

PLANET STORIES



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The evacuation was successful.

DAY OF WRATH

By Bjarne Kirchoff

The men of the Norgan System had a tough decision to make concerning the planet in A93. Yet there was no hesitation. Can you blame them?

FROWNING THOUGHTFULLY, Lan Yotar pushed a button on his desk and waited till the television-screen above it glowed, showing the respectful face of an attendant.

"Ask Tir Latoka to come here immediately, please," said the Chief of the Council of Elders.

"I hear and obey," came the routine reply, and the attendant's face vanished from the screen.

Leaning back in his chair, Lan Yotar gazed somberly at the report in his hand, till the Chief Scientist's voice recalled him to his surroundings.

"You sent for me, Excellency?"

"Yes, I did, Tir Latoka. Sit down." As the Chief Scientist seated himself on the opposite side of the desk, he continued

"I am a little uneasy about the latest report on Rona."

Involuntarily, the Chief Scientist turned to look at the Wall of the Planets, Lan Yotar's eyes following his.

The Wall of the Planets was so called because it pictured that solar system known to its inhabitants as the Confederated Planets of Norga. One entire wall of the Council Chamber in the Hall of the Rulers was constructed of slabs of lapis lazuli, so cunningly joined that they presented the appearance of an unbroken whole. In the center shone a huge disc of gold, representing Norga, the sun of the Norgan solar system. Grouped around it at the proper intervals were other discs symbolic of the system's eleven planets. Yula, the planet nearest Norga, was a solid circle of onyx,

the black color indicating mystery, as it was too close to their sun to permit exploration; Heta, consisting mostly of water, was a disc of shimmering silver; Mira, from which the system derived most of its minerals, was cleverly worked in seven different metals, while the remaining planets were also fashioned to symbolize their main features.

But it was the disc representing Rona that held their eyes. A single piece of pale green jade, marked with little squares of emeralds for the cultivated fields and small circles of sapphires for the freshwater lakes.

"An appropriate color for the planet that supplies over half the system's food," murmured Lan Yotar. "The latest jest is that the Ronans are afraid of turning over in bed for fear of crushing a vegetable!"

"I doubt if there's a square inch of available soil not under cultivation," assented Tir Latoka. "It is not for nothing Rona is known as 'The Food Planet'."

"Which brings us back to this report," continued the Chief. "Tell me, do you consider Nol Kosar an alarmist?"

"Far from it, Excellency," was the ready reply. "He is very clear-headed and reliable, which is why I picked him as Scientist of our most important planet. I added no comments to his report before passing it on to you, as I considered none necessary."

"HMMMMM!" The Chief gazed reflectively at the report, reading parts of it aloud. "Interior heat definitely increasing—underground caverns possibly collapsed, letting inflammable gases into molten core—possible now to grow tropical fruits in temperate zones—seismologists report faint tremors—"

Tossing the report aside, Lan Yotar abruptly asked the question Tir Latoka had been anticipating: "What have you advised him to do?"

"The ancient steam-boiler was equipped with a safety valve to prevent it exploding from too great internal pressure," replied the Chief Scientist. "I advised Nol Kosar to suggest to the Ruler that a vent be bored in the crater of the extinct volcano near Sadri. It is the least fruitful part of Rona, and precautions can be taken to prevent the possible flow of—"

He was cut short by a hideous noise. There was a set of loudspeakers on the

etheradio cabinet by the Chief's desk and it was from one of these, colored a significant red for danger, that the harsh wailing was emanating.

The two men exchanged startled looks and their lips moved. Neither could hear what the other was saying, but their words were identical:

"The Emergency Call!"

THE Emergency Call had been instituted over two thousand years ago, after a disastrous invasion of the system by beings from some unknown part of space. Installed in all important etheradio stations, it was to be used only in cases of extreme urgency, and at its call all government officials were to drop everything and repair to the nearest etheradio for instructions. In the two thousand years it had been in effect it had sounded only three times, apart from the regular tests: once when a giant meteor had threatened the system with destruction, once when the unknown invaders had attempted a second attack, and once when miners on Mira had drilled into an inner world inhabited by creatures with hypnotic powers that threatened to enslave the planet.

The harsh wailing rose to an earsplitting crescendo, then died away, leaving them listening tensely for the announcement. It came, shorn of the customary formal modes of speech used in official reports:

"Set Gori, Ruler of Rona, here! Three volcanic eruptions on Rona! Violent earthquakes in other regions! Entire planet threatened with destruction! Am evacuating all people we have room for in our space-ships! Send help immediately! Over."

There was hardly a pause before the Chief of the Council of Elders began issuing orders: "Lan Yotar here! Set Gori, concentrate the rest of your people in the nearest cities. Ros Vinla, are you listening?"

"Here!" came the voice of the Commander of the Norgan Spacefleet.

"Rush the fleet to Rona and evacuate all people. Over!"

"All Leaders of Spacefleet Squadrons, listen: Squadron I, proceed to Center City; Squadron II, proceed to Forel; Squadron III—"

Lan Yotar snapped off the etheradio and rose. "That's all we can do here. Come!"

Followed by the Chief Scientist, he hastened out of the Council Chamber and down the broad corridor. Descending the steps to the landing field, he was just in time to see his private spacecar swoop down in its allotted place. His pilot had heard the Emergency Call and knew he would be needed. Another spacecar landed close by and Var Dalum, the Chief Scribe, hastily joined them.

"You're going to Rona?" he asked breathlessly.

"Yes. Come with us," said the Council Chief.

The airlock had hardly settled in its socket before the pilot took off and the little craft zoomed up at a steep slant. The blue sky gradually darkened and soon they were in the dead black of interplanetary space, heading straight for the afflicted planet.

"Rona, of all planets!" whispered the Chief Scribe. "What shall we do for food?"

The Chief Scientist shook his head. "Let's not despair till we know the worst," he replied.

After that, silence reigned. The pilot concentrated on getting every ounce of power out of his jets. Lan Yotar sat staring straight ahead, his lips compressed, his arms folded. The two other officials gazed through the transparent sidepanels, now and again sliding the telescopic lenses into them to observe a Squadron of the Spacefleet hastening towards their common destination.

"Surely we should see Rona by now," murmured Var Dalum.

"We should," assented Tir Latoka grimly. "And since there's obviously such a pall of smoke over it that we can't, the situation doesn't look any too good."

The etheradio had been silent, as it was a strict rule that only highly necessary messages be broadcast during an emergency. It now gave voice, unconsciously confirming the Chief Scientist's words.

"Ros Vinla here! All incoming Squadrons exercise extreme care in landing; visibility practically nil, owing to smoke. Alter your course to nearest clear space and come in under smoke. Squadron IV, join Squadron VII; your objective has been destroyed. That is all."

"There's Sita," remarked the pilot, nam-

ing one of Rona's three moons. "Once we pass her—"

In a few moments the spacecar had passed the satellite, and an involuntary groan burst from them all. The planet was a horror. Mile upon square mile, formerly consisting of green fields and bulging granaries, was now a seething mass of molten lava; lakes were rapidly disappearing in clouds of superheated steam. Over all hovered dense masses of black smoke and volcanic ash, blowing aside now and then to reveal the terrible scene beneath.

"Hold it here, pilot," instructed the Chief, then spoke into the etheradio. "Lan Yotar here! My spacecar will stay by Sita till further notice. The Chief Scientist and Chief Scribe are with me. Communicate only when urgent. Ros Vinla, report to me when evacuation is accomplished. That is all."

"I hear and obey," answered Ros Vinla.

For hours that seemed years, the four men sat watching the scene of destruction through the telescopic lenses. Below them, spaceships of every size and description plunged into the chaos and rose again with survivors, hastening to land them on Mira, which was nearest, and returning to pick up more unfortunates from such parts of Rona as were not yet covered with lava or engulfed by earthquakes. Orderly Squadrons of the Spacefleet arrived from their respective planets, landed at their objectives, and took off with full loads of frantic Ronans. Freighters and private craft, including spacecars no larger than the Chief's, moved here and there, singly and in groups, darting in when they saw a chance and saving hundreds of thousands of lives.

Finally Ros Vinla's voice sounded again, and by the fact that he had reverted to official phraseology, all knew that the emergency had passed:

"Greeting from Ros Vinla, Commander of the Norgan Spacefleet, to Lan Yotar, Chief of the Council of Elders. Peace be with you. Evacuation accomplished. That is all."

FOR a day and a half the full government of the Confederated Planets of Norga had sat in an Emergency Session. Decision after decision, concerning the welfare and temporary disposal of the Ronans

had been proposed, voted on and passed or amended.

At last they could concentrate on the problem that had been constantly in their minds since Rona had turned from a green and smiling planet to a hideous mass of glowing lava. Appropriately enough, it was Set Gori, the elected Ruler of Rona, who first brought it up for official debate. A tall and handsome figure, still wearing bandages over the burns sustained when he insisted on remaining at his post to the last, he rose and was granted permission to speak.

"Elders and Rulers," he said. "As we all know, Rona supplied 56% of the food needed by our system. Rona is destroyed. What shall we do for food?"

He sat down abruptly, whereon the Chief Scientist rose and, at a nod of assent from the Chief Scribe, replied.

"Our unfortunate friend from Rona has put the matter in a nutshell. I will answer as briefly: I have spent all day yesterday in conference with my brother scientists, and we all agree there is only one solution. As the Norgan solar system cannot supply sufficient food for its inhabitants, we must look outside the system for a source of supply.

"I move an expedition be sent into space to find an available planet suitable for our purpose."

"I second the motion," said the Chief Astronomer.

"All in favor—?" came the Chief's deep voice.

A forest of hands shot up.

"Carried unanimously!"

The eleven members of the Council of Elders and the Chief Scribe conferred briefly, whereafter the Chief Scribe spoke into a recorder. When he was through, a junior Scribe took the plastic ribbon from the machine and inserted it in a loud-speaker, that the governing body might hear and approve the details before it was made law:

"Decision 14 of the Council of Elders, given on the second day of the Emergency Session, Year 3749 since the Confederation of the Planets of Norga.

"Let this be known as our Decision:

"That a suitable spaceship be constructed for the purpose of exploring such solar systems as are within reasonable range,

and that it be equipped with all the scientific instruments necessary for that purpose.

"That Ros Vinla, Commander of the Spacefleet of Norga, be in command of this expedition and duly authorized to pick his own crew of scientists, navigators, technicians, scouts or any other persons he deems necessary to the fulfilment of his mission.

"That his mission shall be to find and report on any planets that might be suitable for either or both of the following purposes: firstly, to supply us with food; secondly, to provide living space for our surplus population. He will, of course, bear in mind that the rights of the inhabitants of these planets must be fully respected, means of communication must be found and friendly relations established. He will send daily reports by etheradio to the Chief Scribe.

"The Commander will in all cases await the sanction of the Council of Elders before taking any decisive steps, save in cases of extreme emergency, such as a surprise attack by hostile natives."

"Commander Ros Vinla, you have heard the Council's Decision?"

In the section reserved for the high officials of the government, a tall, spare man in early middle-age rose to his feet. He wore the dark blue undress uniform of the Norgan Spacefleet, his rank indicated by a golden sun and circle on the chest.

"I hear and obey," he replied, in a dry, precise voice.

IN THE Chief Scribe's office, Lan Yotar paced restlessly to and fro, watched sympathetically by Var Dalum.

"Why not sit down and relax, Lan Yotar?" he suggested mildly. "A glass of wine?"

With a sigh the Chief of the Council of Elders sank into a padded chair. "Thank you," he answered. "This tension is rather hard on me. I suppose I am getting old," he added wistfully.

"You are only a hundred and eighty-six," smiled the Chief Scribe. "That might have been considered old five or six generations ago, but our life expectancy is increasing so rapidly I think you can safely count on another century, at least."

Lan Yotar paid but scant attention to

the comforting words, his thoughts far away in space. "Isn't it soon time for the Commander's daily report?" he asked. "If System A93 contains no suitable planets—" He stopped with a sigh.

"Yes, I know," murmured Var Dalum. "I newscasted a resume of the whole situation this morning, so the people will be prepared if the Commander's report to-night is negative."

"I didn't hear it. Will you read it to me?"

Pulling a tablet from a rack, the Chief Scribe commenced reading.

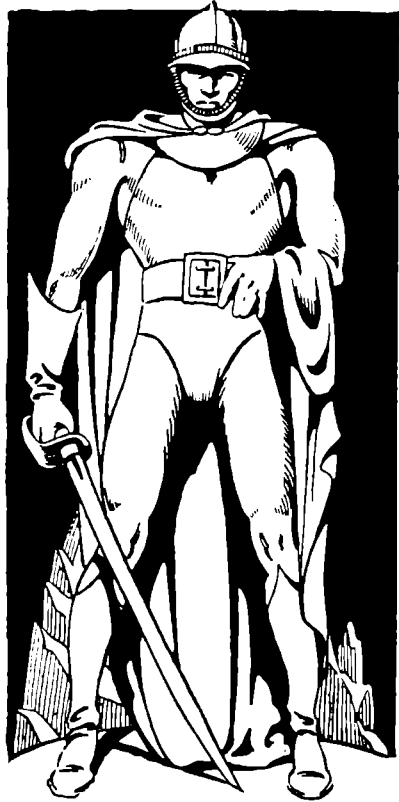
"It is now almost four years since Commander Ros Vinla set out to discover a planet or planets in some other solar system that would relieve the food shortage and lack of living space now prevailing here.

"In that time the spaceship 'Norga II' has visited eleven solar systems and reported on one hundred and thirty-nine planets. Of the latter, one hundred and three are uninhabited and unsuitable for colonization; nineteen can be made suitable and we have already dispatched colonists to twelve of them. It will, however, be several years before they can produce food to any practical amount. Of the remaining seventeen, nine are inhabited by beings in a primitive stage of development, who are at present hostile; we are endeavoring to establish friendly relations with them, but, owing to their low mentality, progress will doubtless be slow. The remaining eight are inhabited by beings similar to us and friendly relations have been established. Unfortunately, they have very little living space and food to spare; certainly not enough to be of any practical help to us at present.

"Ten days ago the 'Norga II' entered the solar system marked on your space-charts as System A93. This consists of a sun and nine planets. Only three of these are inhabited. One of these is a dying planet, arid and thin-aired, and it can barely support its own rapidly diminishing population. The second is too watery to support any life except the amphibious creatures native to it. The third is the one Commander Ros Vinla will report on to-night.

"It is with regret I warn you that, should this planet prove unsuitable for our

purpose, the 'Norga II' will have to return to Norga immediately. The Commander has informed me he has barely sufficient supplies to last him the return trip. After that, time must be spent outfitting the expedition for another trip, time we can ill afford. Furthermore, this expedition having covered all space nearest Norga, the second trip will require much more time to reach unexplored space and will also be unable to cover so large a territory. We can only hope and pray that his next and final report will be one of success."



VAR DALUM replaced the tablet in the rack and for a while neither spoke. Finally Lan Yotar broke the silence.

"We have already started preparations for his next trip," he said. "New space-charts of the—"

A shrill buzzing interrupted him and a green light flashed on the intercommunicator. Val Darum sprang up and pressed a button. "Val Darum here."

"Commander Ros Vinla reporting," came the voice of the etheradio operator on duty.

"Switch him through," directed the Chief Scribe eagerly.

The Commander's voice came over the set. "Greeting from Ros Vinla, Commander of the Norgan Spacefleet, to Val Darum, Chief Scribe of the Rulers of Norga," he began formally. "Peace be with you. Will you arrange to have the Elders listen to this report, as my next action calls for their sanction."

LAN YOTAR leaned forward and pressed the button that switched the Commander through to the various members of the Council of Elders, all of whom were waiting beside their etheradio sets in their homes.

"Greeting from Lan Yotar, Chief of the Council of Elders, to Ros Vinla, Commander of the Norgan Spacefleet," he said. "Peace be with you. Communication has been established as you requested. Proceed."

"Report on Planet No. 3 of System A93," continued the Commander. "This planet is almost an exact replica of the Planet Rona in our own system. It is slightly larger, but the air, water, vegetation, gravity even the domestic animals, are similar to those of Rona. The human beings inhabiting this planet are exact counterparts of ourselves—physically. Mentally, they differ vastly.

"As usual, I sent one scout to make a preliminary survey. He returned with a tale so shocking and unbelievable that I sent two other scouts to check his statements. I took the added precaution of issuing them rayguns, as they would probably have been attacked by these insensate killers had their inviso-armor failed and their presence been discovered. Their reports were similar to that of my first scout, as follows:

"As I said before, these beings are like us physically, save that instead of being all fair-skinned, there are many whose skin is yellow, brown or black, these forming separate races. These races are, in turn, divided into nations. These nations," here the Commander spoke slowly and with great emphasis, "are constantly warring among themselves. In the entire history of this planet, which we learned by selective telepathy, there has never been a time when nation has not been fighting against na-

tion, and often one section of a nation against another.

"This planet is ideally equipped by nature. There is an abundance of vegetation, minerals, domestic animals and all other necessities of life, while the undoubted ingenuity of the inhabitants has evolved many luxuries. Unfortunately, these beings have so strange and perverted a mentality that most of their efforts are devoted to inventing and manufacturing new and terrible methods and engines of destruction.

"The reasons for these constant wars are so absurd and inconsistent that it is difficult to conceive how any sane mind could put them forth or accept them. For example, they have many religions, most of them divided and subdivided into innumerable sects. In time past, fierce and bloody wars have been brought about by the followers of one religion trying to force their faith on the followers of another. Even the sects of one religion would fight among themselves, each claiming to be the only true interpreter of that particular faith.

"Lately they have found other excuses for wars, even more discreditable. Where they used to fight for what passed as spiritual and idealistic causes, they now fight for mere materialistic gain and temporal power, cloaking them under ridiculously flimsy pretexts. One ruler, for example, declared he was forced to make war to obtain living space for his expanding population, at the same time offering rewards and honors to the parents who raised the largest families! A favorite excuse for war is for some large nation to invade and take over a small nation on the pretext that they are protecting it against attack by some other large nation.

"Treaties, pledges and promises mean nothing to these beings, who seem lost to all sense of honor. Indeed, one ruler's first step in any war was to sign a non-aggression pact with his intended victim. Hypocrisy is rampant on this wretched planet. One large empire proclaimed itself defender of the rights of small nations, but stood calmly by while several small nations were conquered, taking no steps against the aggressor until her own interests were threatened.

"Their methods of warfare are indescribably cruel and savage. All nations indulge in the bombing of large populated

centres, killing men, women and children indiscriminately. Some of the more debased nations even torture to death their prisoners of war.

"At present they have just finished a great war, which they call World War II. Signs are not wanting that the victors are about to quarrel over the spoils, which will result in a war that will stagger the imagination. It is my respectful suggestion that we take over the planet before this calamity occurs. Report ends."

"God of Nature! Is it possible that such beings are permitted to exist!" exclaimed Lan Yotar. "Summon the Elders, Var Dalum."

THE Chief Scribe flicked a switch and a large televisoscreen began to glow. It was divided in ten sections, and in each section appeared the face of an Elder.

"Elders of Norga," said Lan Yotar, "you have heard the report of Commander Ros Vinla?"

"We have," replied the Elders.

"What is your pleasure as regards his suggestion?"

"I move that the Commander be ordered to exterminate the race of wicked madmen who inhabit Planet No. 3 in System A93, and that he take over the said planet in the name of the Confederated Planets of Norga," said an Elder.

"I second the motion," promptly spoke up another.

"Moved by Nov Cherga, seconded by Sah Lovit, that Planet No. 3 in System A93 be taken over by the Confederated Planets of Norga, and the beings inhabiting it be destroyed. All in favor signify in the usual manner." The televisoscreen showed ten right hands raised in assent.

"Commander Ros Vinla."

"Here."

"You have heard the motion. Can you carry out the destruction of the human beings on this planet without harming the lower animals?"

"The vibratensor should do that. It creates a sound wave of such tremendous pitch that a human brain is paralyzed by it, but it is beyond the sound range of the more primitive brain structures."

"Is it painless?" asked Lan Yotar anxiously.

"It causes a few seconds of intense agony just before death occurs," answered the Commander. "May I suggest that, while it is against our law to inflict pain, it is only right and just that these beings should experience a little of the pain they are so willing to inflict on each other."

"The Chief Scribe will put the motion in the form of a Decision," decreed Lan Yotar.

Var Dalum wrote busily for a while, then rose and handed his tablet to the Chief of the Council of Elders, who read it through, sighed regretfully, then read it aloud.

"Decision 14A of the Council of Elders, being an amendment to Decision 14 of the Council of Elders, during the Session of Rulers in the Year 3749 after the Confederation of the Planets of Norga.

"Let this be known as our Decision:

"That Ros Vinla, Commander of the Spacefleet of Norga, totally exterminate the beings, saving and except the lower animals, that inhabit Planet No. 3 in System A93, and take over the said planet in the name of the Confederated Planets of Norga.

"Commander Ros Vinla, you have heard the Decision?"

"I hear and obey."

Unbroken silence reigned in the Chief Scribe's office. Lan Yotar sat with his face in his hands, his lips murmuring soundless prayers to the God of Nature. The faces of the ten Elders, reflected in the televisoscreen, were grave and sad. Even the usually imperturbable Chief Scribe fidgeted nervously with his tablets and from time to time glanced impatiently at the intercommunicator.

At last the signal showed the Commander was ready to report.

"Var Dalum," said the Chief Scribe huskily.

"Greeting from Ros Vinla, Commander of the Spacefleet of Norga, to Var Dalum, Chief Scribe of the Rulers of Norga," came the Commander's emotionless voice. "Peace be with you. Decision 14A carried out.

"That is all."