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# death for a hunter

by MICHAEL SHAARA

All night long the two of them dragged on into the north, Nielson following, calmly, steadily, relentless.

NIELSON sat within a bush out of sight, his head bent low and his eyes closed. A few feet behind his back the forest opened onto a wide stream, and on the other side of the stream was a steep bare rise which flattened out at the top into a small plateau. There were several men on the plateau. If Nielson had looked he would have seen them, sitting among the rocks at the top. He did not look but he knew they were there. On the other side of the forest there were more men coming toward him. They were firing into the woods as they came and occasionally he could hear the vicious snaps and hisses of their guns. It was late afternoon. Nielson raised half-closed eyes to squint at the sky. No sign of rain. All day long he had hoped for rain. Still, it was already late afternoon and if the men coming toward him were cautious enough they might not get to him before the sun went down. He rested his head on his chest, breathing slowly and heavily. For three days he had not eat-

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*Were the Morgans intelligent? Michael Shaara, author of CONQUEST OVER TIME (Fantastic Universe, Nov. 1956), returns with this novelet of the problem faced by Nielson as he began to wonder about these beings that he had killed because man needed the planet's living space.*

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en, because he had not had time to stop and get something. He was also very thirsty. He thought of the stream a few feet away, the dust in his throat, the streaked caked dirt on his face. Briefly he thought of what it would be like to go swimming. But the thought did not last. He was very tired. He wondered if he went to sleep in the bush here they might just possibly pass him by. And then he would awake in the middle of the night, the dark lovely night with stars shining down through the trees, and all alone he would be, and then he would go swimming in the river...

The old man sat on a rock at the top of the plateau, staring down into the forest. He was sitting cross-legged with a rifle in his lap and a small radio by his side. From time to time he spoke into the radio, or heard men speak from it, but mostly he spent the time looking from his watch to the sun to the forest below. Near him on the ground sat a much younger man, a psychiatrist dressed in street clothes. This man was very nervous.

"How much light is there?" he asked.

"About an hour and a half."

"It'll be close. What if you don't get him before night?"

"Then we light up the

woods as well as we can and sit it out until morning."

"No chance at all of him giving up?"

The old man shrugged.

"Take it easy. I told everybody to take him alive if they could. But don't expect anything."

"Three years," the psychiatrist grumbled. "Three years of hunting to get one man."

"It's a big continent," the old man said calmly. "And he is after all a professional."

"You said it."

"Nobody but a professional could have gone on this long. Even so, after a while you get superstitious. He kills too damn quietly. There is an art to killing quietly."

"But he is only one man."

"True." The old man looked up at him intently. "But a man can be a remarkable thing."

They sat for a moment quietly in the sun.

"You were going to tell me something about what happened," the psychiatrist said.

"I was considering it," the old man said.

The psychiatrist took out a small black notebook.

"You are the only one who knew him. I can't understand why you won't..."

"Well," the old man said softly, his head bent low, wearily, as if he was looking down into himself, "I guess I might just as well." He clicked the bolt on his rifle once viciously, although his

face was expressionless.

"I guess I really might just as well," he said.

Well now it is a very odd story (the old man said), very odd and very bloody. In the course of it twenty eight men have been destroyed and pretty soon now there will be a twenty ninth. Nielson. This afternoon. And if it ends here with him dead we will never know truly where it began. But I can give you a certain few facts and then you can make up your own mind.

Nielson was a professional hunter, a guide. Roughly you know the type of man, a planet-hopper. He came here for a very odd reason one day, came off a rocket one very hot day three years ago, and was introduced to me by Director Maas. Maas said to issue him a permit to hunt. He said Mr. Nielson was interested in Morgan's wildlife and was willing to do some Game Control work for us for free. He was willing to kill Morgans for free.

Now right away you see that is odd, because if you know professional hunters at all you know they do not kill game for free. They look upon Game Control as a dirty business a man must take from time to time to make a little money. But they will not ever kill out of curiosity. So that is the first oddness.

And second, if you knew Maas you would know also

that it was very unlike him to give Nielson a permit to stay on Morgan. Because the permit was illegal, and Maas was a very legal man. Visitors are not allowed on a planet until it is open for colonization. Especially visitors whose sole reason is curiosity. Yet Albert Maas, a serious virtuous man who never did things without a reason, handed Nielson a permit the moment he asked for it. A small thing, you say. True. And at the time I never questioned it, for Maas was genial and friendly, and this Joe Nielson was an ominous man.

You have never seen him?

Well he was a Swede, you know, built thick all the way down like the bole of a tree. A huge man. Round stomach as a wind reserve and heavy tubular thighs built up by walking many hundred miles. Strange shape for a woodsman, not slinky at all, more like a great blunt bomb. Blond hair, bullet head close-cropped, and in the Swede blood somewhere something dark, with the eyes coal black. Muscular out of proportion, the kind of man that when he moved suddenly made you jump in spite of yourself. And yet, for all the steely mean look of him a cheerful man and after all only a boy. Rosy faced and clean. Not yet thirty. A very strange mixture, part young, part old, part giant, part boy. Part savage.

And he came to Morgan at

a savage time. The planet had just been discovered and we were busy building the first city so the colonists could move in, and but for the city the whole world was raw and wide. The only humans on the planet were the construction crew and one or two scientific teams and another hunter named Wolke. It was a fine free time, a youthful time, because the world was new and had plenty of fresh living space and we needed that space badly...

But about Nielson. Maas asked me to fly him out to where the other hunter, Wolke, was, somewhere out across half a continent, hunting down the Morgans. I did. When we got to the camp he armed himself and went immediately into the woods. He went in blind, not knowing the land, not knowing where Wolke was, not knowing anything at all about the Morgans except that they were lean and ape-like and could tear your head off with a rock at fifty feet. Foolish? Who knows. He was a professional and a man of pride. He had no fear of anything sneaking up on him, not on *him*, and watching him move that afternoon. I had no fear of it either. He went into the tall grass and was gone, totally gone, that huge bulk of man and rifle all gone, and not a grass quivered or a twig snapped, and in the trees

around him even the birds continued to sing.

The old man broke off and sat for a moment quietly. The psychiatrist did not know where this was heading but he had a hunch that if he was careful he might hear more than he had come for. Much more. He waited. After a while the old man said:

"What do you know about the Morgans?"

"Nothing."

"All right. Neither does anyone else. Then for a moment forget Nielson. Consider the Morgans, whom Nielson came to kill. They also have a certain oddness about them.

"They were very clever and swift and very deadly. Altogether I guess there were no more than a few thousand of them on this one continent, but they were Morgan's largest and most dangerous game. Therefore they had to be cleaned out, according to the law, so that the planet would be safe for parks and such, and in the early days we killed them by the hundreds. At the same time they also began to kill us. And the strange thing was that they did not do it like animals, killing us only when we blundered unarmed across their paths, but they began laying in wait for us, hanging around outside our enclosures, and flinging rocks, and for a while we did not go out at all.

"Game Control sent one man down to clean them out and take specimens. This man did very well, captured several and seriously depleted the rest, and then one day they ganged him and we found him headless. His successor was Wolke, but Wolke did not do well at all. For by this time the Morgans had learned to avoid our traps and hide from our guns, and Wolke not only failed to clean them out, but came very close several times to being cleaned out himself. The truth is that Wolke was an amiable man, but no hunter. He was almost a joke. And now we get to the point. For he was also Nielson's friend.

"So there you see why Nielson came, not to kill for fun but to help a friend. Wolke was failing, and if he failed he would get no money and his reputation would suffer and he would get no more guide jobs and would have to leave the woods. And because he was merely an uncomplicated man who hated cities and who also had a wife and two children, he sent out a distress call to the only good hunter he knew who would help him. The only man he knew who loved the open sky as much as he did, the only man who would come. And Nielson came.

"But then why did Maas admit him? Officially, because he was anxious to clean out the Morgans and get the job completed. And yet the truth, at last the truth, is

this: he was more than anxious, he was sincerely worried. He used Nielson's visit to get rid of the Morgans as quickly as possible. For that, you see, is the point on which it all revolves. He thought the Morgans were intelligent."

The psychiatrist stiffened.

"Yes," the old man said, smiling slightly, "that is the real point of it, the question no one ever answered. Not really, not scientifically. The thing was, you see, that the Morgans *couldn't* be intelligent. Morgan was such a beautiful planet, and we needed it so badly, and if the Morgans were intelligent we couldn't have it. And besides, they showed no signs of culture, no tools, no gods, and they did not respond to tests. When we caged them they wouldn't even move, just sat and stared at us and ignored the tests. But they *couldn't* be intelligent. The law says we cannot dispossess an intelligent race, no matter their status, and all that land, all that wild green living room, all that would be lost if one of them, just one of them, passed a single test. So Maas was relieved, we were all relieved, when the psychologist's report proved conclusively that the Morgans were only animals after all."

The psychiatrist was staring, mouth open, pencil poised.

"But what do you..."

"I don't know," the old man

said softly. "Nobody knows. Or will know. But was there, do you think, a little *fixing*? Did someone in authority realize the simple, practical truth quite early, and send down word that the Morgans could not be intelligent? And was there after all really any blame? Here was a home for ten billion people, enough water and iron for centuries, a great stepping stone to the farther stars! Along side this what were the claims of a few thousand naked beasts? Be truthful. Who cares? I do not even care myself."

"But who was the psychologist? You'll have to verify.."

"I make no charges," the old man turned away. "I verify nothing. You wanted the story. I tell it as it was. If there was any point to charges I would have made them by now. But think about it. If the Morgans really were intelligent, who knew? Maas did, and certainly Wolke did, but Nielson didn't. And therefore what happened in the woods that night must have been interesting. Because you see Wolke never said anything. Here was Nielson come across light years to help him, and Wolke never said anything. The job, the money, was too important. And so it goes..."

And the old man stopped his musing and went on with the story, telling it now with his eyes closed as he began to lose himself in it, telling it in great detail and realizing

now that he would have to tell it all, and no longer caring.

That night they decided to move out as soon as possible before too many of the Morgans knew that there was another hunter in the woods. Little Wolke was overjoyed to have Nielson with him and eager now to get a crack at the Morgans on equal terms. When Nielson had found him it was midnight and he was perched in a great tree, petrified, and although Nielson grinned at that, it was unusual and he was naturally curious.

So then Wolke chatted on about how goddam clever the things were, but he left that subject quickly and took up the joking for which he was so well known and liked. They sat for a while talking about the wife and the kids (Wolke's, for Nielson had none), about Nielson's latest clients and which ones he had slept with and how often, and Wolke brought out his latest theory, which was that all the dinosaurs had disappeared so abruptly from Earth long ago because someone, once, had hunted them out. And then they moved out.

Now understand, they were very well equipped, for hunting is now almost a science. They had tight soft clothing which would not scratch on twigs as they moved, and a cream which coated their

bodies and removed their scent so they could not be smelled. They had lenses for night vision and pills for endurance and chemicals which made their nostrils supersensitive. Each carried two guns, a missile firing rifle and an electron handgun. And all this was fine, but what mattered most was that they carried Nielson's skill, that magnificent inborn skill to move very swiftly and be unseen. It comes to few men. He had it as few have had it.

Wolke had located a group of Morgans in a valley to the north. He briefed Nielson carefully on the terrain and then the two of them moved out together.

The way Wolke had chosen to go down into the valley was through a narrow ravine. When they reached the mouth of the ravine they split up, each taking one side, timing themselves to arrive at the end together. It was a fairly cold night in autumn, and very dark, for Morgan has no moon. The stars were clear but unfamiliar, so Nielson had to be very careful about his direction. And so they went down the ravine.

Now here, you see, we have a clue. Why is it Wolke chose such an obvious, incautious way to go down into the valley. That is more than odd. For he had been hunting the Morgans for months now with very little success, yet he apparently had so little respect

for them, for their cunning, that he chose the worst possible way to go in after them. Creeping over the sides of the ravine, over rocks, rifle in hand, separated as they were, what position were they in to fight? Cramped and awkward they must have been, should have known they would be, yet that is the way they went in, and that is where the Morgans ambushed them. Maybe Wolke was so emboldened by Nielson's presence that he became overconfident. Or maybe, and this is likely, he did not want Nielson to see that he had so great a respect for the Morgans, and therefore took the simplest, easiest way down. At any rate there is something about it which looks almost *arranged*, and yet I know Wolke was not a man to commit suicide.

Well, they had been moving down the gorge for half an hour, and they had just crossed a ridge and were on their way down when Nielson became aware of something ahead of him in the woods, something quiet and still, but alive, waiting. He did not see it or hear it or smell it, but he knew it was there. Take that as you will, that is the way he told it. That night he *knew* the thing was in front of him, did not doubt at all, and so he melted down into an alcove between a rock and a bush and waited without moving.

He was sure the thing was



large and dangerous, because in the past these were the things his sense had warned him about. He was also sure that it knew he was there. Then just faintly he heard the thing moving in the leaves, shifting its position. He could not hear any breathing but he began to be certain the thing was a Morgan. For a while he thought it was sleeping and was about to move toward it when he heard something else moving above, another one, and then all at once he realized that there were a great many of them all around him in among the bushes and the trees, spread out and waiting. It was possible that they already knew where he was so he began to move. There was nowhere to go but down, and in the bottom of the gorge there was no cover. He stopped at the edge of the bushes, trying to think his way out, beginning now to understand that the position was very bad.

He could not be sure whether or not to warn Wolke, to make a noise, because more of them were probably on the other side of the gorge, or maybe Wolke already knew, and maybe the ones above had not yet spotted him. But then in the next moment it made no difference. Out of the night across the gorge came a loud cracking squishing sound. Then there was suddenly a great threshing in the leaves, and a terri-

ble victorious inhuman scream from above, and Nielson knew that Wolke had been hit by a rock, and then he heard the ones above him beginning to move down toward him, moving without caution or cries, tearing through the bush and leaping to the place where Wolke lay. Instantly Nielson lay down his rifle and drew his pistol and knife and crouched with both hands ready for close action, tensed and huge and vicious, overwhelmingly ready to kill—but then he heard them running down the gorge and past him, up the other side, seven or eight of them, and they had not known where he was after all.

But now they were going to Wolke, who might still be alive, to make sure that he died where he lay. And then all this in an instant: knowing he could escape now easily back up the ravine, knowing that there were at least a dozen of them ahead, knowing that Wolke was probably already dead or at the very least would die before he could fight them off and get him back across half a continent to the settlement, still Nielson leapt out of the spot where he crouched and screamed his own human scream that made the one Morgan who crouched over Wolke leap up in surprise; and then he flew straight up the side of the gorge, roared like a great black eagle

through bushes and over rocks to the spot where Wolke lay, knife in one hand and pistol in the other, lips drawn back like an ape, enormous body of flying steel running into and over one lone stunned Morgan, bursting through a thicket and snapping off dead tree limbs with his head and shoulders, moving all in one frantic moment to the leafy hollow where Wolke was hit, arriving before the one Morgan there knew what had happened, killing that one on the spot, to whirl then and crouch and wait for the others.

Then they should have rushed him, of course, or at the very least turned their rocks on him, but here again now the likely did not happen. In the dark they were none of them sure just who or how many had come. But they had seen the flash of his gun and one or two had seen the huge hurtling form of him, and so they were cautious now and sank into the bush and waited.

Therefore Nielson had time to pull Wolke into close cover, and also to cool his rage enough to think and let his senses tell him where the Morgans were. As it turned out, he was very lucky. What worried the Morgans most was that they knew their sense of smell was no good in hunting humans, and now they were not sure how many had come, or how many more might be coming. So now they were worried about being trapped themselves in the

gorge. And then Nielson saw one and killed him with a silent crimson flash from the pistol, and that made up the minds of the others. Most of them slipped quietly away, thinking by now no doubt simply of self preservation, because there not many of them left, at this point only fifteen or twenty on the whole continent. But still two remained, one on the rise above Nielson and the other on a level with him across the ravine. These two remained, while the others left. Were they more bitter, these two, for private reasons, or simply more stubborn and courageous? No matter, but it was unusual, and when Nielson had time he would think about it. Would two wolves remain, if the rest left?

Now it was silent again and Nielson moved quickly to do what could be done for Wolke, and the same time watched and listened for the two Morgans. Wolke was not yet dead and his eyes were open, but the back of his head was crushed and he could not see. He was trying to say something and Nielson bent over to listen, because Wolke was going to live no more than a few minutes. But the little man's voice was inaudible. Then the Morgans began throwing rocks. From minute to minute, with terrible unseen violence, a sharp stone would rip the air around them, to tear with mortal rage through the

leaves, to shatter on a boulder and plough deep into a tree. Then the Morgan above, seeing that Nielson was well-hidden, began craftily to lob bigger rocks down, heavy jagged rocks, heaving them into the air on a high trajectory like a mortar shell, so that they came down on Nielson and Wolke directly from above. Immediately that was very bad, and so Nielson turned and concentrated his attention uphill, periously ignoring the one across the way, and when the Morgan above heaved up another rock his long arm was briefly visible, flung out above the cliff like a snake, and Nielson shot it off.

Then there was only the other one across the way, the last helpless, mad, indomitable savage who still would not move, who waited until the dawn flinging rocks with a desperate, increasing frenzy. But now Nielson was safe and knew it, and turned his attention to Wolke.

By that time, however, Wolke was dead. He bled to death at approximately the same time as the Morgan in the rocks above, like the Morgan, a creature hunted in the dark.

And so Nielson passed the night with Wolke soft and silent on the ground beside him. You wonder, don't you, what he thought of the Morgans then. And shortly before dawn the last Morgan

left, for unlike Nielson he could not slip the night lenses from his eyes and see just as well, or better, in the daylight, and therefore even this last stubborn one saw that he was exposed and had to leave. When he was gone Nielson knew it, but remained where he was until the sun was fully up. Then he picked up little Wolke and set him gently across his shoulders, went down into the gorge and retrieved his rifle from where he had left it, and walked back to the camp.

The sun had lowered and the old man had gone into shadow, so he shifted himself into the light. The psychologist continued to stare at him without moving.

"If you had known Wolke—" the old man stopped and shrugged, then looked at his watch. There was now about an hour until sundown.

"We had better get on," he said, now somewhat wearily. "Now I will have to tell you about Maas."

"But—"

"All right, I am no storyteller. But you see Maas is the next important thing, not Nielson. Eventually you will learn about Nielson. Don't get the idea—I see you already have it—that Maas is the villain of the piece. No, not any more than that this is the story of a noble wild man betrayed by a city slicker. Maas was a genuinely worthwhile man. For what he

did no doubt he suffered, but still, he believed he was right. That's what makes it so difficult to judge, to understand.

"Maas, you see, was a man of substantial family and education, of all the best schools, the best breeding, the best of everything. And he turned out the way men like that rarely do, a really sincere idealist. He believed in Man, in the dignity and future of Man, with something like a small boy's faith. Perhaps he substituted Man for God. At any rate he made his faith evident in his speeches and his behavior, and men found him an exceptionally good man to work for, even though he was very handsome and suave and clean cut. For cynical men he had a charm. They followed him in his great desire to conquer all the planets for Man, to reach the farther stars, not because they also believed, but because they would have liked to believe, and at any rate it was inspiring to be believed in. So Maas was a very effective man, a comer. He gained his directorship while quite young, and so came to Morgan, and so set in motion, because of his great faith, the dark damned flow which was to destroy Nielson.

"Yet blame? Where is there blame? Here was a man, Maas, who believed that Man was the purpose of the universe, that he would was born to reach out ever further and

eventually, perhaps, to transmit himself into a finer, nobler thing. And then, of course, keeping this philosophy in mind, you can see how he must have looked upon the Morgans. How easy it would have been for Maas, how right for him in the long run, to overlook a report on the Morgans. Not really falsify, perhaps just not press it, just approve it when it had been thorough—for let us remember that the Morgans paid no attention to tests. And then, did it bother him, Maas, that he had done it? Did it weigh with him at all? Where really was the wrong in it? I mean ultimately, from the viewpoint of a thousand years?"

"And Nielson," the psychologist said. "I begin to see. Nielson was at the other extreme. 'I think I could go live with the animals, they are so clean and pure', that sort of thing?"

"No. Not at all. I told you this was not the story of a noble savage. Exactly what Nielson was I am not sure, but he was not simply a nature lover, nor a man-hater either. Even when you know the whole thing you may not be able to classify. Always behind it there is some dark point that eludes you...but we had better get on."

When Nielson came back with dead Wolke over his shoulder no doubt it was with

certain questions in his mind. be sure. And anyway he could do nothing immediately, for there remained the question of Wolke's wife and her two children. Wolke had no insurance, being a professional hunter, and nothing in the bank. What money Jen Wolke had, was barely enough to get her back to Earth. The end was automatically that Nielson had to go back into the woods. Killing the last of of the Morgans would complete Wolk's contract and earn a few thousand, and also, perhaps, there was for Nielson some primitive debt of honor besides. Yet the end was that he who had come here to help through killing was forced, almost, impelled, you see, to go on helping, and at the same time, killing and so forged on to the last inevitable moment.

Well then, shortly after Wolke was in the ground Nielson came to ask me for a look at the captured Morgans. I was happy to allow it and went along with him, and oddly enough, we were not at the tank very long before Director Maas came in behind us and stood in the doorway watching.

Now here is the scene. In the Bio tank were eleven Morgans, seven male, four female. The Bio tank was a huge steel affair with plastic windows, standardized model built to hold any game yet known, with pressure, atmos-

phere, temperature all carefully controlled from the outside. The windows were one-way, you could see in without the things inside seeing out, and that was Nielson's first real sight of the Morgans.

Eleven of them sitting in the tank together, close together, not moving, not scratching or picking at themselves, not even sleeping or resting. Just sitting. Sitting and waiting, all of them, arms folded in various positions and eyes partly closed, statuesque, alien even in the setting of their natural bushes and trees. Occasionally one would stretch slightly and a weird ripple would flip down its body, but otherwise there was no movement at all. And even at rest like that, perhaps because of it, they were distinctly ominous. The least of them was seven feet tall. They weighed an average of two hundred pounds, lean and whiplike with grey fur all over them. Short fur, silvery in the light. Their arms were long and out of proportion and three-jointed, which was the only fundamental difference between their body structure and ours. Their faces were flat nosed and round, the fur on their heads was no longer or different than the rest of their hair, and of course they had no eyebrows or hairline. But what you noticed most, after the long flowing arms, was

the eyes. Set deep in the silvery fur like black rubber balls, no pupil, just wide solid balls. A long time after you left you could see those eyes.

When Nielson turned from looking at them I saw he was smiling. Then he saw Maas and he broke into a broad grin. Maas curious and perhaps now even a little worried, and Neilson beginning to understand and also beginning to wonder now whether or not this was intentional. And so going directly to the point.

"Where do they rate on the intelligence scale?" he said, gesturing at the Morgans and still grinning.

"Higher than most animals," Maas said cheerfully, although he should have known Nielson had some professional knowledge of animal intelligence, and then he was somewhat surprised when Nielson wanted the exact figure, but said still smiling that it wasn't very high, approximately level with that of a dog.

And then, as I recall, Nielson did not say anything, but just looked at him for a moment, and then back at the unseeing, unmoving Morgans. I think he began to wonder then for the first time seriously if someone here was trying to put something over on him, and wondered also at the same time if he should say anything about it, and was possibly perhaps unable

to keep himself from letting this character know that they might be kidding each other, but they weren't kidding him, because then he said:

"Somebody's been kidding you."

And he turned away, but Maas was not smiling then and stopped him.

"Why what do you mean?" Good old shocked puzzled Maas, and then Nielson also was not smiling, and said:

"They're a hell of a lot smarter than dogs." And Maas said:

"You think there's been some mistake?" And Neilson said:

"Can't you tell just by looking at them? And Maas, recovering himself a bit, said now more suavely:

"No, I confess I cannot. But then, I don't have your natural sensitivity to animals."

So Nielson shrugged and was mute, annoyed with himself for having brought up the obvious and become involved in it, and glanced at me, wishing for me to say something. But I, until that moment, hadn't ever thought about it and was useless. So Maas again smiled.

"The man who examined them was quite reputable, Mr. Nielson," to which Nielson said stiffly, "Don't worry about it. Forget I said anything." And Nielson turned to go, but Maas said: "But this is a very serious busi-

ness—" to which Nielson replied: "Not to me it isn't. Just so long as it's legal, that's all."

At which point, with a slight nod to me, he went out the door and away, leaving Maas standing there somewhat stunned with one hand outstretched and groping like a man playing a piano in the dark.

"Well," he said eventually, "now what do you make of that?" wondering, no doubt, just how much I really did make of it.

But I, fumbling, turned to look at the Morgans, not doubting Maas yet you see, but doubting Nielson certainly, until I looked in and saw the black rubber eyes, looked into the eyes, and so began the doubt which has lasted until this day.

Maas said then, feeling his way—because actually you know he had not been very bright about this—that he knew there were rumors going around, but he had paid them no attention because everyone knew how reports of animals were exaggerated, how just normal cleverness in an animal often seems remarkable. And besides, there was the psychologist's report, and the psychologist was a reputable man.

He was testing me, you see, and then he looked at me and was intelligent enough to see the vague doubt forming on my face, and so brought him-

self to say that it was, after all, a question of our right to an entire planet—"Man's right"—and therefore we must, of course, have the Morgans reexamined. He said that when the first rocket-load of immigrants landed next week perhaps there would be a qualified man aboard, and if not we would send for one.

And I agreed, was wholly in favor, still in no way suspecting Maas, my mind occupied now with the last curious unsettling question, which was, namely, that Nielson thought the Morgans were intelligent and yet could apparently easily go on killing them.

And so we entered upon the last few days. Nielson did not go immediately into the woods but waited until Wolke was buried and Jen Wolke was gone, and then I found him one day in a bar all by himself and I sat down and talked to him really for the first time.

He was quite willing to talk, perhaps even grateful, for he was not the kind of man people talk to easily. He told me a great deal about animals, about hunting, about the different planets he had hunted, and also by the way a great deal about himself. But he was very difficult to understand. I think he was just approaching that stage where a man finds he can no longer

believe something he has been brought up believing. Something very serious.

Well I was curious, you see, about why he was willing to kill the Morgans if he thought they were intelligent, for though I am no moralist things like that interest me. And Nielson told me without ceremony.

Hell, he said, everything is eaten. Everything alive is sooner or later killed and eaten. The big animals are allowed to grow old first, but the end is the same. The first difference between man and animal, Nielson said, was that a man was eaten after he went into the ground, but an animal rarely got that far.

So there we sat in the beery afternoon, talking Philosophy. You begin to see him now, perhaps, him so huge and so young. Not foolish, simply young. He had given the matter a great deal of thought, that I could see, and remember that he had lived a very violent and lonesome life.

Well then I asked him if he really believed what he said, and he smiled and shook his head beerily, sheepishly, and he said, well, partly anyway. A man is...well sometimes, he said, a man can be a remarkable thing. But so also sometimes can an animal. Not all animals, not all men. But then a great many things can be magnificent, or a waterfall or a wave or a big wind. And

if it all has no meaning, if Nobody Above really gives a damn, still, a man can make his own rules and with luck he can get by. What bothers me most though, Nielson said, slightly drunk now and not looking at me, is the goddam blindness of it. A big wind, you see, is not aware of the ships it wrecks, nor is the germ aware of the body it eats, but you die all the same, are eaten all the same, and what bothers me most is that you are eventually destroyed by something that doesn't give a damn. What I would like is to know that when I die I get it from something that has a good reason for it, and knows it's me he's killing.

And thus Nielson the philosopher. And if that is all disagreeable to you, well, he said it three years ago and I remember it now word for word, and I put it in here because you cannot understand him without it.

For see, in the end, what a strange twist we take. Nielson, the woodsman, becomes the cynic, and Maas, the city man, is the idealist, too simple, too simple. For deep down in Nielson, under the fragile outward layer which reasoned and saw too much hate and waste and injustice, much deeper down in the region which knew the beauty of a leaf and a stormy sky, down so deep that Nielson himself was not aware of it, was something...



"But I philosophize," George said wearily. "Let me get on with it. Listen carefully now. The sun is going down and we'll kill him soon. I would like you to know before we kill him. Watch how the rest of it happens and tell me then why.

"The rocket came and Nielson went back into the woods. There was no qualified man on the rocket to examine the Morgans so Maas sent for one, and yet strangely enough did not stop Nielson from going after the few left in the woods, a fact which investigators have not yet paused to consider.

And then when Nielson was gone a week a strange thing happened, oh an odd, unfortunate, annoying thing. Such a time for it to happen too, because Nielson had just sent in several bodies by air and informed Maas that there were only two left, and that he had them pinned down and would get them certainly by the end of the week. On that same day, in the evening, new atmosphere was given to the eleven Morgans in the tank. Curiously, it turned out that by a rare error someone mistook a tank of chlorine for a tank of oxygen—it was lying in the same rack with all the other oxygen tanks—and this man did not notice and so fed chlorine to the Morgans, who all strangled in a very short time. All eleven. It was not

noticed until the next morning, because the Morgans did not move much anyway, but by that time it was much too late and none of them ever moved again. And Maas was greatly shaken when he heard of it, naturally, because racial murder is a very serious thing, and immediately he sent out word to find Nielson before he killed the last two.

But Nielson was half a continent away.

That same evening Nielson shot one of them as it came down to the river to drink.

He shot it from a perch in a thick thorn bush across the way, in which he had been sitting for almost three days.

During all that time he had not moved out of the bush, but sat waiting with diabolical patience while the last two Morgans, undoubtedly in a state of panic now, tried to sense him or get some sign of him. At last they thought he was gone, or at least not in the area, and they came out of hiding to drink at the stream. That was when Nielson got one of them. But the shot was from a long way off, and the Morgan had been careful to drink from a sheltered place, so it was not immediately fatal. The Morgan moved away as quickly as it could, plainly hit. The other seemed to be helping it. Nielson left the thorn bush and began to track them.

It kept coming into his mind then, as it had kept coming to him during the three days in the thorn bush, that if you thought about this in the right light it was a dirty business. The two Morgans were sticking together. For some reason that bothered him. The unwounded one could easily have gotten away while Nielson trailed the other, could even circle behind and try to get him from the rear. Yet the two stuck together, making it easy for him. He found himself almost wishing they would break up.

They were moving to the north. He wondered where they were heading. He was between them and the only real cover, a marsh to the west. He supposed that they would try to double back. It was already quite murky in the woods so he slipped his night lenses on, pressing forward, silently and cautiously but very quickly, keeping his mind clear of everything but the hunt. He wondered how badly the one was hit, then began finding blood and knew. Pretty bad. And moving like that the Morgan would keep bleeding. Well, by morning he should end it. And then get off this planet for good. Go somewhere else and hunt things with tentacles.

All night long the two Morgans dragged on into the north, with Nielson closing

in steadily behind. Early in the morning they began to climb, reaching the first line of low mountains, and then Nielson knew they would try to find a high rocky place where he would have to come at them from below. He quickened his pace, slowly passed them in the night, knowing where they were by little far-off movements. When daylight came he was well ahead of them, up in the high cold country, beginning to feel unnaturally tired now and wondering how in hell the wounded Morgan could keep it up, looking for a good place from which to get them as they passed.

By eight o'clock he had figured the path they would take. He found a dark narrow place on a ledge between two boulders and wedged himself in. It was very cold and he was not dressed for it. He sat for a long while with his hand tucked in his armpit to keep the trigger finger warm and supple. At last he heard them coming.

The wounded Morgan was breathing heavily. He heard it a long way off. Then he heard a clatter in the rocks and thought they'd seen him and were trying to run away, so he peered out.

But the two of them were in the open, perhaps fifty yards away, and they had not seen him. The wounded one had fallen, which was what made the clatter, and lay now

on its back while the other bent over talking to it. Talking to it.

Quickly, not thinking, making a special effort not to think but to bring the rifle up slowly, icily, Nielson sighted in and pressed the trigger. But the trigger wouldn't pull. He was suddenly dizzy, swore at himself. He bore down on his hand, the gun went off. The kneeling Morgan jerked and looked up toward him with the big black eyes, then fell across the other one. Although Nielson's hands had been trembling the shot was clean. When he reached them both Morgans were dead.

He stood for a long while looking down, feeling very odd, very quiet and dazed. The one underneath, which he had wounded the night before, was a female. She had been with child.

He sat down on a rock, rested his head in his hands. He sat there for a long while. When it began to snow he put out his hand and watched the snowflakes melt on his palm. Soon he was white and the ground was white and a thin cold blanket covered the Morgans. Eventually they were completely covered and he was able to leave. He did not take them with him. He wanted to go somewhere quickly and take a bath.

"Oh my lord," the psychologist muttered.

"Yes," George said, "and then he came back and they were all dead. Racial murder. But that was only a part of it, because even before he knew about that he was already dirty. On the plane coming in he sat white-faced with his hands in his lap unnaturally still, and he kept shaking his head and saying he knew that really he ought not to worry about it. He said it was a dirty shame the way when you were a kid they filled you with all that sweet delicate morality, because even when you grew up and saw it was all nonsense still there was always some of it left, dammit, deep inside you where logic couldn't get at it, and that was what he was feeling now but would easily get over. And then of course I had to tell him about the Morgans, the last Morgans all dead, and when he heard how it happened he knew Maas did it, *he knew*, and so sat with his hands unnaturally still until we came to the city, and then went to Maas and destroyed him."

The psychologist bowed his head.

"So all right," George said, "but what really was the truth of it? Where was the guilt? When he destroyed Maas, strangled him in punishment for what they had both done, did he know somewhere deep inside him that he was also, with the same act, making it necessary and in-

evitable that we should eventually also destroy and punish him? For didn't he pull the trigger himself? And didn't he know when he pulled the trigger, even in that horrible second before, didn't he know then that there really was a difference after all and he had no right to do this, and wasn't it even more horrible because the Morgans had never done him any harm and he was only killing them for money, which was no reason at all? And when he went into the woods did he go then with some half-mad idea that he could for a while at least take the Morgans place? Or was he then cold and practical after the event, to go out and do all that he did simply because there was nothing else he could do? And why then to resist with fantastic cunning for three years, to slink and sneak and ambush and murder for three years, knowing surely that the men he had killed were not at fault in this, and knowing also that the end of it was certain, a bullet or a burn, a bullet or a burn..."

The psychologist started to say something but George pressed on.

"And what did he prove, if anything at all? Nothing if not that they were both partly right, both he and Maas, because certainly after three years what it comes down to is this, that a man could be

such a noble thing, if only, if only..."

They were both silent, gazing down at the river. The sun was gone and the water was dark. A few moments later they were still gazing, saying nothing, when they both saw Nielson come out of the woods.

In the darkness the hunter was shaggy and blurred. He stood among the rushes on the bank, not looking up, as if he did not know a hundred men were there. He walked out into the shallow water and started to take off his shirt. He had it up over his chest when someone else saw him from above and shot him, and he fell to his knees as the man shot again, then fell face down in the river.

George went down and knelt by him in the water. It seemed such an easy end after three years that he had difficulty believing. The psychologist came up behind him, rippling the water.

"Dead?"

George nodded.

Gradually other men arrived. One was the man who had done the shooting. There was no elation in his eyes. His face was gray as he looked down at the blond bloody floating hair. George reached out suddenly without thinking and patted the man on the arm.

"And so it goes," George said gently, "so it goes."