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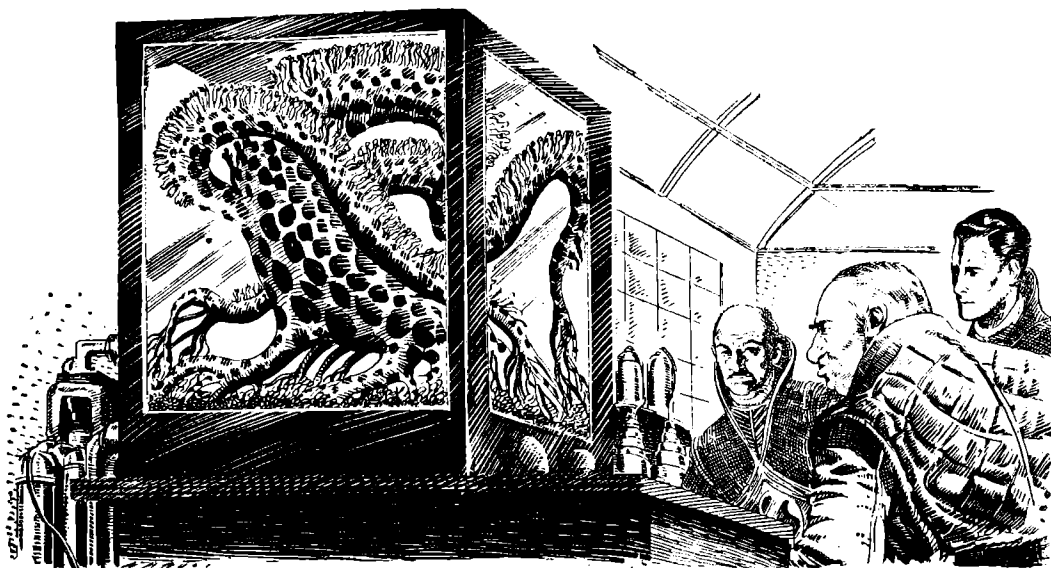
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HERE LIES BOTTLETHWAITE

By DAVE DRYFOOS

*He thought that he was saving his
neck, but he was testing a theory*

MOST people follow their noses. But Dr. Clarence Devington Kaar, A.B., A.M., Ph. D., Director-in-Chief of the First Mazdan Expedition, was different. He followed his belly into our lab.

Luckily, I'd seen it coming soon enough to get up off the table where I'd been dozing. You might say I was saved by a flingit. A flingit is the planet Mazda's equivalent of a house-fly, and one lit on my bald dome not five seconds be-

fore the Old Man's red face followed his belly through the door.

"Good afternoon, Bottlethwaite," he said to me. "Where is Dr. Heeny?"

Now, I happened to know that our young bio-dynamicist was in the sitting room of the Nurses' Quarters, holding hands with Miss Nellie Farrell. Art Heeny was supposed to be working, of course, but what's a fellow to do when his girl has the night shift?

"Dr. Heeny is out making a biological

study, sir," I said.

"I see," he said. "And what have you been doing in his absence, Bottlethwaite?"

"Preserving a specimen, sir," I said hastily.

"Ah, yes. That explains the odor of alcohol. But tell me, how is young Heeny coming along with his search for intelligent Mazdan life-forms? It's only a week, now, till the first Earthship is due, and I'd like to report that we are in actual communication with Mazdans. But that hardly seems possible, if there's any truth to the rumors I've heard about Heeny neglecting his job. Is this present biological study of his connected with Mazdans, Bottlethwaite?"

"Sir," I said, standing at attention, "thirty years in the Army taught me that rumors plague *any* outstanding young man. Dr. Heeny has developed absolute proof of intelligence in one of these gadgets you see here."

I pointed to the three-foot purple shrub-thing set in a glass case by the window. "Let me demonstrate," I said. I didn't tell him I'd trained that shrub myself.

But he wasn't interested anyhow. "Your military record got you assigned to our guard force," he said, "but I'm afraid bio-dynamic demonstrations are a little out of your line, even if non-existence of hostiles *did* result in your transfer from guard to janitor. So perhaps you'd better get hold of Dr. Heeny for me, some time in the next five minutes."

He didn't succeed in getting me mad enough to overlook his little time-trap. If Art was on a biological field-trip, like I'd said, he was more than five minutes away.

"May I ask for half an hour, sir?" I said. "If you'll just make yourself at home—"

"You'll find me quite at home, I think, in all departments of my expedition," the Old Man told me, parking himself in Art's chair. "So if you'll just find young Heeny . . ."

ART was startled when he answered my code-knock at the door of the Nurses' Quarters. When he asked me, "What's up, Sarge?" his voice showed he was still young enough to have a conscience.

I quickly told him what was up. I thought he'd be pleased that I'd claimed we'd found an intelligent plant. But I couldn't have been wrong.

"What did you go and lie for?" he yelped. "No results are o.k., but faked results . . ." He waved his hands hopelessly.

No use arguing. "All right," I said. "All right! I'll just go tell the Old Man I made a mistake. He's fixing to send me to Earth, anyhow—"

"Now, don't be hasty, Sarge," Art said. He put a hand on my shoulder and propelled me away from the Quarters. "If you do go to Earth, I'll go with you, probably. And Nellie's nursing contract still has a couple of years to run . . . Let's go put on space-suits, so we can greet Dr. Kaar in proper uniform, as your Army pals would say."

We went over to the locker-room and helped each other into our suits. Of course, I was still trying to figure an out. At my age, a fellow doesn't like losing a job, even when he has a pension coming in.

"Look, Art," I said. "The plant-thing I've trained does think! It counts to two, and I can prove it. Why don't we show that to the Old Man?"

"I guess we will," said Art. "But your plant-thing doesn't think enough. All it can do is call for another drink—and that doesn't take any brains, does it?"

He kind of smirked at me, but honest, I wasn't drunk. And the plant-thing didn't exactly call for drinks, anyhow. It played a game of signalling by beating its lowest branch on the rim of the container it was potted—canned—planted in, I mean.

I'd starved it for water and then trained it: first, I'd give it one shot-glass of water, and it would beat once; then I'd give it two shots close together,

and the plant would beat twice. Then one again. Its answers were slow in coming, but it knew what it was doing.

So I argued: "That plant-thing can count to two! That's something, isn't it?"

"Sure," Art said. "Real wisdom. It can tell when it's had one too many."

"Okay, okay," I said. "But what does the Old Man expect us to do?"

"We have to find some sort of Mazdan that thinks like a man, to help us develop a system of intercommunication. And I mean real communication, not just the kind of thing done with a sheepdog, for instance. It's rough, Sarge! We don't even know exactly what intelligence *is*, much less how to prove some alien life-form has it!"

"Well," I said, "intelligence is what we can claim to have if we get away with trying to outsmart the Old Man."

"Nevertheless," Art said firmly, "we've got to try it!"

So we did. To make a showing, we shuffled back to the lab in our space-suits.

We weren't so smart. "What is this?" the Old Man boomed, "a masquerade? Since when do you wear space-suits to the Nurses' Quarters, Dr. Heeny? . . . Surprised? You shouldn't be. As a bio-dynamicist, you ought to be aware of the fact that women are biologically constituted to produce two things: children, and talk! So please get out of that costume and show me what, if anything, there is to Bottlethwaite's boasting."

With his face even redder than the Old Man's, Art stood there while I unlaced his suit. The Old Man watched in silence for a few minutes.

Then he said, "Why not tell me the truth, Doctor? It's ridiculous of you to protect an old reprobate like Bottlethwaite, here. He falsified your results, didn't he?"

I opened my mouth and even began to nod a confession, but Art spoke up stoutly. "Sergeant Bottlethwaite is not a reprobate, sir. He's an enthusiastic

amateur. The demonstration of plant intelligence I am about to make is based entirely on his careful work."

The Old Man paced like a watchful cat while Art finished the last of his undressing. I hauled the shrub-thing to the table I kept bare for sleeping purposes. Like I said, this gadget was about three feet high, and purplish. The stem, though, was a deeper shade, almost blue. And the leaf-needles were lighter, reddish and silky.

Art called it a plant because it made its own food from the ground and air. It had three branches, and twisted roots that stayed on top of the ground. Ordinarily, in the field, these shrub-things moved slowly on their roots—searching for food, Art said. But of course the lab had an artificial atmosphere and all, so we kept the plant in a gas-proof glass case, and fed it water through a valve.

I FILLED a beaker now and set it where Art could pour—the shot-glass seemed out of place at this tea-party. And by then he was ready. Explaining as he worked, Art poured a one-ounce portion through the valve, and in about half a minute, which was right on schedule, the plant beat its bottom branch against the rim of its container.

Art waited a few minutes till the water was absorbed, and then poured two one-ounce splashes in quick succession. The plant gave two beats.

The Old Man was surprised, all right. I thought we were in. But I thought wrong.

"This is nonsense!" he snorted. "It proves nothing! And in view of Bottlethwaite's known attitude toward truthfulness, I fear he may be making a fool of you, Dr. Heeny. The whole demonstration may be faked."

"Dr. Kaar," said Art, stanchly. "you may try it yourself!"

And the Old Man did try, with a disdainful look that plainly said he only wanted to catch us off base so he could fire us then and there.

But of course nothing was faked. Try

as he would, the Old Man couldn't get that plant to vary its reactions. So he thought he'd foul us up another way.

"I think we should change the routine of this little experiment, Dr. Heeny," he said, "to see if it can be repeated in a variety of circumstances. Suppose we do it this way: we'll put a screen around your plant. I'll pour the water without letting you know whether I give it one ounce, or two. During the thirty seconds it takes the object to respond, I'll walk away. You privately record the response, and then pour accordingly. If it taps once, indicating I've given it one ounce, you give it two. If it taps twice, indicating I've given it two ounces, you give it one. Do you follow?"

Art nodded solemnly. He looked worried. Maybe I did, too. Because if the Old Man gave the plant half-a-dozen shots at once, say, then the water would collect in a puddle and the plant would act confused. Or if he just kept up my old routine long enough, the plant might get water-logged from even small doses, and the experiment would fail. The Old Man was playing cat and mouse.

But Art didn't rat. He made me get a screen, and then had me stand aside where I couldn't see either the feedings or the responses.

Art fed the plant, then walked away. The Old Man approached, waited for the knock or knocks, fed the plant, and stepped back.

Art came back, took the response, and looked puzzled. But he went through the motions without saying anything, and the Old Man took a turn again. He looked puzzled, too. But said nothing.

They ran through the routine half-a-dozen times before a word was spoken. Then the Old Man said, "You haven't been changing the order of performance, have you?"

And Art said, "No, sir. Have you?"

THE Old Man looked at Art's record of responses, and breathed hard through his nose. Then he turned to me.

"You originally trained this plant,

didn't you, Bottlethwaite? What would you make of it if I were to say your plant has been continuously responding to two-ounce portions with one knock?"

Well, for a minute he almost had me. At times I'd kept up the shot-glass routine for as long as an hour at a stretch, and never once, after I'd trained it, had that plant failed to respond to two ounces of water with two knocks. But then, I'd always quit after an hour, for fear too much water would be bad for the thing. Maybe I'd been wrong. . . .

"Dr. Kaar," I said slowly, "that plant-thing must want more water than it's been getting. If it had answered with two knocks, the next round would have been only one ounce of water. Apparently it can tell that the guy who gets the answer signal isn't the one who pours, according to your system. So by always answering with one knock, it gets two ounces of water every time.

"In other words," I said, drawing myself up proudly, "taking advantage of the changed routine, this gadget cheats!"

"*Something* around here is cheating!" the Old Man huffed. "Heeny, let's run through this some more."

They did. They gave that purple shrub so much water it's a wonder the thing didn't dissolve. And you know what? At the end of the afternoon, that plant was responding with two knocks every time—so it would only get one-ounce shots.

Finally the Old Man called a halt. But he wouldn't admit a thing.

"See here!" he said. "This shrub merely changes its response to fit its state of hydration. There's no point in going on. Its response is purely mechanistic, and *not* evidence of intelligence!" But Art wasn't letting him get away with that.

"No, sir," he contradicted. "This plant has in effect made statements it knew to be false, for the obvious purpose of deception. It suited its remarks to the hearer, so to speak.

"Now, we have machines that can

think, but they think straight or not at all. And there are deceptive animals on Earth—'possums, for instance—but they don't vary their responses. This plant-thing *does*, so it is *not* mechanistic. It thinks the same way *we* do!"

"Don't shout!" the Old Man said, moving slowly toward the door. "You *could* be right. But you and Bottlethwaite are going to have to work on this for a mighty long time before I make any an-

nouncement of it. Imagine telling the world that we've proved the existence of intelligent life on Mazda by discovering a species of cheater!"

With his hand on the doorknob, he paused and shook his head.

"I suppose Bottlethwaite will claim *Man's* readiness to lie is proof of *our* intelligence!"

"Well—" I said.

But he'd gone out the door.