there was silence. Two hours gone, thought Max. Thirty-six to go. He was almost ready to agree with the general. Pointless...

This time he couldn't sleep, and he seemed to be drifting through black molasses. It seemed that days had passed instead of less than an hour and a half, before the general's voice came again.

"Canning, I've got your position. Let's go!"

Max felt as though someone had gripped a handful of his nerves and was scrubbing them with a wire brush. "Where's Doc?"

"He's not here, Canning. Are you ready?"

Max felt his control slipping away. "Get him!"

"Wait." The voice returned in a minute. "He left the base about an hour ago, flying to the mainland."

"Left the base?" Anger surged within him, then turned to regret. *So Doc has given up.* Well, Max didn't exactly blame him, but he'd wanted to remind him about Marie. It seemed particularly important now.

"Ready, Canning?"

"Sure."

"All right," said the general. "The green-white and blue-white wires, in case you've forgotten. GO!"

It was worse than last time. After ten minutes, the general delivered a brief lecture.

"Canning, our time is running out. I didn't want to put you under pressure, but I think you should know it's going to take you thirty-three hours to slow down after you reenter the atmosphere. That means that if you haven't started braking within two hours, there's no point in starting

down at all. Now, will you try?"

Max blew up. "TRY? I'M TRYING! DID YOU EVER THREAD A NEEDLE ON A ROLLERCOASTER, YOU PEABRAINED SLIPSTICK SHOVER?"

The general was silent for ten seconds, as if waiting to make sure Max had finished. "I sympathize with you, Canning, and I'd like to see you down safely. After all, this will go on my record too, even though it was unforeseeable. But I can't alter the facts. Are you ready?"

Max looked at his shaking hands. "No. We'll have to wait."

Later, they tried again without success, and Max was quivering with frustration when he went out of range.

It would be easy, he thought, just to lie there and do nothing. No struggle; just going to sleep when the carbon-dioxide concentration became too high. But he knew he wouldn't give up. Nobody did while there was still some hope.

And when there was none? When he still had thirty-two

hours to live, and nothing to do but whirl around the earth like a dead mouse on a string? It could happen.

He thought about it, staring out the port, feeling the darkness from outside seeping into his mind. He started to reach up and close the port, but the blackness was suddenly everywhere...

His next conscious thought was: *How long?* He had no idea. It hadn't seemed long, but he never knew. Outside, he was relieved to see the light bright at the edge of Australia, behind and to the right.

I'll soon be in range, he thought, and there's still time for one more try. Experimentally, he held his hands in front of him and touched his fingertips together. Perfect.

THE crackle of static came then, and the voice. "Maxie?"

Lord, his mind was gone now, for sure. That feather-brained general was beginning to sound like—

"Maxie?"

He was sure then. Only one person called him that.

"MARIE! How'd you get there?"

"I flew in a jet, Maxie. They had your picture on TV, then the man came and got me..."

So Doc had remembered! Well, he hadn't wasted any time bringing her back. He'd caught the sense of her words: "...Whole place is full of newspapermen and cameras. They want to know all about you."

Max almost smiled to himself, picturing her as the center of attraction. She would be enjoying it, too, as she always did. Then he realized they were wasting time.

"Hey! Put the general on! I've got to get down from here!"

There was silence at the other end.

"Marie?"

"Maxie, don't you remember?" Her voice held a deep sadness.

"What?"

"You came over twice, but you wouldn't talk to anyone. You just laughed."

Max felt sick. He couldn't speak for a long time, then he

said, without emotion, "It's too late then, isn't it?"

"Yes." Her voice was choked. "Oh, Maxie, why did you do it?"

"Marie...don't cry. You just have to take chances to get any place. Some win; some lose. It just takes time to get used to the idea. I've had time."

"So have I, Maxie...two hours. I won't cry any more."

"Okay. How much time do I have left?"

"They just checked. It's twenty—" she paused, and he could tell she was fighting for control. "—Twenty-eight hours."

"That's more than a lot of people on earth have right now, Marie. You should try to look at it that—" He stopped. Forced cheerfulness would just put a strain on both of them. "Marie, I'm sorry it didn't turn out."

"Me too."

"Listen, from now on I don't want to talk to anyone but you, you hear? Anybody wants to say something, they'll say it through you."

"All right, Maxie. I'll—wait a minute."

She came back on after a minute. "The general wants me to tell you they're going to build a statue of you, right here on the base."

Why the pompous old—! Max felt sudden anger, then it subsided. Time was too short for—tantrums. He became aware of a feeling completely new to him: amused tolerance toward the general and people like him. Did the prospect of death affect everyone this way? Too bad it came so late.

"How big will the statue be?" he asked finally.

"How big?" She paused. "The general says it's for you to say."

Max smiled. "Tell him to build it life size, will you? Exactly life size, without a pedestal."

"All right," said Marie.

"And in case we get cut off, don't go away. We'll have a lot of time to talk."

"I'll be here, Maxie."

THE END

OBEY THAT IMPULSE

Subscribe to

SUPER SCIENCE FICTION

12 issues delivered to your home for \$4.00

Address: Subscription Dept.
SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION
1790 Broadway, New York 19, N.Y.

THE UNIQUE AND TERRIBLE COMPULSION

by CALVIN M. KNOX

NOVELETTE

illustrated by BOWMAN

The mild and gentle natives of the planet Danneroi had an incredible means of enforcing their desires upon the Earthmen. It just had to be experienced to be believed!

DAVE GARTH was an honorable man. He had entered the Interstellar Merchant Service at the age of 23 in 2406, and by the time he was 28 he had risen high in the ranks of the organization. He had a reputation for impeccable honesty, and he was an advocate of fair dealings between Earthmen and the hundreds of native races of other planets with which Earth dealt.

In his first five years Garth had served the usual jobs on the Merchant Service circuit, ending up with a minor admin-

istrative post on Lorpar in the Semmelweis System. He was in his second year on the Lorpar job, and already beginning to speculate on how long it would be until he had risen to the top job at the Lorpar outpost, when he was called to his superior's office and was told that a subradiogram had just arrived for him from the central office on Earth.

He had been reassigned. He was to leave Lorpar immediately and return to Earth for briefing on his new job.



"We're sorry to lose you," his superior told him. "You did a fine job here, Garth."

In a way, Garth was a trifle disappointed at being yanked from Lophar. He was working out well there, with his job under control and going smoothly, and he liked the planet, its people, and the men he worked with. Still, if the Merchant Service thought he would be more useful somewhere else, it was not his duty to question their decision. He returned to Earth on the next ship that blasted out of Lophar.

Earthfall took place early in April of 2412, and Garth reported immediately to the central office in Buenos Aires for reassignment. The main computer processed him through, and within half an hour he was in the office of one Martin Kingsley, a District Supervisor.

Kingsley turned out to be a slim pale man in his forties, who offered Garth a chair, a drink, and a cigar, and then plunged immediately into the matter at hand.

"Mr. Garth, do you know

anything about the planet called Danneroi?"

"No, sir." Garth shook his head. There were thousands of worlds in the galaxy, and he had nothing to gain by pretending he knew them all. Garth always believed in honesty as a guiding rule, and so far in his life it had worked out well.

Kingsley leaned forward and puffed at his cigar. "Danneroi is a Plus Point Two world in the Murchison System—it's Murchison IV, I believe. We have a single outpost in the hotlands of Danneroi they mine a good grade of thorium there, and we have big plans for Danneroi in the next few decades. The outpost is run by a single operator, and he's been there for thirty years. His name is Lidman—Anton Lidman. He's done a good job for us, or so we've been thinking all along. But now we get some strange reports about him."

Garth stared solemnly at the well-dressed supervisor, and picked up his cue. "What sort of reports, Mr. Kingsley?"

"A pickup ship touches down on Danneroi every three months to bring new trading

goods for Lidman and to pick up the thorium he's bought. I have the reports of the ship captains right here." He displayed a sheaf of minifac sheets. "I don't think it's news to you, Mr. Garth, that every time a ship touches down on a world to deal with one of our trading posts, we request a report on the behavior of our representative. Well, over the last three years or so we've had increasingly dismaying reports about Lidman—he's uncooperative, cranky, secretive, that sort of thing. We began to suspect he might be too old for the post. But this last report here claims that Lidman's been distributing drugs to the natives."

"No!"

"That's what the report says. I don't believe it either—dammit, I don't *want* to believe it. But according to the captain, Lidman's been taking stuff from the medical stores, harmless stuff by our reckoning but viciously narcotic to the aliens. And I've checked back through Lidman's requisition sheets of the last few years, and damned if he hasn't

been requesting particularly heavy supplies of medical goods."

Garth moistened his lips nervously. The idea of a company man doing a thing like that was almost unbelievable to him. He was aware of the gulf between Earthman and alien, a gulf that should never be bridged by any kind of criminal action.

KINGSLEY went on. "So this is where you enter the picture, Garth. You're being shipped out to Dannerol on the next pickup vessel."

"As Lidman's replacement?"

"Ah—no. As his *assistant*."

"Assistant, sir?"

"That's right. We can't fire Lidman on mere suspicion; we need proof. So we're sending you out as an observer, to keep an eye on Lidman and report back to us. Lidman has been notified that his planet has been upgraded from a one-man to a two-man post, and that an assistant will be on the way soon."

"And what if I find he's actually guilty of giving drugs to the natives?"

"You'll notify us, and we'll remove him from his post. You'll replace him as our Daneroid man. It'll involve a substantial salary raise, you understand."

"And I'll get an assistant?"

"Ah—no. You'll be on your own out there, just as Lidman is now."

"But I thought you said the the planet was being upgraded to two-man status," Garth protested mildly.

Kingsley shook his head. "I'm afraid that's simply the excuse we're giving Lidman for sending you to him. The planet isn't quite in the two-man class yet. It won't be for another five or ten years, perhaps."

"So if Lidman's guilty I'll be out there on my own all that time." Garth said thoughtfully.

Kingsley looked suspicious. "Do you object to taking on a one-man assignment, Mr. Garth?"

"No—not at all," Garth said hastily. "Not really, that is. It's simply that—coming from Lorphar, a ten-man planet—I hadn't considered the possibil-

ity that my next assignment would be—"

"I see. I wish this company had enough money to make every world of the galaxy a ten-man station. It can't be done, though."

"Of course." A new thought occurred to Garth. "What happens to me if Lidman *isn't* guilty?"

"If you think he's fit to continue operations," Kingsley said, "he'll be left on duty and you'll be transferred elsewhere. With a bonus and a promotion, let me add."

Garth nodded. He did not question the company's plans for him. The loneliness of a one-man station was not quite what he had hoped to gain, but others had done such jobs before him, and if the company asked it of him he would comply. And though he didn't care to serve as a company spy, still, drugging the natives was a despicable act that deserved punishment.

Dave Garth was an honorable man. He was loyal to his company and to the greater case of Terran civilization, besides, running a one-man sta-

tion would be a challenge to him. Perhaps in the course of time he could build Danneroi up into a commercial center of two-man or even three-man status—with himself as top man, of course. It was a distinct possibility. Although Lidman had been out there thirty years, and in all that time *he* had failed to increase Danneroi's status beyond one-man rank.

Garth stood up. "When do I leave, sir?"

CHAPTER II

GARTH left Earth four days later, aboard the merchant cargoman *China Coast*, a ten-tube subwarp ship bound for the Sorgal System, but stopping off first for the quarterly pickup on Danneroi.

The network of interstellar trade relations was fantastically complex. Presiding over the whole enterprise was the monstrous computer at Buenos Aires, which filled three cubic miles of Argentinan soil with its rows of cryotronic elements, and which plotted the course of star-to-star trade like a gi-

ant spider brooding over its web. Earth was the core of the trade system. It sent scouts to each planet to determine what, if anything, that planet had that another world might use. Then trading posts were set up, pickup ships routed, trade relations established.

And so the raw thorium mined on Danneroi was shipped on to the Sorgal System, to be purified and worked into tiny power-sources, and other Terran ships would carry the power-sources to still other worlds which lacked natural radioactives themselves.

The Danneroi inhabitants would be paid for their thorium in goods from some other world; the Sorgal craftsmen extracted their profit too.

But in each transaction the real beneficiary was Earth, which took a minute fraction of the price as its share. That minute fraction, multiplied by the thousands of worlds of the universe, made the whole vast operation worthwhile; it turned Earth into the wealthiest world in the galaxy, growing wealthier with each passing instant.

But the essence of such an operation was impeccable honesty. Men like Dave Garth were needed for the job, men who had a code of honor and lived by it. There was no room in the Interstellar Merchant Service for the likes of an Anton Lidman.

The journey to Danneroi lasted ten days, by subwarp drive. The *China Coast* ducked into the blank void that was the subuniverse, threaded a Riemannian geodesic through the distorted and inconceivably alien dimensions of that subuniverse, and emerged in the "real" universe several thousand light-years away.

The mathematics of interstellar travel had taken four generations of solid work; even the giant computers had nearly given the job up as impossible.

Still, it had been worked out at last—and since Earth was the only world that had ever been able to solve the intricacies of subuniverse travel, Earth held a monopoly on interstellar commerce.

It was more than a monopoly, thought Garth. It was a sacred trust. That was why

men like Anton Lidman had to be rooted out.

The *China Coast* carried a cargo of items desired by the Danneroians: revolving mirrors, sewing kits, cosmetics, and the like. There was no use paying the aliens for their thorium in money, for they had no use for money. But gadgetry? That was something else altogether. They were a technologically undeveloped race, and valued such things highly.

That was the principle on which Interstellar Merchant Service worked. Value for money; but the value was strictly subjective. A pound of solid gold was utterly useless to a Danneroian; a revolving mirror had real value.

And so to pay for their thorium with gold was absurd, but they would dig their hearts out for mirrors. No one was being cheated in such an arrangement.

THE *China Coast* touched down at the base clearing on Danneroi in mid-afternoon on April 25, 2412, Galactic Standard Calendar. In his thirty years, Lidman had obviously worked steadily on improv-

ing the landing facilities at his trading post. A broad concrete landing area three thousand feet square had been cleared away in the heart of the jungle; Lidman broadcast a landing-signal and the *China Coast* made a perfect touchdown, square in the middle of the area.

A gong sounded within the ship, letting Garth know the landing had been successful. He was the only passenger, though there were eight crewmen, three to handle the complicated subwarp space transitions and the other five as cargo handlers.

He snapped off the nullgrav shield that had protected him during the period of deceleration and made his way out of the ship.

Although he had been in the Merchant Service five years, he had never failed to experience that tingling moment of anticipation just before he stepped out onto the soil of a new world, under an alien sun.

Danneroi was a Plus Point Two world; that meant that its similarity to Earth was rated at 1.2. Any planet with a rat-

ing between .5 and 2.5 was considered Earthtype; beyond that, special skills were necessary for survival, and Garth was not eligible for work on such worlds yet. He stepped from the ship.

Two natives were ready to help him as he made his way down the short catwalk from the exit hatch. Although Garth had studied up on the world, he stared closely at the aliens, feeling as always the impact of realizing once again that the universe was full of strange life-forms, many of them potentially able to reach Earth's own level of civilization one day.

The Danneroians were humanoid beings. They stood shoulder-high to Garth's six-foot height. Their bodies were slim and symmetrical, their limbs tapering, their fingers slightly webbed. Danneroi was a watery world, and these beings looked like good swimmers, streamlined for speed. They had no hair anywhere on their bluish-purple bodies, and they wore only loincloths.

There was a vaguely oriental slant to their eyes, caused

by a fold of flesh that probably protected them under water.

In a soft throaty voice the alien to his left said, "You are Boss Garth?"

"That's right." Garth was a little startled to find the aliens speaking English, though on second thought he considered that in his thirty years on Danneroi Lidman had probably taught many of them the language.

"Boss Lidman is waiting for you down there," the other alien said. "We will take you to him."

Garth nodded and looked around. The sun, high overhead, was veiled by murky gray clouds, but the air was hot nonetheless. The section of Danneroi chosen for the trading post was tropical in climate.

Other parts, according to the survey report Garth had been given, ranged all the way up to better than 200 degrees in temperature, and the lakes bubbled and steamed. Here the average temperature was more manageable: a steady muggy 85-100.

Garth was used to hot worlds. His second assignment, Dwylliar, had had a mean temperature of 110. But that had been dry heat, desert heat. He wondered how he was going to like the humidity here.

Lidman seemed to have done a good job of building up the station. There was a large prefab at the edge of the landing field that was undoubtedly the trading post itself; next to it were three smaller blockhouses that looked as if they had been built by local labor.

The jungle had been trimmed back, and Garth saw wide roads extending radially out from the trading post area into the jungle.

Whatever sins Lidman might have fallen into lately, he had certainly done a competent job of setting up the trading outpost. Garth immediately felt less bitter toward the man. He respected competence.

And his enthusiasm for the Merchant Service was fired anew by what he saw here. It was, after all, a creative job: to carve from raw jungle a landing area, to build roads, teach the natives, establish

trade relations, win their confidence and their trust. Lidman seemed to have done an excellent job. If only he hadn't spoiled it by breaking regulations—

GARTH'S reflections were interrupted. A short, stocky man was coming toward him from the trading post building a few hundred yards away.

Garth studied him closely. He was a man in his late sixties, perhaps even early seventies, but he looked rugged and capable. He wore only shorts and a tropical helmet, and his body was still muscular, lean, tanned. Only when you looked at his face could you see the inroads of age. His hair, cropped close to his head, had whitened—even his eyebrows. His face was deeply lined, his thin lips drawn downward in a probably perpetual scowl. And his eyes—they were almost depressing in their sadness, Garth thought. They were deep, sharp, brooding eyes. The eyes of a man who has lived a long time, and who has worked hard.

The eyes, thought Garth, of a man who has done wrong and who knows it.

Extending his hand, Garth said, "You must be Anton Lidman."

Lidman ignored the hand. In a harsh, almost rasping voice he said, "Of course I am. Who the hell are you, youngster?"

Garth had to struggle to keep his voice calm as he said, "My name is Dave Garth. Didn't the company tell you I was coming?"

"Let's see your credentials."

Silently Garth took his papers out and passed them over to the older man. He was surprised by the gruffness of his welcome, but as he thought it over he realized it was only to be expected. Thirty years of solitude, thirty years alone on this hothouse planet, might do things to anybody's temper.

Lidman flipped rapidly through the papers and handed them back. He had hardly looked at them: it was obvious that he simply was demonstrating his irritability by demanding them.

Lidman stepped back and

sized Garth up. "So you're my new assistant, eh? How old are you?"

"Twenty-eight."

"I was thirty-five when they sent me out here. That was back in '31. You weren't even alive in '31, were you? Maybe your parents weren't even married then. And all that time while you were being born and growing up and joining the company, I've been out here on Danneroi." Lidman's wiry face contorted bitterly. "Hell with all that. What's your previous experience?"

"Five years in outworld service," Garth said. "Nuril, Dwylliar, Cosgrove, and Lorphar. I was Routing Assistant for a year and a half on Lorphar before I was assigned here."

Lidman grunted. "Okay, Garth. You're officially welcomed to Danneroi. Damned if I know why the central office thinks this planet needs a two-man station, but as long as you're here I'll find some work for you. Can you swim?"

"Fairly well."

"You'll get plenty of practice here. The natives are great

ones for swimming." Lidman abruptly started to walk away. "You go amuse yourself for a while. I have to supervise the cargo transfer."

HE stumped away across the field, leaving Garth standing alone. Over by the ship, unloading was taking place; the ship's cargo of trinkets and gewgaws was being carried into the nearest blockhouse. When that was done, the three-month accumulation of thorium would be loaded aboard, and the *China Coast* would blast off for the Sorgal System.

Garth wandered downfield to the trading-post. It was a two-story building; a couple of natives lounged out in front, dozing in the hot afternoon sun. Garth estimated the temperature at close to 100, and the humidity was in the same region.

A moist haze seemed to hang over everything on this planet. Droning blue-eyed flies the size of small birds whizzed through the muggy air. The jungle ringed the trading-post in; the sight of a spaceship out there on the landing-field was

strikingly incongruous on this primitive world.

Garth glanced uneasily toward the bordering jungle. On a tropical world like this, it was expectable that unpleasant animals lurked out there. He didn't intend to venture into that jungle any more often than his work required him to.

The unloading job took twenty minutes, loading half an hour more. It was late afternoon by the time the clear-the-field signal shrilled out and the *China Coast* rose upward on its rocket boosters. Garth stood on the porch of the trading outpost and watched the ship depart. Moments later he heard footsteps, and Anton Lidman appeared, followed by a few of the natives who had helped out in the unloading job.

Lidman said, "Usually the shipmen stick around for a day or two, but they were in a hurry this time. Damnably tight schedule, or something. Well, come on, Garth. I'll show you where you'll stay."

As Garth reached for his luggage, Lidman quickly stepped in front of him to

block the gesture. The older man said, "The natives can take care of that, Garth. They enjoy helping out that way. Don't spoil their pleasure."

Garth shrugged and followed Lidman up the stairs of the trading post building, with two natives following behind with his luggage. On the upper story, Lidman turned off to his left and indicated a small room with a cot and a rickety dresser in it.

"This is your place," Lidman said.

Garth nodded. He hadn't expected luxury, not on a world that had been a one-man station for so long. Lidman handed him a spraygun and said, "This is for the bugs. Give the place a good spraying every morning when you get up, and at night when you sack out. Don't trust the houseboy to do the job; unless you like bugs crawling around your room, take care of it yourself."

"Right."

"Toilet facilities are down the hall. My room is all the way down there to the right. Downstairs is strictly for business. I'll brief you on your

CHAPTER III

duties in the morning. No sense bothering now."

"Yes, sir."

Couple more things. You bring a hat with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Make sure you wear it all the time. The cloud planket is pretty thick on this planet, but the sun comes through it stronger than hell anyway, and a day running around bare-headed can kill you. Second thing is, meals are on time round here. I have a native cook who's pretty good. If you have any allergies of stuff like that, talk to her about it. Any other questions?"

Garth tightened. "Yes, sir. In case of accident—where are the medical supplies kept?"

Lidman's eyes seemed to narrow a little, as if in suspicion. "For various reasons which may become plain to you later, I keep the medical stores under lock and key. If you need anything, come to me."

"Suppose you're not around?"

"I'll be around, Mr. Garth. Don't worry about that. Clear?"

THE next few days were busy ones for Garth. He installed himself in his little room, began the job of getting himself accustomed to the perpetually muggy climate, and hid very carefully the small subradio transmitter he had been given for filing his secret reports. His room door did not lock, so it was necessary for him to hide the transmitter with great care indeed.

Lidman, as head of the outpost, had his own transmitter, but Garth was under orders to file his reports secretly, and that meant not using the base radio. He hid the tiny device under his discarded overcoat. The second day he discovered that his room had been searched, and he wondered whether Lidman had discovered the transmitter.

He settled into the routine of life on Danneroi. At first sleeping was difficult; the planet had five moons, and at least one of them was full at all times, so bright light streamed into his room every night, making sleeping even harder than

it normally would have been in such a climate.

He found the food passable. As in most tropical societies, it consisted mostly of fresh vegetables prepared with hot sauces: meat, when it was served, was served newly-killed, since refrigeration was a problem.

Garth found the Danneroi style of cooking reasonably to his liking. It was obvious that Lidman had long since adjusted his palate to it, and genuinely enjoyed the food.

The activities of the trading post consisted mostly of negotiating for thorium. A rigid set of values had been worked out, so many gimcracks and gadgets for so much thorium, and it was important never to vary this relationship. Most of the aliens, though, preferred to haggle; this took time.

Thorium was not the only export Danneroi had, though. Lidman revealed that with each pickup ship came several orders from zoos or research biologists of various galactic worlds for specimens, live or otherwise, of Danneroian flora and fauna.

This required special team-

work; over the years, Lidman had trained a corps of hunters who brought back the necessary animal, alive or dead as required, and who crated it for pickup by the next ship.

Each morning Lidman conducted classes in English for the natives. These were widely attended; some natives came from thirty and forty miles away, setting out at dawn each day to attend.

The trading post was a busy place. And, so far as Garth could tell in his first few days, Lidman was doing a perfectly adequate job of running it. The old man was crochety and irritable, but that could be pardoned, considering that he had spent the last thirty years with no company but that of naked aliens. All things considered, he was doing an excellent job, however. And that puzzled Garth.

One of the prime rules of the Interstellar Merchant Service was that no drug or intoxicating beverage not native to a planet be distributed there. Interstellar trade in narcotics and liquor was strictly forbid-

dea. Lidman knew that as well as anyone else.

Yet word had reached Earth at last that Lidman was breaking that regulation. It made no sense to Garth. If it were so, why would an intelligent and capable man like Lidman ruin his good record by violating interstellar law?

Garth didn't have any answer for that. He was beginning to doubt that Lidman actually was committing the violation charged. After all, he had no evidence.

Not until the fourth day.

GARTH rose that day at dawn, when the first warmth of the sun burst into his room. He had slept better the night before than on the previous three.

Since the trading post's plumbing facilities were decidedly on the primitive side, Garth had to go outside for his morning shower. Years ago, Lidman had rigged an outdoor shower behind the building, and each morning just before dawn one of the natives fetched fresh water for the use of the Earthmen. Garth had an audi-

ence of five or six curious aliens while he showered. The fact did not disturb him; modesty was unnecessary on a planet whose total Terran population consisted of two males.

Lidman had long since been up, showered, and dressed. He grunted his morning greeting as Garth entered the small dining alcove for breakfast. When the meal was finished, Garth was given his morning assignment: straightening out the files of pickup vouchers over the past year. Lidman explained that he had been too busy to file the papers away properly. "Can't be troubled with all that damned paperwork when real work has to be done," he muttered.

Shrugging, Garth set to the task and worked most of the morning at it. Around eleven, he wearied of the routine and meaningless job, and decided to go outside and stretch his legs a little.

The sun was rising toward noonday heat. Garth, like Lidman wore only shorts and sun-helmet now, and his body, which had grown pale during his stay on cool Lorphan, now

was rapidly tanning. He stood in front of the trading-post, glancing round, listening to the animal-trumpetings coming from the jungle.

As he stood there a native came from the interior of the building, excused himself, and walked past Garth. The Earthman noticed a small white tube in the alien's hand. A flicker of recognition and surprise ran through him. He called to the alien.

"Come over here."

"You want me, Boss Garth?"

Garth recognized the alien as one of the trading post's own laborers, part of a domestic corps of nine or ten who weeded the grounds, tidied up indoors, cleaned and prepared the food, and generally helped out.

"You're Khalimuru, aren't you?"

"Yes, Boss."

The alien's voice was soft, liquid-sounding. He was no more than five feet three or so, and he looked up trustingly at Garth. *These people are like children*, Garth thought.

"Khalimuru, what's that in your hand?"

"Boss Lidman give it to me."

"I didn't ask you that. What is it?"

"Makes good dreams," the alien said.

Garth felt a tingle of confirmation. "Can I took at it?"

"You give it back to me after?"

"Of course."

The alien surrendered the tube. Garth looked at it. It was a tube of neopriozone, a useful drug in a tropical climate. Its chief use was as an antipyretic, a febrifuge for tropical diseases. It could also be used to reduce pain.

"What do you do with this stuff?" Garth asked.

"Drink it. Little at a time. Gives me good dreams. Boss Lidman let me have it when I work hard."

Garth scowled. The rumors were true, then: unbelievable as it seemed, Lidman *was* distributing drugs to the natives. He held the little capsule thoughtfully, wondering just what action he should take.

"Does Boss Lidman give much of this stuff away?"

"He give plenty. Been doing a long time. You let me have it back now?"

Garth glanced at the capsule in his hand. Was it right to return it to the native, knowing what it was? He wondered. Then he decided it would hardly do further harm to hand the drug over. He gave it back. The alien nodded thankfully and scampered away.

Watching him go, Garth realized he was biting hard on his own lip. It was his duty to report old Lidman, now. He would have to notify Earth, and after thirty years in the Merchant Service Lidman would be relieved in disgrace. Why was the old man doing something like this? Why?

Another thought struck Garth. With Lidman removed, the Danneroi post was his, now. He would be all alone, in charge of the entire operation on this hothouse world. He realized it was a big responsibility.

Sure, his aim all along had been to reach a level of authority, but now that he stood on the verge of it he wondered if he could handle the job and do

half as well as Lidman had done. For Lidman, despite his one lapse from the law, had done a splendid job of organizing Danneroi.

He decided not to approach Lidman directly on the matter yet. Instead he would notify Earth of his discovery, and bide his time.

Returning to the trading-post, he made his way upstairs without stopping off to greet Lidman, and entered his own room. Closing the door, he rummaged in his locker until he found his small transmitter. The only frequency it could broadcast on was a tight-beam carrier direct to the Buenos Aires offices of Interstellar Merchant Service. All he had to do was tap out the words, one after another.

Seating himself crosslegged with his back to the door so Lidman could not enter unexpectedly, Garth transmitted his message:

REPORT OF DAVE
GARTH, DANNEROI. TO
MARTIN KINGSLEY,
BUENOS AIRES OFFICE.

HAVE FOUND NATIVE
IN POSSESSION OF NEO-

PRIOZONE CAPSULE GIVEN BY LIDMAN. CONFIRMS EARLIER RUMORS. HAVE NOT SPOKEN TO LIDMAN ABOUT MATTER YET. LIDMAN'S HANDLING OF OPERATIONS HERE IS OTHERWISE FIRST RATE. FURTHER REPORTS WILL FOLLOW.

GARTH

The message having been sent, he restored the transmitter to its hiding place. It was nearly time for lunch now. Garth headed downstairs once again.

Lidman was standing in front of the building, giving orders to two of the aliens. The sky was darkening; a torrential rainstorm was sweeping down from the hills thirty miles to the north. Garth glanced through the screen windows at the short, lean figure of the older man. How long, Garth wondered, had Lidman been distributing neopriozone to the aliens? And above all else, *why?*

Their native cook appeared from within. "Lunch call, Boss Lidman," she announced.

"Lunch call, Boss Garth."

Lidman broke off his conversation and came inside. As he caught up with Garth, he stared at the younger man penetratingly and said, "Well? How soon will you be through with the filing?"

"By the middle of the afternoon, I'd guess."

"Make sure you are. There's plenty of other work for you here. Plenty. Let's go get some lunch, now."

CHAPTER IV

IT was an uncomfortable meal. Garth, tense with the knowledge that he had found proof of Lidman's crime, was not very hungry. He tried to conceal his emotions. Lidman, across the table, shoveled greens and rice into his mouth eagerly. There was nothing wrong with Anton Lidman's appetite, Garth thought.

The meal was silent. Lidman never spoke unless he had to; thirty years of solitude had taught him no need for small-talk. As for Garth, he was too concerned with his own problems to care to chatter.

In the middle of the meal Lidman looked up and said, "You going to be finished with that filing by half past two?"

"I hope so."

"Good. A shipment of ore is going to be arriving at around three or three-fifteen from the M b u a m b w e tribe, eighteen miles from here. I want you to take care of weighing it in and paying the natives. Think you can handle it?"

"I'll do my best."

"Your best won't be good enough. Aim for perfection and settle for nothing less."

Lidman returned his attention to his plate. Shrugging, Garth did the same after a moment. Lidman was simply giving him a little more responsibility, breaking him in on some of the more important duties of the trading-post. It was just as well, Garth thought. *Before long I'll have to run this whole operation myself.*

He was finished with the dull task of filing away the pickup vouchers early, about ten after two. He went looking for Lidman, but there was no sign of the older man, and one of the trading-post aides told

him that Lidman had gone away for the afternoon to visit a sick child in one of the nearby tribes.

Garth hadn't realized that the job called for an amateur doctor, as well as a trader, teacher, and architect. But each day he was learning more and more about the responsibilities of running a one-man trading post. And it occurred to him now that perhaps Lidman had deliberately gone off and left him in charge this afternoon so he would have to tackle the job of weighing the ore without hope of assistance.

He read till about three, when Khalimuru appeared to tell him that the Mbuambwe ore-bearers were approaching the outpost.

Garth changed into a clean pair of shorts and waited for their arrival. There were eight of them, six men and two women, carrying over their shoulders fibromesh sacks that glittered in the afternoon sun. They looked strangely at him as they dumped their burdens down near the big scale on the trading post porch.

"I am Boss Garth," he said.

"Boss Lidman is not here today."

"Will you deal fairly with us?"

"Of course."

He whistled for a couple of his native aides, and they weighed out the ore. While it was being resacked and carted away to the blockhouses, to be stored against the next visit of the pickup ship, Garth computed a proper payment in mirrors, pocket-knives, radionic cookers, and the other gadgets requested by the aliens. Rather than skimp, he made the payment somewhat on the generous side.

However, the Mbuambwe spokesman gravely shook his head when he saw what Garth offered.

"This is not fair payment."

"In what way is it unfair? I've followed Boss Lidman's measurements. If anything, I've paid you too much."

"Yes. You have paid us too much. Overpayment is not allowed."

For an instant Garth thought the alien was teasing him, but then he reflected that these solemn little beings had

shown no previous sign of a sense of humor. Evidently over-payment *was* unacceptable here. Lidman had warned that the aliens would haggle, but he didn't expect them to haggle in *this* direction!

Kneeling, Garth removed several mirrors from the pile of goods that had been brought from the storehouse.

"Is this enough now?"

"One more."

Repressing his amusement, Garth removed another mirror from the pile. Then the alien said, "Now our dealings are fair and can be blessed."

EVENTUALLY the deal was consummated to everyone's satisfaction, and the aliens withdrew, single file, into the jungle. Garth thought he had handled the transaction reasonably well. Certainly he felt he could manage by himself here on Danneroi, after Lidman was gone.

He sat on the porch, filling out the proper forms to cover the deal—he was determined never to let the paperwork pile up, the way Lidman had—and he was still sitting there half

an hour later, when Lidman returned from wherever he had been.

His bare legs were splashed with mud; he had been into the jungle. He looked down at Garth and said, "You take care of everything?"

"The ore is in the bins. You want to look at the voucher forms?"

"I'll look at them later. Tired."

"Where were you?"

"Medical call," Lidman said. "Boy in a village eight miles to the south had a devil inside him. Turned out to be appendicitis."

Garth stared, popeyed. You just performed an appendectomy?" he asked.

Lidman nodded. "Pretty good one, too. I figure I've yanked three hundred appendixes since I've been here. It runs about one a month, or so." He chuckled. "Funny how that useless organ persists from world to world, isn't it?"

"Do you have any medical training?"

Lidman shook his head vigorously. "I learned by ear. First dozen appendix cases I

had, the patient died. What of it? The witch-doctor couldn't do any more than I did, and at least I was picking up the skills. Since then I usually win if I get there in time. Can't do anything about peritonitis, though. One man can handle only so much, specially when he's an amateur medico."

"You—you take care of childbirths too?"

Lidman looked scornful. "If there's one thing a primitive woman knows, it's how to bear a child. No, I don't help out when they're calving. Help's only needed on surgeries."

Lidman turned and started to go inside. Garth stood helplessly watching him for a moment, struck by the enormity of the job facing the operator of a one-man trading station, and decided that this was the time to have matters out with Lidman. Right here, now, before things went any further.

"Lidman. Wait a second."

Lidman paused in the doorway and turned. "What do you want?"

"I want to talk to you."

"Go ahead, then. Talk."

"No," Garth said. "Inside.

I've got something serious I want to discuss with you."

GARTH followed the older man inside, through the big central room of the trading outpost, and into the smaller office adjoining it. Lidman shut the door, dropped into a wicker chair, and glanced up at Garth.

"Well? What's worrying you?"

Garth ran his tongue over his dry lips. "Something I found out this morning. I'd like you to explain it to me."

"Go ahead."

"Khalimuru—the house-boy. I found him holding a tube of neopriozone this morning."

"What of it?"

"He said you gave it to him."

Lidman seemed to stiffen at every joint. "He told you the truth."

"Khalimuru didn't seem to be sick. How come he needs a whole capsule of that stuff?"

"He seems to like it," Lidman said.

"How about the other aliens? Do they like neopriozone too?"

"Most of them do."

Garth eyed the older man closely, admiring his coolness and wondering what madness lay behind it. "From what I gather, neopriozone acts as a narcotic for these people. You know that, I'm sure. And you hand the stuff out to them. Are you aware that you're breaking the interstellar code?"

"I know what I'm doing, youngster."

"I question that. You have no right to distribute drugs to primitive beings!"

"Maybe I have no choice about it," Lidman said quietly.

"What the hell does that mean?"

Lidman shrugged. "What it means doesn't concern you. What do you plan to do, now that you've uncovered my nefarious activities?"

Garth said levelly, "I'm going to report you to the central office for code violations. You'll be relieved of your post on Danneroi and returned to Earth for trial. I'm your replacement here."

"The home office knew, then. They sent you out here to spy on me."

"They sent me as an observer," Garth said. "You were suspected of illegal acts."

Lidman glared at him scornfully. "You—you boy! You think you can replace me here? You think you can handle this job?"

"I intend to try," Garth said.

"I intend to try," Lidman mimicked acidly. "How nice! And so you're going to turn me in and send me back to Earth."

"What would you want me to do? Condone your crime? Lidman, I don't understand!"

"No, you don't."

"How could you do it—break one of the strictest rules in the book?"

"I had to," Lidman said. "And don't bother to ask me to explain." He rose abruptly. "I spotted you as a spy the minute you landed here. You think I can't tell the difference between a one-man world and a two-man? I didn't need an assistant here. There's nothing you're doing that I didn't handle myself for thirty years. Okay, Mister Spy. You've found me out."

Lidman put two fingers in his mouth and whistled. A moment later the office door opened and three Dannerojians entered. They looked questioningly at Lidman, and at a gesture from him they glided up behind Garth and took his hands.

"Are you crazy?" Garth asked. "Teaching natives to manhandle an Earthman?"

"It just increases my burden of sin, doesn't it?" Lidman said. To the aliens he added, "You are to take Boss Garth out into the jungle as far as the Ghiiar tree and leave him there. You will return alone."

"We understand."

Garth tested the strength of the aliens' grip and found that they had him tightly pinioned. He stared in astonishment at Lidman.

"You're just going to maroon me out there—out in the jungle?"

"Yes."

"If I ever get back alive—if Earth ever finds out—they'll put you away for the rest of your life, Lidman!"

The older man smiled wearily. "The rest of my life is not

so long a time as you seem to think, for one thing. For another, you *won't* get back alive; not unarmed and with no previous experience in the jungle. I'm sorry to do this to you, Garth. I really am. But I can't abide interference with my plans. Things have to be the way they are here."

Lidman looked at the aliens. "Take him away."

Resistance was useless. The natives were small, but they were muscular, and Garth did not stand a chance. They trundled him silently and efficiently out of the trading post, across the clearing, and into the jungle. Garth made no attempt to struggle. He concentrated on memorizing the path, hoping that he would be able to find his way back.

He realized he had been a fool to approach Lidman so openly. The man was insane; *had* to be, to give drugs to the alien and then to send another Earthman out to death in the jungle. Garth saw now he should have imprisoned Lidman at once, notified Earth to come to pick the old trader up for trial.

Now he could predict what would happen. Earth, in receipt of Garth's message, would send another investigator. Perhaps Lidman would invent some fantastic story about Garth's insanity; in any event, he would deny the drug charge. He would be cleared, free to continue his pattern of life here.

The jungle was oppressively dank. Vines clung to the tree-tops, blocking out light. Giant insects droned through the moist air. Lizards, two feet long and brightly colored, scuttled out from under rotting logs to peer curiously at the procession, then hurriedly leaped back into hiding.

Minute followed minute, and as the path wound more and more complexly Garth began to discover he could never find his way back unaided. There was no real road any more, just a yard-wide track through the foliage. Underfoot the ground was marshy, soggy, wet.

Garth had just about abandoned hope when his captors, keen-eared, paused. A moment later he heard the sound that had made them stop. Footsteps,

approaching rapidly—someone running after them.

It was Khalimuru. Breathless, he caught up with the others and exchanged a few quick sentences with them in the alien language.

Garth said, "What's going on?"

Khalimuru looked up. "Boss Lidman has sent me, Boss Garth. He says you are to be taken no further into the jungle. He says you are to be brought back to the outpost immediately."

CHAPTER V

THE trip back took nearly half an hour. Garth wondered what motive had impelled Lidman to make his sudden change of heart. Was it the realization of the inhumanity of his act that had motivated the reprieve? Or was it simply that he had decided to kill Garth himself, instead of trusting to the jungle creatures?

Whatever the reason, the reprieve was granted. On the return journey the natives kept clear of him, as if they were a

little shocked at themselves for having dared to lay hands on an Earthman. He walked by himself, with several of the Danneroians leading the way and the rest in back of him.

When they reached the outpost clearing, Garth saw a huddle of natives outside the trading post. He walked toward them. When they looked up at him, there was an expression of fear and horror in their eyes, and they muttered nervously to each other in their own language.

"You are back, Boss Garth," one of them said to him, in English.

"Yes, I'm back. Where's Boss Lidman?"

"He—he—he inside!"

"Inside where?"

A pale fishlike face stared up at his. "Boss Lidman, is dead!"

"What?"

The alien went on, "Five-ten minutes ago. He put thunderstick to head, loud noise sound. Boss Lidman fall dead."

Garth felt a tingling of alarm. "Where is he?"

"He in office. Before he do that, he say we should listen

to you now. You only Boss."

Garth looked around at the others. "Is he telling the truth? Is Boss Lidman dead? And did he make me only Boss before he killed himself?"

Several of the natives nodded. Garth stared at them. He said, "Where is Boss Lidman now?"

"He in his office, Boss Garth!"

IT had to be some kind of trick, Garth thought. Lidman was planning something devilish. Garth entered the trading post on tiptoes, going straight to the cabinet where the weapons were kept. He unlocked it, drew out a .45 blaster, checked the charge chamber.

Thus armed, he pushed open the door to Lidman's inner office and leaped quickly back out of firing range.

Nothing happened.

Garth waited a moment or two. Then, cautiously, he stuck his head round the doorpost and peered into the small office.

Lidman was sitting at his desk, slumped over. He was

clutching a pistol in his hand—not an energy blaster, Garth noticed with the peculiar clarity of shock, but an old-fashioned pistol. Lidman's head was a bloody ruin. The bullet seemed to have entered just below Lidman's right ear, and had risen diagonally through his skull, blasting off the entire left side of his head. It was an ugly sight. And it was definitely suicide.

As if to confirm that last thought, Garth saw a note lying on Lidman's desk—a sealed envelope, addressed in the dead man's own handwriting to Dave Garth. With shaky fingers Garth reached for the envelope, snatched it up, and started to rip it open. He realized that the natives were peering curiously through the half-open door behind him, and, turning, he smiled gently at them and pushed the door closed.

Then, taking a seat with his back to the body, he tore open the envelope. Inside he found a handwritten note covering both sides of a sheet of paper, in Lidman's cramped little handwriting:

Dear Garth:

By the time you read this I will be dead at long last. For the past decade at least I have waited for death to take me, but I remained in good health and continued to live. Your arrival here at last gives me freedom to destroy myself, for I know my work here will be continued by you, and that also you must inherit my suffering.

First accept my apologies for the beastly thing I tried to do to you today. I was shocked out of my mind, I guess, by your exposure of me. Perhaps it would have been best if I had let you die, but I don't want another sin on my ledger, so I've sent Khalimuru out into the jungle to fetch you back. And in a few minutes I will take a very permanent way of resigning from the Merchant Service, leaving the outpost here in your capable hands.

You were, of course,

correct in that I was giving drugs to the aliens. I have been doing so for nearly ten years, even though I have never ceased to be aware of the dreadful nature of my act. All I can say by way of excuse is that I had no choice. Ten years ago I treated a native with neopriozone, not knowing the narcotic effect it would have on him. When he recovered, he compelled me to give him more. Since then, many of the other natives have become addicts, and they likewise have forced me to supply the drug to them. Their method of compulsion is so uniquely terrible that I cannot bear to describe it here. I fear you will experience it soon enough.

In closing, I ask you to forgive me for what I have done on this world, and to pray for me. Perhaps I will have peace where I am going. I have had none in this life for many years.

Anton Lidman

GARTH straightened up and methodically folded the suicide note into halves, then into quarters, and slipped it into the pocket of his shorts. His mind was still getting used to the events of the last few minutes. It took time to change gears; for half an hour he had figured he was being led to his death in the jungle, and now he came back to find Lidman a suicide, and the entire outpost in his hands.

And the note did little but puzzle. Evidently Lidman had touched off the neopropiozone addictions accidentally, unaware of what he was doing. But what did he mean when he said the natives had used a "uniquely terrible" way of compelling him to keep supplying them with the drug?

He shrugged. First things had to come first, and in this tropical climate a quick burial was most important. Garth strode to the porch of the trading post and signalled to several of the aliens.

He ordered them to dig a grave six feet long and two feet deep at the edge of the jungle.

Garth next headed upstairs

and took out his little radio transmitter, the one that he would no longer need to keep hidden. He turned it on and tapped out another message to the home office:

DAVE GARTH, DAN-
NEROI, REPORTING. TO
MARTIN KINGSLEY, BUE-
NOS AIRES OFFICE.

LIDMAN A SUICIDE
WHEN CONFRONTED
WITH EVIDENCE OF
DRUGGING. LEFT A NOTE
ADMITTING HIS GUILT.
AS PREVIOUSLY UNDER-
STOOD AM TAKING FULL
CONTROL OF DANNEROI
OUTPOST AND WILL
WAIT FOR FURTHER IN-
STRUCTIONS.

GARTH

Then, calling four of the natives, he assigned them to pall-bearing duties. There was no need for a coffin, not in this climate; wood placed in that ground would rot in a month or two anyway. With an alien at each leg and one at each shoulder, the body of Anton Lidman was borne across the clearing he had built, and gen-

tly he was placed in his grave.

Garth said a few words, and then signalled for the grave to be closed. When the new mound of soil rose high over the body, Garth inserted a stick as a marker. Later, at his leisure, he could possibly carve a tombstone for the old man.

He looked around at the natives.

"Boss Lidman is dead. From now on I am Boss."

"From now on you are Boss."

Garth smiled sadly. He had long waited for this, the chance to operate his own trading outpost; he was top man on Daneroi, and perhaps someday, when he had built the station up to five or ten-man status, he would really be important in the Service. But he felt no sense of glory, no exaltation. He had hounded an old man to suicide, and that somewhat tarnished everything.

He returned to the trading post. According to the schedule, Lidman had been expecting an ore consignment from a northern tribe later in the day. Garth wanted to get a little rest, to ease his nerves a

little before he settled down to the job of running the trading post.

TROUBLE began half an hour later.

It started with Khalimuru knocking timidly on the door of Garth's bedroom upstairs. He had not yet moved into Lidman's room.

"Boss Garth? Are you there?"

"Come in. What's the matter?"

"The people are waiting down there, Boss Garth."

Instantly Garth snapped to attention. "What people? The ore shipment isn't due for two hours yet!"

"Not the ore shipment," Khalimuru said sadly. "It is the outpost people. At this time Boss Lidman used to give them dream-stuff. They want to know, you going to give it to them too."

Garth felt a quiver of alarm. "Tell them—tell them I'll be right down. I'll talk to them."

There were seven or eight of the outpost people waiting on the porch for him when he emerged. He was sweating and

tense; this was the moment he had feared ever since his first glimpse of Lidman's body. The moment when he would be called on to distribute drugs to the aliens.

He coughed to get some of the tension out of his nervous system. The aliens were eyeing him expectantly, almost holding their breaths in anticipation of what he was going to tell them.

He said, "I understand you're here because this was the time when Boss Lidman gave you the dream-stuff. This stuff."

He held up a neopriozone capsule and the aliens seemed to sigh with desire for it. Garth noticed now that they all had the glazed eyes of addicts.

He said, "Boss Lidman did a wrong thing by giving this to you. It is evil. Boss Lidman killed himself because of this. From now on, there will be no more of the dream-stuff for you."

After a long pause one of the aliens said mournfully, "We must have it."

"No. From now on no more."

He fingered the blaster at his hip, just in case they decided to get ugly. But there was no visible reaction, just an intangible sadness of mood that seemed to descend over them.

Mildly another alien said, "Boss Lidman always let us have it. Why must things change?"

"Boss Lidman did wrong to give you the dream-stuff."

"And you will not?"

"I will not."

"Then we will kill ourselves," said the alien.

For an instant Garth did not really understand. Then he frowned and said, "You don't need to do that. There are cures for addiction."

"We do not want cures. We want the dream-stuff, and if you do not give it to us we will kill ourselves."

Abruptly one of the aliens—Garth recognized him as the downstairs houseboy—stepped off the porch and faced the group. He seemed to be smiling. As if by magic, one of the native knives had appeared in his hand—a vicious little weapon, eight inches long, with a curved, razor-keen blade that

glinted brightly in the reddish late-afternoon sunlight.

"You will change your mind, Boss Garth," the houseboy said in flat, calm tones. "When we did this for Boss Lidman he changed his mind. You will change yours."

"You will get no drugs from me!" Garth said firmly.

The houseboy shrugged. Still smiling, he lifted the knife and, in a gesture that took no more than a second to perform, jabbed it into his stomach and sliced upward, laying himself open almost to the throat. The smile did not fade as the houseboy fell to the ground. A pool of blood began to spread outward.

Garth goggled unbelievably. Before he could speak, a second Dannerorian had come forward and he, too, was brandishing a knife.

"Will you give us the dream-stuff, Boss Garth?"

Thickly Garth said, "You must be out of your minds! Killing yourselves!"

"Will you give it to us?"

"No! No!"

Garth averted his eyes in horror as the second alien dis-

embowelled himself. Currents of shock ran through him; he felt sick.

As a third alien stepped forward to kill himself, Garth shouted, "No! Wait! Here, take the damned drug! Take it!"

He hurled the capsule of Neopriozone at the alien, and, dashing within, picked up the keys he had taken from dead Lidman's body. Hurriedly he found the medical cabinet key, opened it, took a handful of drug capsules from the rack, and hurled them at the group of aliens.

Shuddering, he ran upstairs.

For a long while he sat on the edge of his cot, bathed in sweat, trying to erase the nightmarish sight of two dead aliens from his mind. Now he understood why Lidman had called the aliens' compulsion "uniquely terrible." They indeed had a dreadful weapon. Either he supplied them with the drug or they disembowelled themselves right before his eyes. Life was cheap on this young world, it seemed.

Garth stared at his quivering hands. With those hands he

had given drugs to the aliens. He had broken the rule he held most sacred.

I had no choice, he told himself grimly.

Heaving sobs racked him. He stared out the window, down at the happy group of aliens. They had what they wanted. No one seemed to care that two had died for it. They had these Earthmen figured out. *We're softhearted. They know how to make us give them what they want.*

It was incredible that Lidman had been able to stand it so long. Always smiling, always obedient, the natives had nevertheless imposed a dread tyranny over him. There was always the unvoiced threat of self-destruction compelling him to hand out the drug, until he himself had broken the spell with a pistol shot.

Garth looked forward, into the years to come. Long years of nightmare on Danneroi, as he went about his duties and tried to pretend he wasn't breaking the law. It was too much. He was an honorable

man. He could never bring himself to distribute drugs, day in and day out, for the rest of his life.

Sobbing incoherently, he reached for the radio transmitter. He thought a moment, knowing that what he would write now would smash his career, would end his usefulness in the Merchant Service. He would be given a psycho discharge. But there was no help for it. He was caught in a vise-like grip.

If he refused the drugs, the aliens would slaughter themselves. If he gave them the drug, he was breaking his own staunch moral code. There was only one way out. Garth realized he was on the edge of cracking up.

With trembling fingers he tapped out a message to the home office:

THESE ALIENS ARE
DEVILISH. SEND SOME-
ONE ELSE IN A HURRY. I
RESIGN. HELP! HELP!
HELP!

THE END

THE FAST-MOVING ONES

by J. F. BONE

illustrated by BOWMAN

The natives of the new planet moved so incredibly fast that there was no means of contacting them. They moved like things out of a nightmare — just blurs of speed!

THE alarm rang suddenly and violently! The sound jerked Dale Borchardt awake. He came to his feet, Kelly in hand, staring sightlessly into the blinding glare of the flashlight until his pupils adjusted to the light. From outside the lighted area came the cough of a blaster and the ripping explosion of a minimum aperture bolt.

"Drop it! You thieving snake!" Vassily Konev's high voice split the quiet air. There was another cough,—another explosion. Borchardt ran toward the sound,—and then remembered. This was planned. He was to watch the lighted area. And it was well that he

did, for the two rail-thin man-like natives moved like something out of nightmare. They were halfway across the area to the stack of supplies before he levelled the blaster, and had nearly reached their goal when the bolt erupted at their feet. Without slackening speed they separated and dashed for the blackness outside. Vassily appeared at the edge of the lighted area. His shot struck at the feet of one of the figures. The native swerved and put on a fresh burst of speed, his thin body literally blurring as it dashed for the safety of the darkness. Borchardt meanwhile had bracketed his target with two well-placed shots that had



turned it back from the edge twice, when the native turned and ran straight at him. There was no time for a third shot as he and Borchardt collided. The man was knocked off balance and the native whizzed past and leaped to safety through the light.

Borchardt picked himself up from the ground, swore briefly and then chuckled. "Well, we gave the slippery sons something to remember this time!"

Vassily Konev shook his bullet head. "Not quite, Dale. The advantage isn't all ours. The first one got away with the box of torch tips." He stood balanced on the balls of his big feet, jaw athrust, an expression that might have been either a smile or a grimace of anger drawing his wide lips back over large square teeth.

"The cutting heads?" Dale asked dully.

Vassily nodded. "I don't give a damn what Doc says, we should booby trap this area." His voice was grim. "The thieving sons'll ruin us."

"They already have. That was our only box of heads, and we can't cut that mess away

with a welding torch." He pointed to the crumpled wreckage of the number three stabilizer, suspended a foot or so above the ground by the landing jacks. "You know how tough duralloy is."

Vassily nodded. "Well, that leaves us the final alternative. We'll have to ask the Patrol to haul us out of here."

"Like hell we will! We're not that bad yet. The BEE's washed its own rags since the beginning, and hasn't asked for help from the military yet, and I'm damned if my ship's going to be the first!"

"Well, what are we going to do? Ultrasonic barriers don't stop them. They move so fast that they're through them before the paralysis works. We've tried drugging baits, but chloral and the barbiturates have the effect of so much water. They absorb it and come whizzing back for more. We could shoot a few of them, of course, but we aren't here to do that, and besides they could make hash of us if they really got mad. We haven't a chance against their speed. Right now they think it's a game, and so long

as they keep thinking that way we'll be all right, but if they got the idea that we were serious—" Vassily shrugged, his heavy shoulders rising and falling in a gesture that meant more than words could express.

Dale sighed, "We couldn't kill them anyway unless they threatened our lives. We're conditioned against it."

"We could booby trap a few baits with gas. Maybe that'd work."

"I doubt it. Nothing else has. They'd probably think it's some sort of rare perfume."

"If we could only get one of them.—just one!" Vassily groaned. "Ten minutes in the Educator would be all that would be needed. We could plant a compulsion that'd make the fellow bring back every last thing.—including his fellow citizens."

"HOW do you catch a shadow?" Borchardt asked bitterly. He scratched his close-cropped yellow head. "It's like that old recipe for rabbit stew,—you know, first catch your rabbit—" his voice trailed off into silence as he

looked around him. "Where's Doc?" he asked finally. "I know he doesn't like shooting, but he should be down by now."

"He's out there." Vassily said indifferently, gesturing at the darkness with a thick thumb. "He came outside about an hour ago muttering something about ecology, took the floater and left."

"Why didn't you stop him?"

"Me?" Koney said.

"I suppose not. After all, he's the boss of this party." Borchardt groaned. "Well, I suppose he'll be all right, if the natives don't steal his transmission while he's rolling around. He went down to the village, I suppose." Borchardt nodded toward the invisible cluster of structures set in a straggling line above the seashore a couple of kilometers away. The village was hardly worth the name, but it was an ideal spot for a contact, which was why they were here.

Vassily nodded. "That's the way he was headed." He shivered a little as an icy blast off the hills behind them whistled through the lighted area. "Re-

minds me of Siberia in late fall," he said. "And Doc says that it's midsummer here. Wonder what it's like when it really gets cold."

"If we don't get that stabilizer patched up, we'll have an opportunity to find out," Borchardt said grimly. "How come they grabbed that box?"

"Probably wanted the bronze. They make spear points out of the stuff. They chase down fish and animals for food, according to Doc."

"Wonder if the animals travel as fast as these fellows?"

"Faster, maybe."

Borchardt grimaced. "It'd be hard to get a steak around here. Lift a Kelly for a point blank shot and the next thing you know the target's out of range." He sighed. "Well, I suppose the next thing to do is see if we can make up another cutting head. There's some bronze stock in the toolshop, and we have a lathe. Maybe in a week or so we'll be able to get to work again."

"Providing the natives don't steal us blind by that time—"

"Maybe Doc'll come up with an answer," Borchardt said.

His tone indicated that he doubted it. Borchardt was one of the old-time senior pilots, and he didn't have too much faith in the new products of the Bureau of Extraterrestrial Exploration's Academy back on Earth. The new style ecologists with their encyclopediac memories were nothing more than walking card indexes. Push the right button and they came up with the answer, but someone had to push the button. So far no one, not even Dr. Wilson Chang himself had found the button that gave the answer to the problem of the high speed, pilfering, cold-dwelling natives of Ariel. Ariel was an iceworld, a frigid polar-type that could support organic life only in a narrow band in the equatorial region, and that life made its terrestrial relatives look like something little faster than snails. The BEE, for reasons best known to itself, had decided that it was time for a contact, but why the Bureau figured that a three-man team of pilot, engineer and ecologist were enough to make it on this world was one of the mysteries lost in the maze of

bureaucratic red tape. Possibly somebody goofed, or maybe it was for economy reasons, but for Borchardt's money, the BEE should have used a battle-wagon, a couple of troop transports and about twenty miles of electronic fence if it wanted to make contact with these people. He stretched his lean body and sighed unhappily.

This mission had been jinxed from the start of setdown. The hidden rock outcropping that had smashed the steering jet was just the beginning. The shock had warped the inner hatch and they were forced to unbolt it with hand tools, since the Fourth Echelon repair kit was stored in the upper hold of the damaged fin. Then, they had to unload the fuel in the lower hold in order to get at the engine, a messy job at best since the big spools of metallic tape that fed the jet's engines weighed nearly two hundred pounds apiece. And of course they had to unload the small stores in the upper hold to get the fuel spools out.

Then Doc had to take the floater and investigate the village which they had selected

for Contact. The natives had seen him and followed him back to the ship,—and then their troubles really had begun. A whole case of small special tools disappeared almost immediately,—and the makeshifts they were forced to use caused one delay after another. And now, when they were finally ready to cut in and rerig the jet, the natives had stolen the heads for the cutting torch! Borchardt swore mildly under his breath. For a First Contact, this deal was taking on more of the aspects of an Advance Party.

FIRST Contact was important—but it was strictly an in and out affair. Earlier exploration sweeps recorded the physical, topographical and gross ecological details. This information was processed and held in the BEE files until someone decided to open the world to direct Exploration.

Then came the Contact. An area was picked,—preferably an isolated backwater with a few inhabitants. The contact ship came straight in, collect-

ed a few dominant forms of life, passed them through the analyzer and educator, extracted all the pertinent physical and physiological data from their bodies and the thought patterns from their minds, planted a compulsion to cooperate, and turned them loose. Within hours the chain reaction triggered by the educator would extend to the entire community,—and then, loaded with vital information, the ship would leave for the BEE labs where the data would be processed and an Advance Party trained for further penetration. Contact phase normally took less than ten hours.

Borchardt grinned sourly. If things kept on going like they were, this particular Contact was never going to be consummated.

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

"Might as well turn in and get some sleep. They won't be back tonight."

"That's been their pattern so far, but maybe they'll change it? We stopped them

pretty cold tonight. They hardly made expenses."

"They work on a pattern," Borchardt said. "One raid a night,—that's all.

"They've left our heavy stuff alone so far. Maybe they'll try for it."

"I doubt it. There aren't enough of them. Outside of the youngsters there aren't more than a dozen natives in that village, and, besides, I don't think that they're really interested in cleaning us. They're just robbing us for the fun of it, and perhaps because we apparently have more things than we need. They aren't either vicious or warlike. Fighting this environment is a full time job. They're just sharing our wealth."

—"They aren't doing badly at it so far," Vassily said grimly. "We've been here five days, and so far they've gotten away with two cases of concentrated protein rations, a case of powdered milk, both our handie talkies, two down sleeping rigs, a box of spare tubes, the tuner out of the Communicator, a hundred pounds of assorted

tools and small stores,—and now the box of torch heads—”

“It was bad luck that we hit that outcropping on touch-down,” Borchardt said, “but that damn tundra hid it. If we hadn’t messed up the jet we wouldn’t have had to unload the fin, and we wouldn’t have tempted them.”

Vassily nodded. It was partially their own fault. Like all BEE personnel he was tolerant of the feelings of alien races. Tolerance was the Bureau’s middle name, an attitude that had been developed through the exploration and opening of half a hundred humanoid worlds. It paid off.

Tolerance and understanding had bred tolerance and understanding, and the Earth hegemony, recently translated into the Confederation, had through these two factors become the only major power in this section of the galaxy.

All things being considered, the BEE had a good record,—and the men who served in the Bureau were proud of it. Somehow, they’d get out of this present jam with colors flying.

BEE teams had been in worse. At least the natives were not hostile.

From the darkness outside came the sibilant hiss of the floater’s power plant. Vassily grinned. Now that the ruckus was all over, Doc was coming back. He had a good idea why Doc wanted to visit the village at night. He was a pacifist, a man who hated violence. Weapons, even when used only in threat, left him physically ill. But Doc, too, was tolerant. Such things were done by the old timers, and he respected even though he didn’t agree with them. Doc, Vassily reflected, wasn’t so bad once you got to know him. But he was their sole dependence to get them out of this jam, and Doc was a pretty slender reed.

The floater came slowly into the light moving with the peculiar motion that gave it its name;—a stubby vehicle mounted on three fat sausage-shaped flotation units that would carry it over almost any terrain. It stopped and the hissing died as Doctor Wilson Chang damped the power plant and

crawled stiffly out of the driver's compartment.

His oriental face a mask of inscrutable calm, Chang pulled a small metal case out of the floater and handed it to Vassily. "Did you lose this?" he asked.

Vassily grabbed the case and opened it. "The heads!" he yelped joyfully. "Where'd you find them?"

"Out there. I was coming up from the village when the fellow that stole them came down the trail. Your shot lit right behind him, and I was in front. I guess he thought discretion was the better thing, because he dropped the box and took off up the slope like his private devil was chasing him." Chang smiled. "Those fellows certainly can run. They must have a terrific metabolic rate."

"I wouldn't know about that," Vassily said happily, "but I'm sure glad to get these beauties back. I had visions of some native blacksmith hammering them into spear heads."

"That's probably what would have happened to them," Chang agreed. "They have a

great deal of trouble getting metal. It's highly prized. Most of the hunters use bone spears in catching the fatfish that are the main source of their diet." Chang scratched his head. "I should remember something about this sort of people. They are very similar to the Eskimos on Earth except that they move much faster. They're noncombative, live on a diet mainly consisting of proteins and fats, in an iceworld environment. Even their stone houses and gentleness are similar."

"If we could only catch one of them,—" Vassily said.

"We could try to win their confidence," Chang replied, "but that's going to take time,—and maybe it'll never be done by us. They're very shy." He paused. "Their family life is communal as far as I can find out," he said obliquely, "but I can't see where that's going to help us much."

"You're the doctor," Vassily said.

CHANG nodded. He was. In addition to being an ecol-

gist he was also a qualified doctor of medicine, a dual function that saved weight and expense in these fantastically unremunerative preliminary explorations. He also had some extensive training in alien psychology. He understood these people well enough. The only trouble was that he couldn't make the necessary first contact.

He cursed softly to himself in ancient Cantonese. He was supposed to be one of the bright boys, one of the lads who knew how to solve problems like this, but for nearly a week he'd been stumbling around trying to find the answer which he knew was there but which was obstinately eluding him. There were enough supplies to last a month, and the repairs were of a minor nature. There was nothing serious about their position. It was merely frustrating.

With a sigh he turned toward the ship and his quarters. A few hours sleep and another session with the ship's remarkably complete microfilm library, and he'd be ready to try something else. It was a shame that the natives were so re-

sistant to normal methods of capture. Like himself, they were tolerant,—but in a different way. Drugs didn't work. Fear didn't paralyze them. Exposure to the unknown didn't result in superstitious awe. Gas didn't work,—he'd tried that tonight while Borciardt and Konev were fighting off the raid.

He grunted with mild disgust. Five days and still no contact. It was almost unheard of,—and he had the bitter suspicion it would be the same story by the time their supplies ran out and the repairs were made.

Chang awoke to Vassily's tenor voice singing a minor keyed love song. The big man was a sentimentalist, particularly when he was cooking. Planetfall was always a morale builder with Vassily Konev, for then he could exhume his preciously hoarded dehydrates and reconstitute them into flavorful dishes that smelt and tasted of Earth. Vassily was a born cook, and Chang wondered why the big man had ever taken the job of a space engineer.

"What is it this morning, Vassily?" Chang asked.

"Borscht," Konev said happily, "with hard rolls, eggs a la Hadrian and Turkish coffee."

"Soup?—for breakfast?"

"In Russia we eat borscht at any time."

"In China the soup is with the dinner,—and why Turkish coffee?"

"I stored some sugar in the Number three sponson, and I found it last night. I had forgotten it was there. Besides, I like Turkish coffee."

"You hoard like a pack rat," Borchardt said, "but the results at planetfall are worth it. But lay off the Turkish coffee as far as I'm concerned. I'll take mine black. Sugar makes me sick. I've no tolerance for the stuff."

Chang smiled. "Thank you so much, Dale," he said. "The great light has at last dawned. You, my friend, have pushed the right button and the answer comes just like you said it would. Tonight we collect our first native. So today we had better build a small electronic pen, and get the manacles

ready." Chang's smile vanished as he suddenly changed into the inscrutable oriental. "And, Vassily," he continued, "do you know how to make fudge,—or perhaps sugar candy?"

"Why of course," Vassily said.

"Do so then.—make up about two or three pounds of it."

"What are you going to do, Doc? Lure them into that pen with a sugar trail?" Borchardt asked. "We've tried a variation of that, and it didn't work."

"This one will.—I hope," Chang said. He didn't say anything more and both Vassily and Borchardt held back their questions. The important thing was that Chang had an idea—and if he didn't wish to publish it, they could wait.

THE short day passed rapidly. Vassily made up a dozen slabs of chocolate fudge, and wrapped them in the bright red eye-catching plastic that the natives apparently liked. Chang and Borchardt set up the corner stakes that generated the forcefields of the pen,

and tested a dozen pair of gravitic manacles. Finally everything was ready. And as the cold orange ball of the sun dropped below the horizon, and the fanlights were turned on, the three men tried to act as normally as possible.

The red packages were piled upon the other gear, and Vassily set to work clearing out some of the crumpled duralloy that once was a stabilizer. The cutting torch hissed, flamed and sparkled as it ate through the stubbornly resistant metal. Borchardt stood alertly on guard while Chang pattered in and out of the ship as he customarily did during the early part of the evening.

Vassily turned off his torch and went to the supply pile. Picking up one of the packages of fudge, he opened it, broke the brown contents into three pieces and passed them around. Borchardt, who hated the stuff, munched on it with every evidence of enjoyment, while Chang and Vassily didn't have to simulate pleasure. It really was good fudge, Chang decided as he finished the piece.

Suddenly there was a flash

of movement around the periphery of the light and four figures dashed into the area with enormous speed. Borchardt leaped to his feet with a curse, dragging at his Kelly, but he was far too slow. The natives had gone, with only a trail of high pitched laughter to mark their passage.

"They took it," Vassily said with satisfaction. "Now what?"

"Now we go get them," Chang replied. "They usually eat part of their loot on the way back to the village, and with their metabolic rate, I don't think we'll have to go too far."

They didn't. The four natives were sprawled on the tundra less than a quarter of a kilometer down the trail to the village. They didn't move as the Earthmen came up.

"Drunk! by God!" Borchardt swore, as he looked down at their thin, limp, oddly manlike bodies.

"Not drunk," Chang said. "Here, help me get them in the floater. We'll have to get them back to the ship. They might die if they're not treated." He bent over the natives and

pulled open the skin garments that covered their chests. A jet hypo gleamed in his hand. It hissed softly four times, and Chang sighed. "I hope that'll do it. This is a dangerous business. Now get those manacles on. If I'm right, they'll be coming to in a few minutes. But I don't think they'll be any trouble."

Chang was right. Contact was made quite simply, and the natives, stunned, bemused, and still a little unsteady on their feet, were turned loose to bring their fellows in tomorrow. The chain reaction had started and the BEE had a foothold on another world.

"What on Earth did you do?" Borchardt asked with heartfelt curiosity.

"It was easy. You gave me the clue, Borchardt. Actually,

these people are much like Earth's Eskimos. Of course, their appearance is different, but their environment is the same, and they're humanoid,—which means that they have essentially the same metabolism as we do. I merely made an educated guess, and it paid off. These folks have been living all their lives on a high fat, high protein diet. They're tolerant to it. If we tried the same thing, we'd probably die of acidosis. But with this tolerance they have little if any tolerance for carbohydrates. In the Eskimo it produces the same syndrome as excess sugar in a diabetic;—a diabetic coma. And with their faster metabolism it should appear faster." Chang grinned. "It did," he finished dryly.

THE END



SCIENCE SHORTS

by EDGAR P. STRAUS

A possible source for cosmic radiation has been tracked to the mysterious Crab Nebula. This nebula, the gaseous remains of a supernova which exploded in 1054 A.D., has long been under study because of peculiarities of its light spectrum. Several years ago independent teams of Russian and American astronomers discovered that the Crab Nebula's light is almost 100 percent polarized.

The most likely explanation for this is that the light is radiated from very high-speed electrons being accelerated in a magnetic field. Such radiation can be seen in electron synchrotrons. It is thought that the supernova produced a source of high-energy electrons, and these are now being bent into curved paths by the magnetic fields of interstellar space.

If the nebula contains fast electrons, it is likely to contain fast protons as well. The latter

would not radiate light, and so cannot be directly detected. But if they exist and are traveling as fast as the electrons, they may be reaching the Earth as cosmic rays.

Study of the results of the 1954 American H-Bomb tests has provided additional information on the inner geography of the Earth. Analysis of seismic waves produced by the four hydrogen-bomb explosions indicates that the Earth has an inner core of a radius of 800 miles, inside the central core.

The central core of the Earth was located twenty years ago at a depth of 1800 miles below the surface. It has a radius of 2200 miles, and the region above it is called the mantle of the Earth.

The H-bomb studies show an 800-mile-wide inner core at the heart of the Earth, where the pressure is more than twenty million pounds per square inch.

EXILED FROM EARTH

by RICHARD F. WATSON

illustrated by ORBAN

Never, never again so long as we lived could we return again to Earth. Yet old Howard was about to die and he wanted to see his home planet. — There had to be a way!

THE night old Howard Brian got his impossible yen to return to Earth, we were playing to an almost-full house at Smit's Terran Theater on Salvor. A crowd like that one really warms a director's heart. Five hundred solemn-mouthed, rubber-faced green Salvori had filed into the little drab auditorium back of the circus aviary, that night. They had plunked down two credits apiece to watch my small troupe of exiled Terran actors perform.

We were doing *King Lear* that night—or rather, a boiled-down half-hour condensation of it. I say with I hope pardonable pride that it wasn't too bad a job. The circus man-

agement limits my company to half an hour per show, so we won't steal time from the other attractions.

A nuisance, but what could we do? With Earth under inflexible Neomorian sway, we had to go elsewhere and take whatever bookings we could. I cut *Lear* down to size by pasting together a string of the best speeches, and to Sheol with the plot. Plot didn't matter here, anyway; the Salvori didn't understand a word of the show.

But they insisted on style, and so did I. Technique. Impeccable timing. Smit's Players were just about the sole exponents of the Terran drama in this sector of the out-



worlds, and I wanted each and every performance to be worthy of the world that had cast us so sternly forth.

I sat in the back of the theater unnoticed and watched old Howard Brian, in the title role, bringing the show to its close. Howard was the veteran of my troupe, a tall, still majestic figure at seventy-three. I didn't know then that this was to be the night of his crackup.

He was holding dead Cordelia in his arms and glaring round as if his eyes were neutron-emitters. Spittle flecked his gray beard.

"Howl, howl, howl, howl!

Oh, you are men of stones;

Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so

That heaven's vaults should crack. She's gone for ever.

I know when one is dead, and when one lives:

She's dead as earth. Lend me a looking-glass;

If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,

Why then she lives."

As Howard reached that tingling line, *She's dead as*

Earth, I glanced at my watch. In three minutes *Lear* would be over, and the circus attendants would clear the auditorium for the next show, the popular Damooran hypnotists. Silently I slipped from my seat, edged through the brightly-lit theater—Salvori simply can't stand the dark—and made my way past a row of weeping aliens toward the dressing-room, to be on hand to congratulate my cast.

I got there during the final speech, and counted the curtain-calls: five, six, seven. Applause from outside still boomed as Howard Brian entered the dressing-room, with the rest of the cast following him. Howard's seamed face was beaded with sweat. Genuine tears glittered in his faded eyes. *Gemine*. The mark of a great actor.

I came forward and seized his hand. "Marvelous job tonight, old man. The Greenies loved every second of it. They were spellbound."

"To hell with the Greenies," Howard said in a suddenly hoarse voice. "I'm through, Erik. Let someone else play

Lear for your gaggle of gawping green-faced goggle-eyed aliens in this stale-sawdust circus."

I grinned at the old man. I had seen him in this crochety bitter mood before. We all were subject to it, when we thought of Earth. "Come off it, Howard!" I chuckled. "You don't mean to tell me you're retiring again? Why, you're in your prime. You never were better than—"

"No!" Howard plopped heavily into a chair and let his gaudy regal robes swirl around him. He looked very much the confused, defeated Lear at that moment. "Finished," he breathed. "I'm going back to Earth, Erik. *La commedia e finita.*"

"Hey!" I shouted to the rest of the company. "Listen to old Uncle Vanya here! He's going back to Earth! He says he's tired of playing Lear for the Greenies!"

Joanne, my Goneril, chuckled, and then Ludwig, the Gloucester, picked it up, and a couple of others joined in—but it was an awkward, quickly dying chuckle. I saw the weary, wounded look on old

Howard's face. I grinned apologetically and snapped, "Okay! Out of costume double fast, everyone. Cast party in twenty minutes! *Kethii* and roast *dwaarn* for everybody!"

"Erik, can I talk to you in your office?" Howard murmured to me.

"Sure. Come on. Talk it all out, Howard."

I led the gaunt old actor into the red-walled cubicle I laughingly call my office, and dialed two filtered rums, Ter-ran style. Howard gulped his drink greedily, pushed away the empty glass, burped. He transfixed me with his long gray beard and glittering eye and said, "I need eleven hundred credits to get back to Earth. The one-way fare's five thousand. I've saved thirty-nine hundred."

"And you're going to toss your life's savings into one trip?" I shook my head emphatically. "Snap out of it, Howard! You're not on stage now. You aren't Lear—not a doddering old man ready to die."

"I know that. I'm still young—*inside*. Erik, I want to

play Hamlet in New York. I want it more than anything else there is. So I've decided to go back to New York, to play Hamlet."

"Oh," I said softly. "Oh. I see."

Draining my glass, I stared reflectively at Howard Brian. I understood for the first time what had happened to the old actor. Howard was obviously insane.

The last time anyone had played Hamlet in New York, I knew, it had been the late Dover Hollis, at the climax of his magnificent career. Hollis had played the gloomy prince at the Odeon on February 21, 2167. Thirty-one years ago. The next day, the Neopuritan majority in Congress succeeded in ramming through its anti-sin legislation, and as part of the omnibus bill the theaters were closed. Play-producing became a felonious act. Members of the histrionic professions overnight lost what minute respectability they had managed to attain. We were all scamps and scoundrels once again, as in the earliest days of the theater.

I remembered Dover Hollis' 2167 *Hamlet* vividly, because I had been in it. I was eighteen, and I played Marcellus. Not too well, mind you; I never was much of an actor.

Howard Brian had been in that company too, and a more villainous Claudius had never been seen on America's shores. Howard had been signed on to do Hamlet, but when Dover Hollis requested a chance to play the part Howard had graciously moved aside. And thereby lost his only chance to play the Dane. He was to have reclaimed his role a week later, when Hollis returned to London—but, a week later, the padlocks were on the theater doors.

I said to Howard, "You can't go back to Earth. You know that, don't you?"

He shook his head obstinately. "They're casting for *Hamlet* at the Odeon again. I'm not too old, Erik. Bernhard played it, and she was an old woman, with a wooden leg, yet. I want to go."

I sighed. "Howard, listen to me: you accepted free transportation from the Neopuritan government, like all the rest

of us, on the condition that you didn't try to return. They shipped you to the outworlds. You can't go back."

"Maybe they're out of power. Maybe the Supreme Court overthrew the legislation. Maybe—"

"Maybe nothing. You read *Outworld Variety*, the same as the rest of us. You know how things stand on Earth. The Supreme Court is twelve to three Neopuritan, and the three old holdouts are at death's door. Congress is Neopuritan. A whole new generation of solemn little idiots has grown up under a Neopuritan president. It's the same all over the world." I shook my head. "There isn't any going back. The time is out of joint, Howard. Earth doesn't want actors or dancers or singers or other sinful people. Until the pendulum swings back again, Earth just wants to atone. They're having a gloom orgy."

"Give me another drink, Erik," Howard said hollowly. I dialed it for him. He slurped half of it down and said, "I didn't ask you for a sermon. I just want eleven hundred

credits. You can spare it."

"That's questionable. But the money's irrelevant, anyway. You couldn't get back to Earth."

"Will you let me try?"

His dry cheeks were quivering, and tears were forming in his eyes. I saw he was in the grip of an obsession that could have only one possible end, and I knew then that I had lost my best actor. I said, "What do you want me to do?"

"Guarantee me the money. Then get me a visa and book passage for me. I'll take care of the rest."

I was silent.

He said, "We've been together thirty years, Erik. I remember when you were a kid actor who didn't know a blank verse from a blank check. But you grew up into the best director I ever worked with."

"Thanks, Howard."

"No. No thanks needed. I did my best for you, even on this rotten backwater. Remember my Prince Hal? And I did Falstaff too, ten years later. And Willy Loman, and Mark

Diamond, and the whole Ibsen cycle."

"You were great," I said. "You still are."

"We never did *Hamlet*, though. You said you couldn't bear to condense it for the Greenies. Well, now's my chance. Send me to Earth. Lend me the dough, see the Consul for me, fix things up. Will you do that for me, Erik?"

I drew in my breath sharply. I realized I had no choice. From this night on, Howard would be no good to me as an actor; I might just as well try to let him die happy.

"Okay," I said. "I'll see what I can do for you."

"You're a prince, Erik! An ace among men and the director of directors. You—"

I cut him off. "It's time for the cast party. We don't want to miss out on that sweet burbling *kethii*."

AS usual, we were very gay that night, with the desperate gaiety of a bunch of actors stranded in a dismal alien world where we were appreciated for the way we

did things but not for what we did. We were just another act in Goznor's Circus, and there wasn't one of us who didn't know it.

I woke up the next morning with a *kethii* head, which is one way of saying that my eyeballs were popping. The odor of slops got me up. My flat is in the Dillborr quarter of Salvor City, and Dillborr is the rough Salvori equivalent for Pigtown. But Earthmen are severely restricted as to living quarters on worlds like Salvor.

I dressed and ran myself through the reassembler until my molecules were suitably vitalized and I felt able to greet the morning. Ordinarily I'd have slept till noon, getting up just in time to make the afternoon rehearsal, but this day I was up early. And I had told the cast that I was so pleased with *Lear* I was cancelling the regular daytime run-through, and would see them all at the theater at the usual evening check-in time of 1900.

I had plenty of work to do this day.

I knew it was a futile cause: Howard had as much chance

of getting back to Earth as he did of riding a sled through a supernova and coming out uncooked. But I had promised him I'd see what I could do, and I was damned well going to try.

First thing, I phoned the office of Transgalactic Space-lines, downtown in the plusher section of Salvor City. A Neopuritan gal appeared on the screen, her face painted chalk-white, her lips black, her eyes frowning in the zombie way considered so virtuous on Earth. She recognized me immediately, and I could almost hear the wheels in her brain grinding out the label: *Sinful actor person.*

I said, "Good morning, sweetheart. Is Mr. Dudley in the office yet?"

"Mr. Dudley is here," she said in a voice as warm as stalactites and about as soft. "Do you have an appointment to talk to him?"

"Do I *need* one?"

"Mr. Dudley is very busy this morning."

"Look," I said, "tell him Erik Smit wants to talk to him. That's your job, and it's sinful of you to try to act as a

screen for him." I saw the retort coming, and quickly added, "It's also sinful to make nasty remarks to possible customers. Put Dudley on, will you?"

Dudley was the manager of the local branch of the space-line. I knew him well; he was a staunch Neopuritan with secret longings, and more than once he had crept into our theater in disguise to watch the show. I knew about it and kept quiet. I wondered what Miss Iceberg would say if she knew some of the things her boss had done—and some he would like to do, if he dared.

THE screen imploded swoopingly and Dudley appeared. He was a heavy-set man with pink ruddy cheeks; the Neopuritan pallor did not set well on him. "Good morning, Mr. Smit," he said formally.

"Morning, Walter. Can you give me some information?"

"Maybe. What kind, Erik?"

"Travel information. When's the next scheduled Salver-Earth voyage?"

He frowned curiously. "The *Oliver Cromwell's* booking in here on the First of Nine-

month—that's next Twoday—and is pulling out on the Third. Why?"

"Never mind that," I said. "Second-class fare to Earth is still five thousand credits, isn't it?"

"Yes, but—"

"Do you have a vacancy on the Earthbound leg of the journey?"

He said nothing for a moment. Then: "Yes, yes, we have some openings. But—this can't be for *you*, Erik. You know the law. And—"

"It isn't for me," I said. "It's for Howard Brian. He wants to play Hamlet in New York."

A smile appeared on Dudley's pudgy face. "He's a little out of date for that, unless there's been a revolution I haven't heard about."

"He's gone a little soft in the head. But he wants to die on Earth, and I'm going to do my best to get him there. Five thousand credits, you say?" I paused. "Could I get him aboard that ship for seventy-five hundred?"

Anger flickered momentarily in Dudley's eyes as his Neo-

puritan streak came to life. Controlling himself, he said, "It's pointless to offer bribes, Erik. I understand the problem, but there's absolutely nothing you or I or anyone can do. Earth's closed to anyone who signed the Amnesty of 2163."

"Eight thousand," I said. "Eighty-five hundred."

"You don't understand, Erik. Or you *won't* understand. Look here: Howard would need an entrance visa to get onto Earth. No visa, no landing. You know that, I know that, he knows it. Sure, I could put him aboard that ship, if you could find a spaceport man who'd take a bribe—and I doubt that you could. But he'd never get off the ship at the other end."

"At least he'd be closer to Earth than he is now."

"It won't work. You know what side I'm on personally, Erik. But it's impossible to board a Transgalactic Line ship without proper papers, and Howard can't ever get those papers. He *can't* go back, Erik. Sorry."

I looked at the face framed in the screen and narrowly

avoided bashing in the glass. It would only have netted me some bloody knuckles and a hundred-credit repair bill, but I would have felt better about things. Instead I said, "You know, your own behavior hasn't been strictly Neopuritan. I might write some notes—"

It was a low blow, but he ducked. He looked sad as he said, "You couldn't prove anything, Erik. And blackmail isn't becoming on you."

He was right. "Okay, Walter. Hope I didn't take up valuable time."

"Not at all. I only wish—"

"I know. Drop around to the circus some time soon. Howard's playing *Lear*. You'd better see it now, while you have the chance."

I blanked the screen.

I sat on the edge of my hammock and cursed the fact that we'd all been born a century too late—or maybe too early. 21st Century Earth had been a glorious larking place, or so I had heard. Games and gaiety and champagne, no international tensions, no ulcers. But I had been born in the 22nd Century, when the boom

came swinging back the other way. A reaction took place; people woke from a pleasant dream and turned real life into a straight-laced nightmare.

Which was why we had chosen between going to prison, entering mundane professions, and accepting the new Neopuritan government's free offer to take ourselves far from Earth and never come back. We'd been on *Salvor* thirty years now. The youngest of us was middle-aged. But makeup does wonders, and anyway the *Salvori* didn't care if Romeo happened to be fifty-seven and slightly paunchy.

I clenched my hands. I had been a wide-eyed kid when the Neopuritans lowered the boom, and I jumped at the chance to see the outworlds free. Now I was forty-nine, balding, a permanent exile. I vowed I was going to work like the deuce to help Howard Brian. It was a small rebellion, but a heartfelt one.

I called my bank and had them flash my bankbook on the screen. It showed a balance of Cr. 13,586—not a devil of a lot for thirty years' work. I scribbled a draft for six thou-

sand in cash, dropped it in the similarizer plate, and waited. They verified, and moments later a nice wad of Interstellar Galactic Credits landed in the receiving slot.

I got dressed in my Sevenday best, locked up the place, and caught a transport downtown to the spaceport terminal. As an Earthman, of course, I rode in the back of the transport, and stood.

A coach was just leaving the terminal for the spaceport. By noon I found myself forty miles outside Salvor City, standing at the edge of the sprawling maze of buildings and landing-areas that is Salvor Spaceport. I hadn't been out here since that day in 2168 when the liner *John Calvin* deposited me and eighty-seven other Terran actors, dancers, strippers, and miscellaneous deported sinners, and a bleak-faced official advised us to behave ourselves, for we were now subject to the laws of Salvor.

I made my way through the confusing network of port buildings to the customs shed. My 6000-credit wad felt pleas-

antly thick in my pocket. Customs was crowded with aliens of various hues and shapes who were departing on a Mullinor-bound liner and who were getting a routine check-through. Since Mullinor is under Terran administration, not only were the Salvori officials running the check but a few black-uniformed employees of Transgalactic Spacelines were on hand as well. I picked out the least hostile-looking of those, and, palming a twenty-credit piece, sidled up to him.

He was checking through the passports of the departing travellers. I tapped him on the shoulder and slipped the bright round double stellar into his hand at the same time.

"Pardon me, friend. Might I have a minute's conversation with you in privacy?"

He glanced at me with contempt in his Neopuritan eyes and handed me back the big coin. "I'll be through with this job in fifteen minutes. Wait for me in Depot A, if there's any information you want."

Now, it might have been that one of his superiors was watching, and that he didn't

want to be seen taking a gratuity in public. But I knew that was a mighty shaky theory for explaining his refusal. I didn't have much hope, but I hied myself to Depot A and waited there for half an hour.

Finally he came along, walking briskly and whistling a hymn. He said, "Do you wish to see me?"

"Yes."

I explained the whole thing: who I was and who Howard was, and why it was so important to let Howard get aboard the ship for Earth. I let him know that there would be two or three thousand credits in it for him if he arranged things so Howard Brian could board the *Oliver Cromwell* next Two-day. At least, I finished, he would die with Earth in sight, even though he might not be permitted to disembark.

I stood there waiting hopefully for an answer and watched his already frosty gaze drop to about three degrees Kelvin. He said, "By the law, Mr. Smit, I should turn you in for attempting to bribe a customs official. But in your case justice should be tem-

pered by mercy. I pity you. Please leave."

"Dammit, I'll give you *five* thousand!"

He smiled condescendingly. "Obviously you can't see that my soul is not for sale—not for five thousand or five billion credits. The law prohibits allowing individuals without visas to board interstellar ships. I ask you to leave before I must report you."

I left. I saw I was making a head-first assault on a moral code which by its very nature was well-nigh impregnable, and all I was getting out of it was a headache.

Bribery was no good. These people took a masochistic pride in their underpaid incorruptibility. I was forced back on my last resort.

I went to see the Terra Consul. The legal above-board approach was my one slim hope.

Archibald von Junzt McDermott was his name, and he was a tall and angular person clad entirely in black, with a bit of white lace at his throat. It was his duty to comfort, aid, and abet Terran citizens on Salvor. Of course, I

was no longer a Terran citizen—that was part of the amnesty too—but I was of Terran birth, at least.

He wore the full Neopuritan makeup, bleached face, cropped hair, blackened lips; he hardly seemed like a comforting type to me. He sat stiffly erect behind his desk and let me squirm and fidget a while before he said, "You realize, of course, that such a request is impossible to grant. Utterly."

Quietly I said, "I'm asking for a relaxation of the rules on behalf of one very sick old man who will probably die of joy the moment Earth comes into sight, and who is guaranteed not to touch off a revolution, promote licentiousness, seduce maidens, or otherwise upset the aims and standards of Neopuritan Earth."

"There can be no relaxation of the rules," Consul McDermott repeated stonily.

"Can't you look the other way *once*? Don't you know what pity is, Consul?"

"I know the meaning of the word well. I feel deep pity for you now, Mr. Smit. You have no spine. You are afraid to

face the world as it is. You're a weakling, Mr. Smit, and I offer you my pity."

"Damned decent of you," I snorted. "You won't grant Howard Brian a visa to Earth, then?"

"Definitely not. We're neither cruel nor vindictive, Mr. Smit. But the standards of society must be upheld. And I cannot find it within my heart to encourage immorality."

"Okay," I said. I stood up and flashed a withering glare at him—a glare of pure hate that would have been a credit to the starchiest Neopuritan preacher in the universe.

Then I turned and walked out.

IT was 1800 when I got back to my flat, and that left me an hour to relax before I had to get down to the theater to set things up for the 2030 performance. I got out of my stiff dress clothes and into my work outfit, and spent a little time on my forthcoming condensation of *Medea* while waiting for the hour to pass. I felt sour with defeat.

The visiphone chime sounded. I activated the receiver

and John Ludwig's face appeared, half in makeup for his role of Gloucester.

"What is it, Johnny?"

"Erik, can you get right down to the theater? Howard's had a sort of stroke. We'll have to call off tonight's performance."

"I'll decide that," I said.

"I'll be right down."

They had fixed up a rough sort of bed for him in the main dressing-room, and he was stretched out, looking pale and lean and lonely: globets of sweat stood out on his forehead. The whole company was standing around, plus a couple of tentacled Arcturan-acrobats and the three Damooran hypnotists whose act follows our show each night.

Ludwig said, "He got here early and started making up for *Lear*. Then he just seemed to cave in. He's been asking for you, Erik."

I went over to him and took his cool wrist and said, "Howard? You hear me, Howard?"

He didn't open his eyes, but he said, "Well, how did it go? Did you book the trip for me?"

I took a deep breath. I felt cold and miserable inside, and I glanced around at the tense ring of faces before I told the lie. "Yeah," I said. "Sure. Howard. I fixed it all up. Leave it to old Erik. Everything's fine."

A pathetic trusting childlike smile slowly blossomed on his face. I scowled and snapped to a couple of others, "Carry him into my office. Then get finished making up for tonight's show."

Ludwig protested, "But Howard doesn't have an understudy. How can we—"

"Don't worry," I barked. "I'll play *Lear* tonight, if Howard's out."

I supervised as they carried Howard, bed and all, through the corridor into my office. Then, sweating nervously, I collared the three Damoorans and said, "Are you boys doing anything for the next half hour or so?"

"We're free," they said in unison. They looked like a trio of tall, red, fleshy animated corkscrews with bulbous eyes in their forehead. They weren't pretty, but they

were masters of their trade and fine showmen. They hung around Goznor's Circus all the time, even when they weren't on.

I explained very carefully to them just what I wanted them to do. It was an idea I'd held in reserve, in case all else failed. They were dubious, but liberal application of platinum double stellar coins persuaded them to give in. They vanished into my office and shut the door behind them. While I was waiting, I found Howard's makeup kid and started turning myself into King Lear.

Perhaps fifteen minutes later the Damoorans filed out again, and nodded to me. "You had better go in there, now. He's on Earth. It was a very good trip."

I tiptoed into the office. Howard lay sprawled on the bed, eyes screwed tight shut, mouth moving slowly. His skin was a frightening waxy white. I put an ear near his lips to hear what he was mumbling.

*"...I cannot live to hear
the news from England,*

*But I do prophesy the elec-
tion lights*

*On Fortinbras; he has my
dying voice:*

*So tell him, with the occur-
ents, more and less,*

*Which have solicited—the
rest is silence."*

My mind filled in the stage direction: Dies. Act Five, Scene Two. Hamlet's last speech.

Bravo, I thought. I looked down at Howard Brian. His voice had ceased, and his throat was still. His part was played. Howard Brian had acted Hamlet at last, and it was his finest moment on Broadway.

He was smiling even in death.

The Damoorans had done their job well. For thirty years I had watched them perform, and I had faith in their illusion-creating ability. Howard had probably lived months in these last fifteen minutes. The long journey to Earth, the ticker-tape parade down Fifth Avenue, the thronged opening-night house, deafening applause. Certainly the Damoorans had manufactured good

notices for him in the late editions.

Anyway, it was over. Howard Brian had cheated them after all. He had returned to Earth for his swansong performance.

I shook a little as I left the office and shut the door behind me. The on-stage bell sounded. I heard Kent and Gloucester begin their scene.

I went out there as Lear and maybe I did a good job. The cast told me later that I did, and the Salvori loved it. It didn't matter. Howard

would have wanted the show to go on.

But I couldn't help thinking, during the solemn after-show moments when they carried Howard out, that my turn was coming. You can't go back to Earth; but someday in the next twenty years I was going to want to go back with all my heart, as Howard had wanted. The thought worried me. I only hoped there'd be a few Damoorans around, when my time came.

THE END

Don't Miss

TRAPPED

Detective Story Magazine

or

GUILTY

Detective Story Magazine

On Your Newsstand NOW!

CREATURE FROM SPACE

by HARLAN ELLISON

illustrated by ORBAN

It was a hideous situation! The horrible creature was right there in the spaceship — and yet, where was it? What was it? And what, or who, was it going to be next?

HOW happy-go-lucky can you get? The crew of the *Ionian Trollop* sought to discover the answer to that question. On the spacepaths they were known as “those imbecile Earthies”. They plied the star lanes with wide-eyes and laughing lips. Tearing air and slapping dirt for all it was worth, they were a gaggle of clowns, a pride of buffoons, a covey of folderolites. Nothing was sacred to the men of the *Ionian Trollop*.

On>Listeper they closed down an entire sin-section in one night. On 8-Ball they were denied landing co-ords and braked in, anyhow. They ploughed up three landing pads with their exhaust before they had settled, and then proceeded

to mobilize the port guards who tried to impound them. On Fleischmann their names were curse words, and mothers frightened their children to bed by warning them: “Patrick Dansker will get you if you don’t behave!” or “Then the big terrible Helms came to eat the little boy!” or “Do you want to grow up like Charlie Julian?”

The men of the *Ionian Trollop* were far-famed, and equally as far-feared. They could out-fight, out-curse, out-love, out-haul and out-space any other outfit tooling the galaxies.

Pat Dansker—big-mouthed, long-legged, smelly—was the Captain. Unless it had been a week during which he had not been able to manage his calis-



thenics due to a crowded schedule, in which case Ray Helms—big as a bear, hairy as a hog, ugly as an umbre—would beat the hell out of him, and abscond with the title and cap.

John Gilkenny was the oiler and mechanic. His ability with a lectro-wrench or pile damper was exceeded only by his ability with a blonde or redhead. He was half gear and switch, the others swore, but not in his presence. An accident off Japetus had ruined his plumbing, and accelerated his sex-drive.

Charlie Julian was the astro-gator, cook and slavey. The last due to his runty size and ability to be easily tromped. Because of the constant abuse he took aboard ship, when he hit sod he became the most violent of the lot, and was feared by every man, woman and child on the Rim; his aggressions, bottled and chafed aboardship, were loosed on the unwary populations of the nearer planets. He's fought men twice his size, and beat them easily. He was a windmill in a brawl, and swore so ferociously, his opponent was off-

guard even before the first blow had been struck.

There was one more member of the crew. Jones Claypool was business manager, course regulator, stores operative and general supercargo of the vessel. At an early date he had convinced the more rowdy members of the crew that he was an unqualified genius, and any disturbance to his equilibrium would throw his delicate reasoning out of kilter.

Since he was needed to keep books on the freighting operations, and to manage affairs, as well as maintain an air of vague and shuddering efficiency on the *Ionian Trollop*, Claypool was never assaulted, and only rarely practical-joked.

He was an egg-shaped man, completely bald, who affected a spare blond moustache and a talking *slee*-bird. The *slee* was a refugee from the *iiliii* plague on one of the moons of Cornucap, and before it had been saved by Claypool it had lost—or molted—most of his scaly feathers. I now had the distinct appearance of moth-eatenness. Claypool loved it dearly, for it recited Dante.

Five men. Unlike any other crew in space. Without organization, without initiative, referendum or recall, they were the wildest, fightingest, drunkenest lot of black-guards who ever redballed from the storehouses on Pluto into the Coal-sack. But one thing could be depended on, with the ship and crew of the register *Ionian Trollop*: a job was a job. Give it, sign it, pay for it, and it was done.

Come upheaval, cosmic rain-storm, invasion, novation, hot tubes, plague, dissipation or act of God...the cargo got to its destination intact, on time, unspoiled.

The crew of the *Ionian Trollop* made good credits, for they were the best damned freight haulers either side of the Celestial Crunode.

There are stories about the last bounce of the *Ionian Trollop*. Many stories. Some say they were all drunk, and headed out, past re-charge stops, past the suns, into the nowhere that lies past the last megagalaxy. Others contend they were caught when Gallipagus went nova. A sparse contingent

swears they are all living on Valhalla, with nineteen wives each.

All are wrong.

The last flight of the *Ionian Trollop*, of that mad crew, was unlike anything Terrestrial man could envision. The log was never found, for it floated with the ship, far out in the dust heaps, never to be read.

This is the story of that last flight.

With five men...

...and a creature aboard.

“GODDAM you, Pool, if you don’t get this miserable, mangey bird off my console, I’ll...I’ll—”

Jones Claypool’s voice was its typical soft sussurance. “You’ll what, Mr. Helms?”

“I’ll put a damping rod through its gullet and roast it in the stern tubes. Now get the goddam beast outta here!”

The *slee* turned up its left nose, shook out its scraggly scale-feathers along its buttocks, and toe-stepped along the facing ledge of the plot-console. When it was directly in front of Ray Helms, it plopped down, its front trio of

legs dangling in air, and defecated.

Helms went mad with fury. "You stinkin', crud-swillin', mange-laden mothball! I'll ruin ya! I'll—"

He made a vengeful lunge for the unconcerned bird, but it gently flapped its wings, and rose out of his reach. Ray Helms stood there, his great barrel chest heaving. "Look what that thing did! Willya look! Just goddam well *look!*"

The *slee* hung close to the bulkhead over Helms' frothing mouth, and in a rasping, grating tone of voice squalled:

"The noise of wordly fame (screeee) is but a blast of wind,

"That blows from diverse points (screee), and shifts its name,

"Shifting the point it blows from. (Screeee)."

"Ah, Canto XI!" Jones Claypool enthused, enraptured. "Most choice, most choice! Oh, you are improving every day!"

The bird hopped lightly down through the air and into the doughnut-shaped man's thick arms. Claypool cooed

over the strange creature, ignoring pointedly the raging fuming of the second-in-command.

"Get that sonofabitchin' thing *outta* here!" Ray Helms shouted, whipping the Captain's cap from his thick crop of black hair, and throwing it to the deck. He had bested Dansker in a sumo match the "day" before and so was entitled to wear the cap till Dansker had strengthened up for a rematch.

"I have work to do, Mr. Helms," Claypool spoke softly but sharply. "You're unnerving me."

As though he had uttered magic phrases that closed off the big man's windpipe, Helms subsided, crimson with sublimated fury, into the computing pot, the cap crushed between his mighty wedge-shaped hands.

Claypool turned and stepped gingerly into the dropshaft, still holding the *slee* tightly to his pudgy chest. As they both gravitated down out of sight, the rasped word, "(Screee) Coprophagist!" floated back up the shaft, and Helms

leaped to his feet, dancing about in unrestrained desire to kill.

"That ... that ... that...!" words failed, and he flung the cap against the bulkhead. "I'll kill it, so help me, I'll kill it and eat it raw!" Then he remembered what the bird had called him, and considered what he had just said, and sank back to the pot, silent, but with eyes aflame.

The good ship *Ionian Trollop* moved out super-fast and silent, into the grey spaces between the island universes. Helms went back to his minute corrections of Julian's initial course-computations.

In the ship, was warmth and all was well, on the star road to Mewlly, fourth planet of a star with no name, and half a number.

AEONS before Man had poked his first fiery finger into the night sky, far across the mega-galaxies a star had gone nova. It had erupted with volcanic hell, and ruptured the skins of its surrounding worlds. On one of those shattered worlds a race of creatures had lived, and

these creatures, near to indestructible, had been thrown up and up and up into space, where they had encysted, and frozen over, dormant, to float in space for all time.

All but two of these creatures had perished, as close to perishing they could. One of the remaining two that had not been swept into the currents of not-space to twist forever beyond the eyes of Eternity, had gone to live in the heart of a sun called Drachemus. Gravity had pulled the being there, and there it remained forever.

The second still circled in space, ranging far in the immensities of nothing. Within the steel-hard shell the creature had built around itself, without knowing it was doing so, surviving despite itself, a germ lived. The heart and spark that *was* the entity. It lived. An entosthoblast in a cell, still live, ready to emerge at the first thawing warmth. Encased in body-deadening cells that prevented the rigors of space to deflower the soulness of it, the creature lay secure, waiting, waiting...

THE *Ionian Trollop* was trying a short-cut. An attempt to beat its own cross-galaxy record, it had strayed out across the grid co-ordinates, contravened the accepted routes, and was now traveling in uncharted space.

"Night" aboardships, with four minds at rest, one at alert.

It was Charlie Julian's turn at night alert, and he slumped in the computing pot, idly flipping the foileaves of a book titled CULINARY VARIETY FOR SPACEMEN. He murmured softly as he read the book, cursing violently but softly, slowly turning the pages.

"Bastards...make 'em a ragout an' they call it swill, the stinkin'—rotten—..." his voice dropped off at the more virulent phrases, casting unpleasant insinuations on the ship's crew and their origins. "—them!" he concluded, and slapped the slim volume shut.

Days had little relation to andside time, to the men of the *Ionian Trollop*; with no night and no day, they let their systems rule them, and wan-

dered the corridors of the ship at all hours.

♦ But when a record was in the making—as this jump was to be—Jones Claypool insisted they carry out some form of schedule. In that way they might more carefully gauge the time spent en route, and handle emergencies with dispatch. So they slept.

Charlie Julian rose from the pot, and stretched tip-toe to his full five feet four, hands above head, fingers curled in reflex.

He was poised that way, the warners on the board silent and dark, when the meteorite struck.

It came whipping out of space. In actuality, they flung themselves at it, but in either case, the tiny spheroid struck the plasteel hull of the *Ionian Trollop*. It smashed through at tremendous velocity, and pierced the shell of the ship like tin foil.

The warners went insane.

Crimson and pus-green lights flashed instantly on the console, pin-pointing the pierced section. Airtight bulkheads sealed themselves, and

jumble-alarms went off throughout the vessel.

Julian leaped at the console, cursing viciously, and slapped home the knife-switch that would send out repairmecks. Down the many corridors of the *Ionian Trollop*, the faint sounds of cubby hatches slamming open echoed, and the mole-like repairmecks—beam directed at the damaged section—rolled toward their work. The one-eyed robotlings converged on the damaged section, and automatically activated the bulkhead sealers. The bulkhead slid open and they scurried through unhesitatingly. The bulkhead closed tightly again.

Within the darkened section, the cyclops-eyed robots opened their tiny parts-niches, and withdrew tools.

A thin, bulb-ended repairmeck reached into its chest and brought out a tiny wad of what could have been old chewing gum. One of its tentacles ended in a tube and socket, and it thrust this wire-tipped socket into the wad of matter. The wad expanded, became a plas-teel patch with self-sealing

edges. The repairmeck threw it on the puncture in the hull. It gripped like paste at its ends, bulged in the center, and held.

Then the weldermeck came through the group, as the parts dispensers got ready their miniature plates. In a matter of seconds the hole was repaired, the repairmecks cast about for the opposite number, where the projectile should have left the ship, and finding none, signalled the control room all was well.

The lights flucked-flicked-twitched on and the section was bright again. The bulkhead sighed open, and the air reached in strong fingers.

Outside the portal, the five man crew of the vessel waited, cursing.

"...your fault, you ignorant gravel-brain!" Pat Dansker was snarling at short Charlie Julian. "Goddam clown! How many times I tell you to stay *awake*..."

"I *was* awake, you lousy blowhard. I *was* awake! In the plot room, you fink!"

Dansker hauled off and cuffed the smaller man between the eyes with a set of knuck-

les. Julian bounced off the bulkhead and came back spitting. Dansker wore no pajamas, and his chest was slippery wet.

"I'll kill you, you *flakie-lover!*" Dansker raged, making a grab for Julian.

Charlie dodged the great hand, and shot back viciously, "She was *not* a *flakie*, you half-blind crud. She'd been sick, that was why her skin looked green!"

The repairmecks scurried between their legs, hustled back to their cubbies and slammed themselves in, almost as though they had reason, and were trying to avoid the fighting.

Eventually, Dansker knocked Julian unconscious with a doggie-wrench magnetically fastened to the inner wall of the section, and the remaining four went in to assay the damage.

Gilkenny strode purposefully to the re-welded section and checked it thoroughly for leak or stress. "Looks to be a meteorite about four and a half inches, maybe five, across."

Helms joined him, his great

bearded face thrust up close to the bulkhead. Smooth lines crossed at the corners of his eyes as he considered the damage, and looked back over his shoulder. He muttered to himself, and the lines deepened: "Ummm. Vector would put it right about..." he walked across the section and his thick, flat fingers traced an idle pattern over the unbroken plating. He looked deeply perplexed. He muttered further: "Trajectory of that thing'd make it...at least *somewhere* around here—"

"What are you grouching about *now*, Helms?" Pat Dansker's blond head came around and he stared widely at the bear-like Captain-of-the-moment.

"Shut up, SIC," he taunted the now-second-in-command, "I'm thinking."

Dansker's slim face altered subtly, and his big, golden head came up. First a snort, then a guffaw, then his gnome-like mouth opened fully—a view of the nether regions—and he roared with unsuppressed mirth. Helms took a threatening step toward him,

and in a few moments they were wrapped in each other's strangle-holds, cursing and thrashing about the room as the other two watched, adding such encouraging phrases as "Bully!" and "Oooh, that one hurt!" or "In the groin, in the groin!"

FINALLY, when they had both collapsed from exhaustion, and lay with heads together against the bulkhead. Helms managed to squirt out his musings. "Th-there... hah-ain't no, no... hunh... duplicate bang-out on the, the," he licked his bloody lips, and closed his eyes quickly. "It hurts, damn you, Dansker! On the opposite bulk, you... slob... no bang-out hole. The thing came in, but—"

He did not have to complete the statement. It was obvious and apparent. When a meteorite spanged a ship, it was like a bullet going through an arm. It went in, and it went out.

That meant two holes. Two. One, two.

There was only one hole in the *Ionian Trollop*.

Dansker reached up feebly, and ripped the cap off Ray Helms' head, where it had been crushed down as though it would reside there till eternity became dust.

"You g-get t-to your... cabin... Helms!" he directed, as Captain once more. Helms looked sidewise at him, as though to reprimand him for his advantage-taking.

Gilkenny ambled over where the two beaten men lay propped against each other and the bulkhead, and helped Helms to his feet. Helms struggled half-erect, then fell back. Gilkenny added further tug to the second-in-command, and brought him to his feet.

Helms slapped away the smaller man's hand. "I d'need your stupid help!" He took three steps toward the corridor and his cabin, and fell flat on his head. He lay there, bubbling against the deckplates as Pat Dansker stood up in triumph.

"Nev'r c-could take it," he murmured, as though drunk, and quite probably addled after the bout. He stumbled past Charlie Julian, who had re-

vived and was coming through the port, and made his way to the droptube. He disappeared down the shaft, in the general direction of his cabin, the cap perched jauntily on one side of his head.

Julian was nursing a fair sized ostrich egg on his forehead where Helms had applied the doggie-wrench, and his eyes were bloodshot. His big nose twitched in anticipation of more anguish.

There were those aboard who offered the theory Julian enjoyed the abuse he received, and was nothing but a masochist beneath it all.

"What happened to the wheel?" he cocked a cocky thumb in the direction Dansker had gone.

Gilkenny turned away as though he had not heard the question. He re-examined the welding job on the inner hull. Jones Claypool, who till now had only spoken to offer battle encouragement, answered, "Dansker got back the cap. Don't step on the SIC."

Julian carefully made his way toward Helms body, where it stretched in uneasy repose, and measuring carefully, gave

the unconscious second-in-command a delicate boot to the ribs. Helms rolled with the force of it, but did not waken.

"Y'know, this *is* strange," Gilkenny tugged at an unruly blond forelock dangling over his eyes.

Jones Claypool, whose ferocious crimson and green pajamas rivalled the multi-colors of inverspace, walked across the deckplates to Gilkenny's side. "What is strange?"

Gilkenny tapped the metal. "Ray was right. The thing came in, but where did it go? There's no hole on the other side. There should be a bang-out somewhere."

"Why couldn't the rock just get trapped inside. Its inertia cut off at the impact?"

"No go," Gilkenny refused to agree. "Them things move out at a good speed. No, there'd be a hole. This is strange."

"Well, I'm sacking away. It's your time for alert, anyhow," Julian snapped, surly as usual. "Served two hours more than I should have. Damned lazy..." his curses trailed after him, down the dropshaft.

John Gilkenny turned from the bulkhead and made his way over Helms body, in the direction of the flight deck. Claypool dogged his footsteps. "I want to get something to read from the mini-files," the short egg-shaped man declared. "Who could sleep after all *this* racket? Most unnerving."

Gilkenny tossed him a bemused glance, and preceded him down the corridor.

Beside one of the cubbies, a repairmeck sat quietly.

"Must of got stuck outside its cub," Gilkenny assayed, the mechanic in him leaping forward. "I guess a solenoid burnt out. I'll take care of it now... no sense letting it hang out till later."

Claypool smiled benignly. Such attention to detail was commendable, and showed up in the profit columns at Jump-End. He had been trying to instill the same reliability in other members of the crew, but it seemed only John Gilkenny had that sense of neatness a bookkeeper admired. He smiled again, and walked down the corridor to the flight deck. He smiled a third time on his return, passing Gilkenny who

was staring puzzledly at the repairmeck. Volatile expression that it was, Claypool paid it no heed as he stepped into the droptube, returning to his cabin with the foilleaf book.

He was never to see blond John Gilkenny again.

At least, not the real John Gilkenny.

The real John Gilkenny died that night.

For Helms had been more precise than he had known, when he said: "The thing came in..."

But it wasn't a thing. It was a creature!"

For the repairmeck lolling outside the cubby was not burnt out. It was in peak working condition. Which was why John Gilkenny had been staring at it so confusedly. His confusion mounted still further when he opened the cubby with a cycle-key and saw the repairmeck that was intended to be in there... *in there*.

There was, to be specific, one more robot on the ship at mid-Jump than there had been at Countdown.

But it was not a robot.

Any more than it had been a meteorite.

Nor any more than it would be John Gilkenny.

Whom it speared with a razor tentacle from its bundle of service arms, dissected, and cast negligently into the refuse sphincter.

For it was not animal, vegetable or mineral. It was malleable.

It was the creature of space.

GILKENNY was frying eggs when Pat Dansker stumbled into the commissary. Dansker tread tip-toe on the cold deckplates, swearing violently, and vowing he would have carpets installed on all the decks, despite the taboos of the Luna Checkout inspectors. Ever since the first space plague had been brought into the Lunar domes in the nape of a rug laid in a pleasure cruiser, there had been strict regs against the installation of same. Tribal fears were as prevalent to the colonists as they were to the men of the uncivilized worlds. And rugs were bad on the Moon.

"Stop your bitching," Gilkenny threw at the Captain. "Or try putting on your shoes. That might cut the chill." He

flipped the eggs expertly, turning their brown bottoms to the light.

At that moment, as though he had come off the beach of a wasteland island, confused and wandering, Charlie Julian stumbled out of the corridor, and stopped solidly, staring at the tall, slim blond man frying eggs patiently at the spill-burner. He croaked a monosyllable, and went very white.

Dansker turned to Julian, and an impatient sneer crept across his features. "What the hell's nibbling you, jerk?"

Julian could not, would not, was not able to, answer.

Dansker snorted in wry disgust. "You get weirder every jump, Julian." He went to the selectomat and dialled himself a glass of screwdriver. When he had the orange juice and vodkajuana mixture safely in his wide paw, he turned, and saw Julian in the same position, eyes wide, feet apart, face ashen.

"Say, lad, what the hell is with you today... you catch something on Kuylio when we weren't watching you?"

Gilkenny turned, caught Ju-

lian's eyes full, and his own wide blue ones narrowed in disguised judging. He tapped the spatula in his hand absently, catching cooking fat on his palm, but not seeming to care.

"Yeah. What's the matter, Charlie?" he asked.

If it was possible, and it was, for it occurred, Charles Julian's swarthy little face paled another degree. He made whorl-like motions with his fingers.

"Hey, clown!" Dansker erupted, annoyed. He stepped over and slapped the smaller man across the mouth.

Instead of his usual truculent silence or a whirlwind assault after such treatment, Julian's manner was totally new to Dansker. He gripped the Captain's arm so tightly, the screwdriver slobbered over the edge of the glass and ran onto the deck. His face was a mask of anguish. "Pat, Pat..." he burred softly, his teeth clenched and his eyes probing into Dansker's.

Dansker looked at the little man, and a feeling of apprehension stole over him. His brow furrowed. "What is it, Charlie?"

Julian bit his lower lip and, "Come on." He led the Captain down the corridor to the disposal cubby.

He irised open the sphincter of the refuse bin, and pointed.

On a thick, gelatinous scum of de-materializing matter, the side of the head of John Gilkenny bobbed, was eaten a bit by the energy flow in the bin, bobbed again, rolled with the flow of the substances, was eaten more, and after what seemed a very long, long time, sank out of sight. The grey surface of the scum was unbroken.

"God." Dansker stepped back and leaned against the wall. His outward calm was broken only by the repetition of the word. "God."

The ship was silent. What was an impossibility, was a reality. A ship is never silent. If not the faint, efficient murmurings of the drive mechanisms, then the clatter of the galley, the flutings of the course computers, the stress-noises of the hull. Now, it was silent. Silent as space, silent as a mute, silent as the grave. Silent with terror that lived in

the form of John Gilkenny.

Dansker turned and dilated the sphincter. He stared at the closed face of it for a moment, then said: "We got trouble."

DANSKER walked into the galley with the spit-beam levelled. He pointed it at John Gilkenny, saying, "John, what happened last night?"

Gilkenny looked up from his eggs, and wiped a slim hand across his handsome mouth. His dark eyebrows went up, and his blond head rose a few inches in wonder. "What do you mean?"

Charlie Julian stepped around the Captain, his own spit aimed at Gilkenny's face. "What he means is, what happened after we found that blow-in from the meteorite?"

Claypool moved up alongside the other two, and though he was without weapon, and the *slee* stood silently atop his bald head, his eyes were shrewd and watchful. "I left him with a defective repair-meck. He was going to service it."

"Okay, Pool, that's enough," Dansker was full in charge

now, and all humor was gone from the group. Gilkenny had scooted around in the seat, and with fork poised above the plate, an expression of utter bewilderment had suffused his features.

"I don't know what the hell you jerks are talking about." A tinge of annoyance and indignation crept into his words.

"We might not have known . . . John? . . . if the refuse bin hadn't been washing during the night, and not eating. It cleans itself periodically. We saw. . . your . . . body in there this morning."

"Who the hell *are* you?" Julian asked.

"Well, who the blazes do you *think* I am, you clowns! I'm Johnny, like always. Say, I've made about a thousand bounces with you, don't tell me you don't know me by now!" He was flushed, and tossed his handsome head negligently.

Julian's spit joined in.

Dansker fired point-blank.

There was a cataclysmic eruption, a great phosphorescent flare, and they were blinded, completely blinded, with reds and greens and

blacks dancing in their sight, and the two men continued to fire at the spot where Gilkenny had been.

When the roaring had cleared, and the lights had faded, Gilkenny was gone. "Thank God it's over," Claypool closed his eyes briefly. "Over. Whatever it was, it's gone now."

Helms, who had oddly stayed back, now shoved Julian aside. "There ain't no body. Where's the body?" A dirty smear of grey charcoal-like substance was dark against the edge of the seat, and the floor before it.

There was no body.

Dansker hefted the spit-beam as though he had never quite been aware of its potential.

They went their separate ways.

None of them noticed the extra stylus in the pencil-pot, on the writing table.

WHEN the first relayed words from Mewly begun faintly registering on the *Ionian Trollop's* counters, Charlie Julian was told to get up a

meal. He went into the galley, and began clearing the writing table, which converted into a meal board. He lifted the pencil-pot, and one of the slim shafts levitated from the pot. It hung there in mid-air for a split instant, then thrust forward.

The pin-sharp point of it entered Julian's left eye, and sank into the brain instantly.

A few minutes later Charlie Julian lifted the body of Charlie Julian, its face crimson with an extra depth in one orb, and carried it to the rear expulsion chamber.

The chamber was seldom used, save when it was necessary to jettison cargo or other impedimentia that was too bulky to fit in the refuse sphincter.

The body was dumped, the inner door was dogged, and the chamber was "blown". Charlie Julian sailed out, end over end, into space, to the rear of the *Ionian Trollop*...

...and was gone.

Charlie Julian stood in the galley, his arms wrapped around his middle, and stared at the dark stain on the bulk-

head. "I wonder why I must do this?" he said, and went to find his spit-beam.

The creature that was Charlie Julian burned down Ray Helms before they stopped it. Julian came up behind Helms, lounging in a formfit, sucking down a bulb of lotus beer. There was no hesitation and no compunction in the killing. The stepping up, and the stud pressing, and the spitting of the force beam. And Ray Helms' lifeless, headless torso slid down in the formfit. Held in place by the chair, but dead.

Julian did not have the opportunity to dispose of the body, this time, however. Dansker and Claypool entered the room at the same moment, both having come from the flight deck. When they saw Helms in the chair, dead, they both knew what had happened.

Pat Dansker raised his arm, allowing the spit-beam to drop from its press-holster, into his cupped and waiting hand.

He stared across at Julian, and their eyes met over their weapons. "So it ain't gone," Dansker said.

"You don't know," Julian answered.

"I know. I can feel it, Mister," Dansker retaliated

"What? What is this?"

Dansker's eyes went sharp and thin. "You came in when that meteorite plowed through. That's why there was only one bang-out in the hull."

"I didn't want to come in, Pat."

"You came, though. You've done what you've done."

Sadly. Almost confusedly. "Yes."

Then, as though they realized together that they held each other's destruction in their hands, the spit-beams came up.

But neither fired.

Again, the explosion, the terrible rending of the fabric of space within the ship, the pin and cartwheels of light, the trembling and the diving and the hurling that was a forcible extrication of the creature from its shape, and into a new shape.

Both Dansker and Claypool feeling the force of the transformation, tried to combat it. Their minds buffeted against it for a long instant in timelessness...and then unconscious-

ness rode unstoppably over them.

There were the sounds of only two bodies striking the deckplates.

Julian was no longer there.

But another had taken its place in the list of *dopplegangers*.

NOT for a moment did either one think the creature was dead. It had showed before that it took more than space, or power, or heat to kill it. And the blast had been produced by itself, not by anything they had done. So obviously, the creature—whatever it was, wherever it had come from—was still aboard.

And in a different form.

A form that would make it dominant. If it had to be aboard, it would not become a deckplate if it could become a man. Unless it wanted to hide indefinitely. Yet, it did not seem to want that.

Whatever the alien logic of this creature, they could not fathom it, nor could they deny that it was anathema to them, and that it was hostile. It had unquestionably shown that.

There were only two left of the five who had made up the hell-bent crew of the *Ionian Trollop*.

With the fairly obvious reservation that one of the two remaining was a thing from the emptiness of space.

Claypool woke and raised up from the deck. He rested there on one hand for some time, thinking. Thinking that it had been a long bounce, and that it had had to happen eventually. That the deeps held terrors no man could fathom, and that they would eventually crush him. Had it not been this creature from space, it would have been something else. A spore on some small world, a novation as they passed through inver-space, a defective energy-bead in the drive mechanisms, old age. It had to come.

But *this* way? Here, in a plasteel coricle, hustling between the stars.

On the way to a world known as Mewlly.

He looked at the still-unconscious body of Pat Dansker, and the problem was simplified. Knowing what he was...

knowing he was human, he knew what Dansker must be.

He fumbled across the floor for the spit-beam the Julian-thing had dropped when it had re-formed.

As he lifted it, he heard a sound behind him. Dansker was awake, and rubbing the sockets of his eyes with heavy hands. "Gosh, Pool, what, what happened?"

Jones Claypool brought the spit-beam up, and pursed his lips in fear and hopelessness. "God save you, Pat."

"What the hell are you doing? Oh, I get it...you lousy creature!" His face was flushed with brittle fury.

"It won't throw me off, Pat. I knew we were out long enough for you to dispose of the body. And I know I'm me, so that makes you the thing. Goodbye."

"Pool! No, don't do it! Pool...!"

The Captain had no chance to retrieve his own spit-beam where it had fallen when he dropped. The flare of the weapon in Jones' hand was

big and diamond-shaped, and the *slee* bird's shriek matched that of Pat Dansker's. The bird flew up and then settled slowly as the acrid stench of cordite and the nauseating scent of burnt flesh mingled in the section.

Jones Claypool rose, and let the spit-beam drop from his numbed fingers.

The signals from Mewlly were coming in spice-strong now. He corrected the course-comp, and the ship heeled slightly, deadening in on its target.

Space rushed by, and he cursed the creature that had come in through a hole in the hull. Cursed it, and damned it to whatever hell was reserved for extraterrestrial menaces like the thing.

He lay back in the pot, and his thoughts were of nothing.

While on his shoulder, the *slee*, contemplated Mewlly, and all the wonderful shapes it could assume.

And he could ken cleavage beginning; it hurt.

THE END

THE UTTER STRANGER

by ALAN E. NOURSE

He was so alone in a strange world, so utterly alone!
And yet no one would believe he was one bit different
from the other inhabitants of that strange, new world

“JUST suppose,” said Morgan, “that I *did* believe you. Just for argument.” He glanced up at the man across the table. “Where would we go from here?”

The man shifted uneasily in his seat. He was silent for a long time, staring down at the table, fingering the glass before him. Not at all a strange man, Morgan thought. Rather common, in fact. Ordinary face, nose a little too long, fingers too dainty, suit that makes him look like a Boot on his first liberty—but in spite of that, a very ordinary-looking man.

Too ordinary, thought Morgan.

Finally the man looked up. His eyes were dark, with a hunted look in their depths

that chilled Morgan a little. “I wish I knew,” the man said. “I don’t. I’ve thought, and I’ve thought, and nothing leads anywhere. But you’ve *got* to believe me, Morgan. I’m lost—I mean it. If I can’t get help, I don’t know where it’s going to end.”

“I’ll tell you where it’s going to end,” said Morgan. “It’s going to end in a hospital, A mental hospital. They’ll lock you up in the looney bin, and they won’t let you out again.” He poured himself another glass of beer from the pitcher, took a deep drink. “And that,” he added, “will be that.”

THE place was dark and almost empty. Overhead a rotary fan swished patiently near the ceiling. The man

across from Morgan ran a hand through his dark hair, nervously. "There must be some other way," he said. "There must be."

"All right, let's start from the beginning again," said Morgan. "Maybe we can pin something down a little better. You say your name is Parks—right?"

The man nodded. "Jefferson Haldemeyer Parks, if that helps any. Haldemeyer was my mother's maiden name."

"All right. And you got into town on Friday—right?" Parks nodded. "Fine. Now then, go through the whole works again. What did you do first?"

The man thought a minute. "There was a fall, you remember. About twenty feet. Didn't break any bones, but it shook me up, and I was limping. The fall was near the highway going to the George Washington Bridge. I got over to the highway and started to flag down a ride—"

"How did you feel then? I mean, was there anything strange that you noticed?"

"*Strange!*" Parks' eyes widened. "I—I was speechless. At first I hadn't noticed too much

—I was concerned with the fall, and whether I was hurt or not, I didn't think about it—but when I walked up to that highway, and saw those cars coming, I could hardly believe my eyes. I thought I was crazy. But a car stopped and asked me if I was going into the city—and then I knew I *wasn't* crazy."

Morgan's mouth took a grim line. "You understood him."

"Oh, yes. We talked all the way in to New York—nothing very important, but we understood each other. His speech had an odd sound, but—"

Morgan nodded. "I know. I've noticed. So what did you do in New York?"

"Well, obviously, I needed money. I had gold coin. Had no way of knowing if it would be useful, but I'd taken it on chance. I tried to use it at a newsstand first, and the fellow nearly laughed me off the street. Said what did I think he was, the U.S. Treasury or something. Said I should go to a money-lender—a hock-shop, I think he called it. So I found a place—"

"Let me see the coins."

Parks dropped a small gold

disc on the table. It was perfectly smooth and perfectly round, tapered by wear to a thin edge all around. There was no design on it, and no printing. "What did they give you for these?" Morgan looked up at the man sharply.

Parks shrugged. "Altogether too little. Two dollars for those, five for the larger ones."

"You should have gone to a bank."

"I know that now. I didn't then. Naturally, I assumed that with everything else so similar, principles of business would be too—"

Morgan sighed, and leaned back in his chair. "Well, then what?"

Parks poured some beer and sipped it slowly for a moment. His face was very pale, Morgan thought, and his hands trembled as he raised the glass. Fright? Maybe. Hard to tell. The man put down the glass, and rubbed his forehead with the back of his hand. "First I went to the Mayor's office," he said. "I kept trying to think what anyone at home would do in my place. That seemed a good bet. I asked a policeman

where I could find him, and then I went there."

"But you didn't see him."

"No. I saw a secretary. She said he was in conference, and could be seen only by appointment. So she let me speak to another man, who was one of the Mayor's assistants."

"And you told him?"

"No I wanted to see the Mayor. I thought that was the best thing to do. I waited for a couple of hours. Then I saw another man, who told me flatly that it was impossible to see the Mayor without stating my business first." He drew in a deep sigh. "So I stated it. And then I was gently but firmly ushered back onto the street again."

"They didn't believe you," said Morgan.

"They didn't begin to believe me. They laughed in my face."

Morgan nodded. "I'm beginning to get the pattern. So what did you do next?"

"Next I tried the police. I got the same treatment there as I did from the Mayor's office. Only not so gentle. They wouldn't listen either. They muttered something about cranks and their crazy notions,

and when they asked me where I lived, they nearly exploded. Told me to get out and not come back with any more wild stories."

"I see," said Morgan.

Jefferson Parks picked up the cigaret pack lying on top of a magazine on the table. "Mind if I have another of these? They—they hit the spot." He lit one clumsily, and coughed a little. "I—I didn't know quite what to do. I'd been ready for just about anything—but this. It was frightening. I tried to rationalize it, and then I quit trying. It wasn't that I attracted attention, or anything like that—quite the contrary. Nobody even looked at me, unless I said something to them. I began to look for things that were *different*, things that I could show them, and say, see, this proves that I'm telling the truth, look at it —" He looked up helplessly.

"And what did you find?"

"Nothing. Oh, little things, minute, insignificant little things. The calendars, for instance—I naturally couldn't understand their frame of reference. And the coinage—you

stamp your coins. And cigarettes—we don't have tobacco." The man gave a short laugh. "And the house-dogs! We have little animals that look more like rabbits than poodles. But there was nothing else, nothing more significant than that. Absolutely nothing—"

"But there was yourself," said Morgan.

"Ah, yes. I thought that over carefully. I looked for differences—obvious ones. I couldn't find any. Look at me, you can see that. So I looked for more subtle things—skin textures, fingerprints, proportions. I still couldn't find anything. Then I went to a doctor."

Morgan's eyebrows lifted in approval. "Good," he said.

Parks shrugged tiredly. "No good. He examined me. He practically took me apart. I carefully refrained from saying anything about who I was or where I came from, just said I wanted a complete physical examination, and let him go to it. He gave it to me, all right. He did a fine job. And when he finished, he patted me on the back and said, 'Parks, you've got nothing to worry

about. You're as fine, strapping a specimen of a healthy human being that I've ever seen.'” The man slammed the glass down on the table. “I almost knocked him down. I was so angry I don't know what I did for sure. It was idiotic—it defied reason, it was infuriating—”

Morgan nodded sourly. “Because you're not a human being,” he said.

“That's right. Because I'm not a human being.”

“**H**OW did you happen to pick this planet, or this sun?” Morgan asked curiously. “There must have been a million others—”

The man called Parks unbuttoned his collar, and rubbed his stubbled chin unhappily. “I didn't make the choice. Neither did anyone else. Travel by warp is a little different from the travel by rocket you fiction writers make so much of. If you're travelling with a rocket you pick your destination, and make your calculations, and off you go. The warp is blind flying—strictly blind. We send an unmanned scanner ahead, and it

hits more or less wildly until it locates something, somewhere, that looks habitable. When it registers right someplace, we keep a tight beam on it, and send through a scout.” He grinned sourly. “Like me. If it looks good to the scout, he signals back, and they leave the warp anchored for a sort of a permanent gateway until we can get a guide beam built. Because we can't control the directional and dimensional scope of the warp. There are an infinity of ways it can go, until it has a guide beam transmitting from the other side. Then they can just scan a segment with the warp, and the scanner picks up the beam.”

He shook his head wearily. “We're new at it, Morgan. We've only tried a few dozen runs. We're not ahead of you in technology—we've been trying it by rockets, just like yours, for about a century. That's fine for a solar system, but it's not much good for the stars. Then somebody found the warp principle, and it looked like the answer. But something went wrong—the scanner picked up this planet,

and I was coming through, and then something blew. And I was falling. And when I tried to contact it again, it was gone!"

"So then you found things here the same as there," said Morgan.

"The same! This world and mine are practically twins. Similar cities, similar technology, everything. The people are the same—precisely the same anatomy and physiology, the same language—can't you see the importance of it? This planet is on the other side of the universe from mine, with the first intelligent life we've yet found anywhere—and when I try to tell your people that I'm from the stars, *they won't believe me—*"

"Why should they?" asked Morgan. "You look like a human being. You talk like one. You act like one. What you're asking them to believe is utterly incredible."

"But it's true."

Morgan shrugged. "So it's true. I won't argue with you. But as I asked before—if I *did* believe you—what do you want me to do? Why pick *me*, of all the people you've seen?"

There was a desperate light in Park's eyes. "I was tired. Oh, God, I was tired. Tired of being laughed at, tired of having people looking at me as though I were a ghoul or something, and taking off in the opposite direction. You were here, you were alone—so I started talking. And then I found out you were a writer—"

He looked up, his haunted eyes eager. "I've got to get back, Morgan, I've got to! My life is there, my family. And think what it would mean to your world, to ours—contact with another intelligent race! Combine our knowledges, our technologies, and we could explore the whole galaxy!"

He leaned forward, his thin face intense. "Look, Morgan. I need money, I need help. I know some of the mathematics to build a guide beam, I know some of the design, some of the power and wiring principles. You have engineers here, technologists, physicists—they could fill in what I don't know, they could build a guide. But they won't do it if they don't believe me, if they think I'm

crazy! Your government won't listen to me, they won't appropriate any money—"

MORGAN didn't move. He just stared. "How many people have you talked to?" he asked.

"A dozen, a hundred, maybe a thousand—"

"And how many believed you?"

His eyes were pleading. "None."

"*Nobody* would believe you?"

"*Not one soul.* Until I talked to you."

And then Morgan was laughing, laughing bitterly, tears rolling down his cheeks as he laughed. "And I'm the one man who couldn't help you if my life depended on it," he gasped.

"You believe me?"

Morgan stopped laughing. "I believe you. Yes."

"Then you *can* help me."

"But I can't."

"*You must!*"

"I'd be worse than no help at all."

Jefferson Parks gripped the table, his knuckles white. "Why?" he cried hoarsely. "If

you believe me, why can't you help me?"

Morgan pointed to the magazine lying on the table. "I write, yes," he said sadly. "Ever read these stories before?"

Parks picked up the magazine, looked at the bright cover. "I've seen them—"

"I have a story in that magazine," said Morgan. "Went over quite well. Go ahead, read it."

The stranger from the stars leafed through the pages, stopped at a page that carried Roger Morgan's name. His eyes skimmed the first paragraph, and he turned white, and set the magazine down with a trembling hand. "I see," he said, and the life was gone out of his voice, and it was utterly dead. He spread the pages viciously, read the lines again.

The paragraph said:

"Just suppose," said Martin, "that I *did* believe you. Just for argument." He glanced up at the man across the table. "Where do we go from here?"

The man shifted uneasily in his seat—

THE END

NUCLEAR NEWS

by STEVEN RORY

Princeton University physicists have developed a device for tracking atomic particles that is tremendously more sensitive than any other such devices invented either in this country or by Russia. The new tracking device is sensitive enough to distinguish between events occurring a hundred-millionth of a second apart.

The unit is expected to be valuable in discovering and recording particles that have a life measured in millionths of a second. It consists of a plastic block containing a series of plastic rods one fiftieth of an inch in diameter. These rods are laid at right angles to one another to the desired thickness of the block.

The rods, called filaments, function as "light pipes." They are made of polystyrene-benzene plastics, and produce light when a particle passes through them. The light is internally reflected from the surface of the

rod and only emerges at one of the rod's two ends.

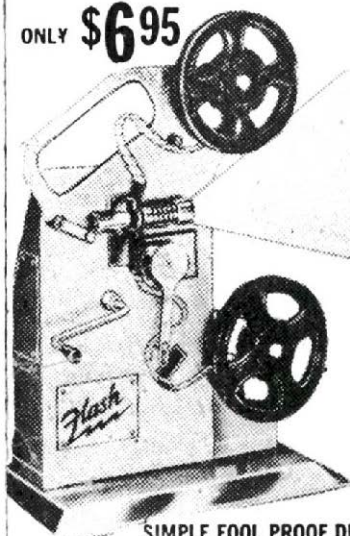
When a particle passes through a rod of the layer that points, say, east-west, it leaves a spot of light on the surface of the block at the east and west ends of the tube; similarly, if it passes through a north-south rod, it will leave a spot of light at the north and south ends of the block. This criss-crossing provides three-dimensional tracking.

The light spots appear on the surface of the block for only three-billionths of a second. Their track, therefore, is recorded with an electronic scope that multiplies the intensity of the image and casts it on a screen.

The new nuclear tracker is expected to be of great aid to workers on the Princeton synchrotron, due for completion in 1960, which will have the fastest cycling rate of any particle accelerator now planned.

REAL 8 MM HOME MOVIE PROJECTOR

ONLY \$695



**SIMPLE FOOL PROOF DESIGN
SAVES YOU UP TO \$65**

Now, you can open a new world to your youngster with this Precision motion picture projector that will bring to life 8 MM color or black & white movies right in your own home and that he can run by himself! Yes, this sturdy motion picture projector is not a toy, but a complete mechanism that makes home movies a luxury that you can now afford.

SHOW MOVIES TO FRIENDS—TAKE HOME MOVIES

Now, you can take all the movies you want without worrying about the expense of a projector. And, ready for your enjoyment also, are the magic and thrills of your youngsters' favorite comedy, adventure, and cowboy heroes. You'll show movies to friends and relatives, hold parties for the kids, and so much more. So don't delay! Order now! Only \$6.98 plus 45¢ shipping charges.



EXCITING FEATURES

- Sturdy all steel construction
- Precision ground and polished lenses
- Projects both color and black & white 8 MM movie film
- Takes up to 200 ft. reels
- Complete with demountable theatre screen
- 25 ft. film subject free

PORTABLE—FULLY EQUIPPED

The "Flash" 8 MM picture is electrically projected by standard inexpensive batteries for safety and ease. There's no plugs or connections to get out of order and it's portable — can be used indoors or out. Pictures can be shown on any surface. Reel holds 200 feet of film. Complete outfit includes "Electric" 8 MM projector, full luminous screen with stand and 25 ft. film subject. Only \$6.98 plus 45¢ shipping charge. **FULL MONEY BACK GUARANTEE** if not 100% delighted.

10 DAY FREE TRIAL

**HONOR HOUSE PRODUCTS CORP.,
DEPT. PM-28, LYNBROOK, NEW YORK**

Rush my "Flash" projector to me by return mail. If after 10 Day Free Trial I am not delighted, I may return it to full purchase price refund.

Send C.O.D. I'll pay postman \$6.98 plus postage and shipping charges.

I enclose \$6.98 plus 45¢ shipping charges in full payment.

Name

Address

PERSONALIZED HOME BAR

ONLY
\$5.98

*Personally Initialed
It's Portable
For Parties,
Gatherings
Basement*

This handsome portable Home Bar, personalized with your initials in a striking dimensional contrast, makes it easy to serve guests in style. Made for both indoor and outdoor use. Its handsome contrast of wood grain and gold finish makes for a sparkling setting in the home. Adds class to any party or gathering and points up the cleverness of its proud owner. And, for relaxing at home, in the parlor, den or basement it's certainly a convenient, handsome addition. Only \$5.98. Comparable in satisfaction and utility to bars selling for \$30. A perfect gift for any occasion.

10 DAY FREE TRIAL

Order today! If not delighted return for refund. Because of its large size we are forced to ask for 63¢ shipping charges.

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

S. J. Wegman Co., Dept. ~~RB-61~~ RB-61
LYNBROOK, NEW YORK

Rush my new personalized portable Home Bar at once. If I am not delighted I may return it after ten days Free Trial for prompt refund of full purchase price.

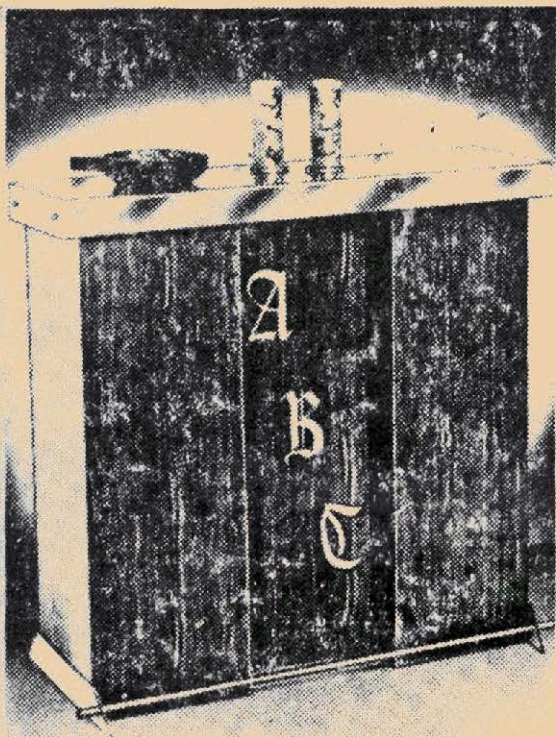
Send C.O.D. I will pay postman on delivery plus C.O.D. shipping charges.

I enclose \$5.98 plus shipping charges.

NAME

ADDRESS

MY INITIALS ARE



FEATURES

- Personalized With Your Initials
- It's Portable—Sets Up Indoors Or Out
- Built-in Shelf Holds Full Party Supplies
- Stain Resistant Bar Top

It's Big—39" wide, 38" high, 13" deep

Sturdily built of aluminum laminated and wood grain finished Multi Flute Fibreboard, this handsome personalized Home Bar is resistant to alcohol and soda stains. Handy built-in shelf holds full supply of bottles, glasses and napkins. Full size bar top holds drinks, pretzels, chips, etc. Sets up in a jiffy and folds compact for easy storage. A beauty for your home and a novel gift. State initials desired with each order.