

All
Stories
New

THE ORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION

STORIES

Volume 10

MAY, 1959

Number 2

FEATURE STORY

- THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE SPACE *Robert Silverberg* 6
Ed Reese hadn't wanted a vacation, but he had thirty-four weeks of vacation-leave coming, and the company insisted. Then he met Carol Dwyer, assigned to introduce him to the pleasures of Earth, and wondered why he'd waited so long...

SHORT STORIES

- UTILITY GIRL *Basil Wells* 24
Theo didn't know why utility girls on freighters were looked down upon. Then she read the fine print in her contract, and found that she was at the disposal of every man in the crew...
- ANDROID, KILL FOR ME! *Kate Wilhelm* 42
An android couldn't do wrong — but there might be a way to convince Zeke that what Helen wanted was right...
- HERE, KITTY KITTY *Kit Reed* 49
The Dingles were different; in fact, they were downright creepy until they gronked their twiddlies, and...
- WEAPON MASTER *A. L. Caramine* 57
New weapons for old, on an easy-payment plan. That was just what the colonists of Newcastle needed, in their feud with another colony!

SERIAL NOVEL

- CADUCEUS WILD (Last of Four Parts)
..... *Ward Moore and Robert Bradford* 69
What can be done with a traitor in a revolutionary organization that is opposed to killing? If they didn't kill the culprit, how could they prevent him from delivering the underground into the hands of the Medarchy?

DEPARTMENTS

- READIN' AND WRITHIN' (Book Reviews) .. *Calvin M. Knox* 63
THE LAST WORD and THE RECKONING 117
Your report on the January issue, plus your letters and our comment.
- READERS' PREFERENCE COUPON (for your votes) .. 129/130

Editor: ROBERT A. W. LOWNDES MARIE A. PARK, Asso. Ed.
DOROTHY B. SEADOR, Asso. Ed.

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, May, 1959, published 10 times a year (monthly, except for April and June) by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 241 Church Street, New York 13, New York. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass., under the act of March 3, 1879. 35c per copy; yearly subscriptions \$3.00. Printed in the U. S. A.

**here,
kitty
kitty**

by *KIT*
REED

*It all started when the
Dingle gronked his
twiddly...*

IT'S FUNNY, but when you adopt a cat, ten times out of ten it turns out to be a female. Take Herman. I came into work in the height of the trading season one spring, up to here in things to do, and I found this cat asleep in my bottom drawer. The cat stretched and purred a little and then climbed out of the drawer and began rubbing its back against my ankle. Herbie Witkers, who has the desk next to mine, was watching. Herbie has a cat of his own, and I guess he knows all about cats.

"Gee, Willie," he said. "Looks like he likes you. Why don't you take him home?"

"I dunno, Herbie. I don't know if I should..."

The cat was twisting itself around my feet, rolling and batting at my trouser legs. We fixed up a piece of paper and a string for it to play with and got it to take a little milk. None of us got much done that morning. Herbie seemed almost happier than I was when I decided to take the kitten home.

That morning, I dubbed the cat Herman and became the father of one. About a year later the cat's name was Her-

mione, and I was the father of seven. Later, it was sixteen, and then...well, you know cats.

By that time, I had to park my Jumper-X in the street. There just wasn't room for it. It got so I was afraid to go into my garage, because there would be a seething mass of cats, mrowling and carrying on and pretending to be glad to see me. From the first, I was pretty sure they were all fakers. When I tried to pet some of them, or went "Awwwww, puddy, awwww..." the only one in the whole mob to come over and rub against me was good old Hermione. Pretty soon I realized I had a bunch of freeloaders on my hands. Besides, the whole place was beginning to smell like a Martian *mooft* corral. I decided to do something about it.

IF YOU know cats, you know how hard it is to give them away. The first cat you get is always nice, but ten times out of ten its kittens are scruffy ingrates that seem to stick around home like an Arcturan *aaantaaan* waiting for its mate. I tried taking a few to the

trading post with me, but it turned out Herbie had been there before me. He'd given kittens to everybody in the office and all the ground crew, and half the extra-Ts who brought in goods from other planets. When I asked him if he'd be interested in some of the batch I had at home, he just laughed.

I learned a lot about kittens in the next few days. I learned that when you're talking to a prospective taker, you always refer to the kitten as *he*. I learned that almost every neighborhood kid will use up one or two kittens a year, and that you have to give the kid the cat when his parents aren't home. If you're smart, you wait till they're out of town. I learned that, after you've dumped the first ten or twelve, you've reached saturation point and, mortality rate notwithstanding, it's nothing but puddies for you from then on in.

That's why I was so glad to see the Dingles. If you haven't heard of the Dingles, it must be because you don't own a cat. The Dingles are the Lord's gift to humanity.

I think I was the first Earth

person to meet one. I can't tell you who they are, or where they came from; the Phyletic Intake Bureau can't tell you either, and they spent two years trying to trace them. The talk now is that they came from another galaxy altogether; their ships are like nothing we've ever seen before.

When the first Dingle came, I was all alone in the trading post. Except for Hermione. I like to work in the office alone, and any day you stay after four o'clock, you're bound to be alone. Government offices are that way—everybody shoves off as soon as the whistle blows. Anyway, I like the silence, and I thought Hermione might like a little peace and quiet away from her brood (there were about a hundred of them in the garage at that point), so I had her tucked in the bottom drawer where I'd first found her. I was working away on nothing in particular, and Hermione was snoozing when the first Dingle came in.

HE LOOKED just like those pictures of flying saucer men they used to have in comic magazines. He was green all

over, and his head and his ears came to points; he had round pie-eyes and no mouth to speak of. I'll never understand how his ship got in through the scanner network. He leaned across my desk and his eyes rolled a little. He said: "Ooooooodely? Ooooooodely?"

To tell you the truth, he made me feel pretty crawly, but I stood up and tried to look as dignified as I could. "I represent the E.B.T.—the Earth Board of Trade," I said. "Welcome to our p'planet. Have you been formally admitted? I haven't seen your picture in the Registry office..."

He straightened up and banged one feeler across his chest. "Ooooooodely? Ooooooodely?"

"I beg your pardon..." I gave him the same routine again. I speak about twenty-eight dialects, and they cover most of the galaxy, but I'd never heard anything like this.

"Ooooooodely?"

I felt creepier and creepier. "I'm sorry, I..."

Then he gronked his Twidly and everything was all

right. He was talking perfectly good English, and he was the sweetest thing I'd ever seen. One minute he was bubbling at me and I was ready to start clawing at the wall; the next he gronked his Twiddly and suddenly he was talking in an Oxford accent and I loved the guy.

A Twiddly is like nothing you've ever seen. It's something that all Dingles have, and it turns out they can't even talk to each other about it. The closest analogy I can draw is the Con-Tax Translator—that heavy wire shebang our star-crewmen use to talk to extra-Ts; but a man wearing a Translator can never forget that five pounds of machinery he has on his back, while gronking your Twiddly seems to be as natural as taking a deep breath.

AFTER this Dingle gronked his Twiddly, we had a nice talk. He said something sad about trying to get used to being without it, but I brought out a bottle I keep in a drawer marked "Classified" and he forgot all about it and cheered right up. Things probably

would have been stiff and official if he'd come during the business day; but as it was, we sat and talked about this and that as cheerful as old friends on a picnic. I didn't even feel guilty about not calling the Intake office because this Dingle was so charming.

He was just on a friendly visit, he said; he was sightseeing in the Galaxy, and he'd decided to drop in on us. He was getting ready to go when Hermione uncoiled, oozed out of the drawer and began playing around his bottom feelers. When he saw her, he got down on his hands and knees with her and forgot all about leaving.

He offered me twenty-eight million *granna* for Hermione. It's funny, but you get attached to cats. Even if Hermione did betray me to the tune of some hundred kittens and grandkittens, I loved her, and I wasn't going to let her go. But if he wanted some of her kittens—or her kittens' kittens—or her kittens' kittens' kitten... I told him about the batch I had at home.

"You mean there are more? Are there many more like this

on your planet?" He was as happy as Herbie had been the day I took Hermione home.

"Well, they aren't *exactly* like her," I told him. "I mean—there are black ones and brown ones and spotted ones and striped ones, and I've got this really cute gray one..."

"But they are all made on this same plan—four legs, ears, tail, whiskers..." He was getting pretty excited.

"Sure." I started thinking about getting my garage aired out, and being able to put my Jumper-X in it again. "And you can have as many of them as you want. Come along with me."

We went to my place, and the Dingle put this sort of transparent, spider-webby net around all the cats but Hermione, and took them back to his ship.

"The people of my planet will be grateful to you forever," he said, as he tucked the last cat in and blasted off.

HE WAS BACK the next day, with twenty more Dingles and a ship the size of a city block. The Dingles were as charming as could be (after

they gronked their Twiddlys) and said they couldn't get enough cats. They offered to pay any amount of *granna* we asked, and were amazed that we'd let the cats go for free. Even the government pushed through an okay on the export when they found out that the cats were all the Dingles wanted to take. You couldn't say no to a Dingle.

I will admit we had a little fuss from the SPCA at first, but when we assured them that the Dingles wanted the cats for pets (what else *could* they want them for? Dingles are herbivorous), they said something about the whole thing's being a boon to catdom, and brought over a whole bunch from their Animal Shelter and Resort. The word spread fast, and pretty soon every cat-owner on the sphere was shipping in a batch of kittens. I will say this for us cat-owners—we were loyal enough to keep the cats we'd started out with—it was the offspring we wanted to send. It was a cinch I wasn't going to part with Hermione, but I sure was glad to get rid of those kits.

Operation Catlift was some-

thing to behold. Thousands of people came to the Spacedome and waved banners and cheered as loading began. Tabbies, Toms, cats, kits, Maltese, Persian and Siamese, calicos, Manx, tigers, angoras, alleys, rank on rank they came, seething down the shute and up the ramp into the Dingles' ship, carrying on and caterwauling as if the Judgement Day had come. It was magnificent. The band played and there were speeches before the airlocks closed, and the Dingles promised us they'd be back next year, anxious for another batch.

"You have done a generous thing for all of Dingleland," one of the Dingles said. Then he bowed two or three times and slammed the lock. When the ship blasted off the crowd went wild.

Well, we all sang and danced for a while and then I took Hermione home, and nobody saw another Dingle until six months later.

I WAS IN the office working late again, when the original Dingle I'd met came in. He

gronked his Twiddly and we talked.

"I came to thank you for Earth's magnificent gift to us," he said. "If it hadn't been for you—words cannot express..."

Suddenly my back hair stiffened. "What are you doing?" I asked. He was gripping something familiar in his feeler.

"I'm merely gronking my Twiddly, Earth friend. You have seen me do it many times."

"Yeah, but isn't that a new type of—*gronker* you're using?"

He flushed a deeper green and admitted it was. "You see, your gift to us has done us immeasurable good. Our native *kara* plant, which has supplied the Dingles with stylos—what you call *gronkers*—for generations, has become extinct. Our race faced the same fate if we were left without stylos, for we could not communicate. Your magnificent gift to us has supplied the race with enough stylo material to last as long as we have life, and we are eternally grateful."

I got a little more curious. "Well, what do you do with—

the *rest* of our gift, after you use this part of them for gronkers?"

"Oh," he dug his feeler into the carpet and avoided my eyes. "We throw them away. Again, friend, I only wanted to say thank you. We will be back in six months, at which time we hope to pick up another load. Thank you, thank you..." He started backing toward the door. I had to stop him.

"Uh—Dingle."

"Yes, Earth friend?" He gronked his twiddly again so he could talk to me, and I winced.

"Something I oughta tell you. Look, some of your other Earth friends might not be just like me. They might not understand the special way you use that—gift we gave you."

HE FADED from green to chartreuse. "Oooooodely?"

"Yeah," I said. "Sad but true. Not everybody would understand. So, pal..."

"Oooooodely?"

"Keep it under your hat, huh? And keep those new gronkers of yours out of sight."

"For you, Earth friend, any-

thing." Self-consciously, he slid his new gronker up his sleeve, and slipped it out again so that just the tips were showing. "Oooooodely?"

"That's fine," I said.

"Thank you, thank you, kind one." The little guy was bowing and scraping all over. "Thank you, thank you..." he stopped gronking his Twiddly. "Thank you...ooooodely?" He backed out the door.

So there you are. The Dingles are great cat fanciers all right. They fancy the whiskers, and once they've pulled them out, they throw the rest of the cat away. What would happen if the world found out?

If I know the SPCA, the Catlift exports would stop. None of those pet philanthropists are going to stand for the Dingles' pulling our cats' whiskers that way. And *throwing them away*—I can imagine. Yes, if they find out, that'll be the end of Operation Catlift and we'll be back where we started, with rafts and droves of kittens and no place for a man to park his Jumper-X.

Sure it's cruel to debeard those cats, but five'll get you ten the cats the Dingles *think*

they've thrown away are thriving somewhere on Dingelian wastes.

Besides, Hermione has just presented me with another litter, and they're milling and seething in the back yard.

So what if they hurt the puddies an iddy biddy bit. Awww... .

I'll never tell.

Only one thing. There's been more than the usual moiling and milling in our neighborhood of late, with kits and

cats, who are loners at heart, getting together for conferences and choruses and caterwauls. If I didn't know better, I'd suspect that they'd guessed about the Dingles and were planning some sort of direct action. If they found out for sure that I'm the guy who's keeping Operation Catlift going, I'd be in for real trouble.

And I think Hermione's on to me.

