

PLANET STORIES



VOL. 5, NO. 2 • A FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINE • SEPTEMBER, 1951

► *Novel of Interlocking Space*

THE INCUBI OF PARALLEL X *Theodore Sturgeon* 4

Gone were Earth's womankind. The Franx-blasted planet had been wrung of the young, the beautiful. Only Garth, son of Gesell the Great, knew the gateway to the prison-world—a world of 70-foot, man-stealing Giantesses.

► *A Startling Novelet*

LORD OF A THOUSAND SUNS *Poul Anderson* 84

A man without a planet, this 1,000,000-year-old Daryesh. Once Lord of a Thousand Suns, now condemned to rove the spaceways in alien form, searching for love, for life, for the great lost Vwyrdda.

► *Short Stories from all the Galaxies*

SANCTUARY, OH ULLA! *J. T. MacIntosh* 33

Shrewd Alganet paid off the war-bemused Ullans with back-firing images. His one wise mistake was to purchase a Ullan Woman.

THE INHABITED MEN *Margaret St. Clair* 44

Why was it, Gongo wondered, that the Earthman lying asleep in his space-freighter bunk whispered in so many alien voices?

THE STAR FOOL *Gordon Dickson* 50

The fate of star-colonies hung on blacked-out Tarn II and the only man within jet distance was ineffectual little Whaley.

LAST NIGHT OUT *Lee Gregor* 57

Tomorrow Ensign Grey and his hated, blue-furred space-mate, Canopus 43C, would go off to war—if tomorrow ever came.

TYDOR'S GIFT *Alfred Coppel* 67

Why should Tydore place such an inestimably valuable gift in the greed-hands of the Earthling whom he hated?

THE WATCHERS *Roger Dee* 71

It had taken him ten years to find them—to even convince himself that they existed. Now Manson was ready to kill.

VENGEANCE ON MARS *D. B. Lewis* 75

Should Hale give an ex-comrade to the torture-thirsty Hrai, or chance the massacre of Terrestrial thousands?

HOSPITALITY *J. W. Groves* 80

Eden could not have been half so good as this green jungle planet. Yet every Eden has its secret Serpent.

THE VIZIGRAPH Compliments and complaints from Planet's hardy readers 2 & 102

T. T. SCOTT, *President*

MALCOLM REISS, *General Manager*

PLANET STORIES Published bi-monthly by Love Romances Pub. Co., Inc., 130 W. 42 St., New York 18, N. Y. The entire contents of this magazine are copyrighted, 1951, by Love Romances Publishing Co., Inc. Registered as second class matter August 15, 1950, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. All rights reserved. While due care is always exercised, the publishers will not be responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts. Price 25¢ per copy. For advertising rates address: Advertising Director, Fiction House, Inc., 130 W. 42 St., New York 18, N. Y. Printed in U. S. A.

*Eden could not have been half so good. Delicious fruit.
An everlasting sun. Six-limbed people fevering to serve the
fallen Sky Gods. Yet every Eden has a secret serpent . . .*

HOSPITALITY

by J. W. GROVES



THE PLANET HAD no axial rotation of its own. They landed on the permanently sunward side, the reaction-tubes in the shoulders of their suits lowering them gently through the branches of huge fern-trees on to green-blue, moss-like grass.

Durgan threw back his helmet revealing sharp thin features, pale-blue furtive eyes. Brent, more suspicious of the information in the Index of Habitable Planets, waited for the built-in indicator of his suit to confirm the air as breathable before he uncovered his round, balding head.

"Hope the natives are like you said."

"Sure they are," said Durgan. "I read all about 'em in a book by a guy named Taylor. They're hospitable. Do anything to make a stranger comfortable and happy. It's part of their religion."

"Taylor only stopped here for twelve hours. We got years . . ."

"Oh stop whining. Did you have any better idea for getting us out of that jam?"

Brent shook his head. The idea was smart enough. Right now the patrol was chasing their empty automatically-piloted ship. Soon they would see it crash on the outermost planet of this system. And if, as a precautionary measure, they decided to land and analyze its contents they would find quite enough organic molecules to account for two dead outlaws—thanks to the food converters which had been working at full capacity for days. With reasonable luck the names of Brent and Durgan would soon be struck off the roll of wanted men.

"That part's all right," he admitted. "But hell!"

The natives had come out from between the shadowy fern-trees with startling suddenness. Great purple-colored brutes they were, six-limbed, yet still vaguely humanoid in shape in that they had a distinct body and a head above it. Their eyes were green, unwinking, and just below the eyes was a round permanently-open orifice with harp-like strings stretched across it.

Durgan saw Brent snatch at his bolt-gun and moved to stop him. Then he dropped his hand as the other man let his fingers fall away from the weapon. The purple creatures were bowing obsequiously and gesturing toward two structures slung

from the broad shoulders of four of their number.

"Litters," said Durgan happily. "To carry us to their village. Didn't I tell you?"

The natives responded to the sound of his voice with a joyous humming and more deep bows.

Brent grunted. "How're we going to talk to them?"

"We won't need to talk to them," said Durgan. "They'll look after us without being told." He tugged resistingly as one of the natives would have taken from him a foot-square case to carry on another litter. "No thanks pal. I'll look after the space-radio myself. We're gonna need that so we can get ourselves picked up as castaways once the heat's off."

News of their coming had evidently been sent ahead of them for a fresh hut, larger than the rest, was being finished. The two men were escorted to it, and their litters gently lowered to the ground.

"None of the comforts of civilization," said Brent. "But I think you're right. We're going to be well looked after."

Durgan nodded.

Brent, ignoring him, was sampling some gaudy looking fruit. He grunted his satisfaction. "Try one," he said. "They're good."

Between them they cleared the bowl of fruit and started in on the next one that was immediately produced. Durgan gave up first. Brent managed to keep going for ten minutes longer. Finally even he had to stop.

He patted his rotund stomach and grinned at the circle of purple green-eyed faces around him. "That, my humming-birds, was swell. And now I think I'll have a nice after-dinner snooze."

The anxious-sounding humming mingled with his dreams so that he had to blink for some seconds before he came fully back to consciousness to find purple hands pawing at him, shaking him gently. As soon as he sat up the natives fell back.

He chuckled at Brent who was swearing vividly. "Wonder why they did that?" he said. "Maybe afternoon sleep is against local etiquette or something. Oh well it doesn't matter much."

"It might not matter much to you," said

Brent sulkily. "But me, I enjoy my after dinner nap."

"Then this is where you start to learn better habits." Durgan rolled off the pile of aromatic dried leaves on which he had been lying and went over to the space-radio. "This thing's undetectable so long as you use it for reception only. Let's see what programs we can pick up."

HE FOUND AN OLD broadcast that had been spreading out through the universe for years. It was faint and rather badly marred by static but he enjoyed himself for a while listening to long-familiar tunes. Then he noticed that the gathered natives were twitching to the rhythm of the orchestra. "Wonder if we could teach them to dance?" he said.

The natives were obsequiously willing. Unexpectedly, their dancing, completely extempore, had a certain wild grace of its own despite their grotesque appearance. And when the two men tired of watching that Brent suggested that they might be taught to run races.

By the time they were both hungry again Brent owed Durgan half a million interstellar credits, and two tons of ore-mite. It didn't really matter very much.

When they were comfortably replete they leaned back on their sweet-smelling couches. Durgan looked up at the sun still standing unmovingly at its zenith. "You," he said gravely, "are a liar. You can shout its always midday as much as you like but my wrist-chron says its eleven P. M. Bedtime." He turned his head lazily. "We'd better get them to shift this stuff inside the hut for us. Won't be able to sleep properly out in the light."

It wasn't so funny this time when the anxious humming and the gently shaking hands woke him up. "Let me alone," he said irritably. "What's the matter with you?"

For a moment or two he sat up glaring at the ring of them that was gathered round him. They hummed joyously. "I don't see what the hell there is to be so pleased about," he snarled.

"Nor me neither," growled Brent.

Durgan lay down again. The purple hands were shaking him almost before he

closed his eyes.

At the end of two more hours of it Brent was spluttering with fury. He jerked out his bolt-gun. "Let me sleep, damn you," he yelled, "or I'll use this on some of you . . ."

"Don't be a fool," snapped Durgan. "They don't understand a word you're saying. And if we start shooting we'll arouse their hostility."

"They're arousing my hostility right now," said Brent.

"Forget it! We're absolutely dependent on them to keep us alive for the next few years." Durgan got to his feet. "We'll have to try to keep awake a bit longer. Wait till we see the rest of them turn in."

Their hosts were delighted when they came out of the hut. Fresh fruits were piled in front of them. Dancing and the running of races was resumed. But each time either of the men dozed off quietly every other activity ceased and solicitously humming natives gathered around him, gently shaking and prodding . . .

"It's no good," snarled Brent after being pulled back to consciousness for the twentieth time. "I just can't wait for their bedtime, whenever it is. Either I sleep or I start shooting."

Durgan nodded. "I'm beginning to feel the same way myself. Tell you what, we'll go for a walk in the forest and try to shake them off. Then we can hide ourselves in the branches of a tree. It won't be too safe, I don't know what sort of wild life there is loose on the planet, but we'll have to chance it."

THE NATIVES seemed distressed at the idea that they should want to go out into the forest unescorted. But after a lot of emphatic gesturing the men got their own way. They wandered wearily for a couple of miles and then scrambled up into the lower branches of a huge tree.

"Now," grumbled Brent as he fastened himself into place with his belt. "Maybe we can get a little shut-eye."

It was the sound of a spitting bolt-gun that awakened Durgan. He came hazily back into consciousness, sandy-eyed, and blinked for a moment without understand-

ing at the two still, purple figures that lay at the tree's foot.

"You damned fool!" he snarled.

"I had to," growled Brent. "They woke me up. Again."

Durgan groaned, stretched himself as best he could in his awkward position. "Now we've started shooting we'll have to keep it up." He drew his own gun. "I'll cover you for an hour. Then you can take over."

It was the longest hour ever. His eyelids were made of the stuff of dwarf stars. The figures on his wrist-chron were embedded in molasses.

Twice he snapped shots into the shadowy forest but he was never sure whether he fired at anything real or at conjurations of his own half-dreaming brain. When at last it came to the time for Brent to take over he was asleep almost before the tubby little man had drawn his gun.

The soft hands that dragged him down out of the tree, that made his stumbling feet start walking, were nightmare, pure nightmare. They had to be . . .

He heard Brent sobbing. "I only went off for a moment. I couldn't help it. And then they came and took our guns away."

He still had strength enough left to curse the tubby man viciously.

But even that much energy drained from him as the long hours crept by. Under the irresistible thrust of powerful purple hands he staggered up and down a patch of soft grass between the towering trees.

The creatures around him were fiends. Fiends from some forgotten hell ruled by that scorching monster above. His wrist-chron was a cunning device for torturing him because it lied that another night had come and gone while the blazing ball in the sky screeched triumphantly that it was still noon.

A flickering moment of sanity came to him. He'd read somewhere of a man falling to sleep while he walked along. Maybe it could be done.

He screamed and started to cry abjectly as the goad pierced searing agony into his thigh.

He heard Brent's croaldng voice, "The

space-radio. I got to get to the space-radio. Call the patrol. They'll take us away from this."

It would have mattered a lot once but it didn't matter now. Nothing mattered now except that they wouldn't let him sleep . . .

THE CAPTAIN of the patrol cruiser found them still stumbling up and down the clearing, a dozen mournfully humming natives behind each of them, prodding them on. The Captain had heard of the purple creatures' reputation for hospitality. He blinked with amazement and when he had safely secured the two prisoners he sent for the language expert among his crew and set him to work.

The natives' language was unique in that its variations were purely tonal. The expert had a tough time trying to make sense of it but at last he succeeded. And when he was able to give a rough translation of what the creatures had to tell the Captain started to laugh.

Extract from Report No. 1586A/B

From:—Captain of Patrol Cruiser 'Stella'
To:—Central H.Q.

The reputation for hospitality enjoyed by the natives of this planet is fully justified. Their religion enjoins them to treat all strangers, particularly those that descend from the heavens, as sacred.

The plan of escape concocted by Durgan and Brent might well have succeeded but for one detail, the planet has no axial rotation.

The natives have never known night and consequently never evolved the ability to sleep. To them there is only one sort of unconsciousness, that caused by illness or death. Since their guests were not dead they argued that they must be suffering from a hitherto unknown disease.

The medical system of these creatures, though effective in many ways, is essential empirical. To treat a disorder they attack the symptoms.

When we arrived on the planet they were still conscientiously trying to find a cure.