

PLANET STORIES



VOL. 5, No. 5 • A FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINE • MARCH, 1952

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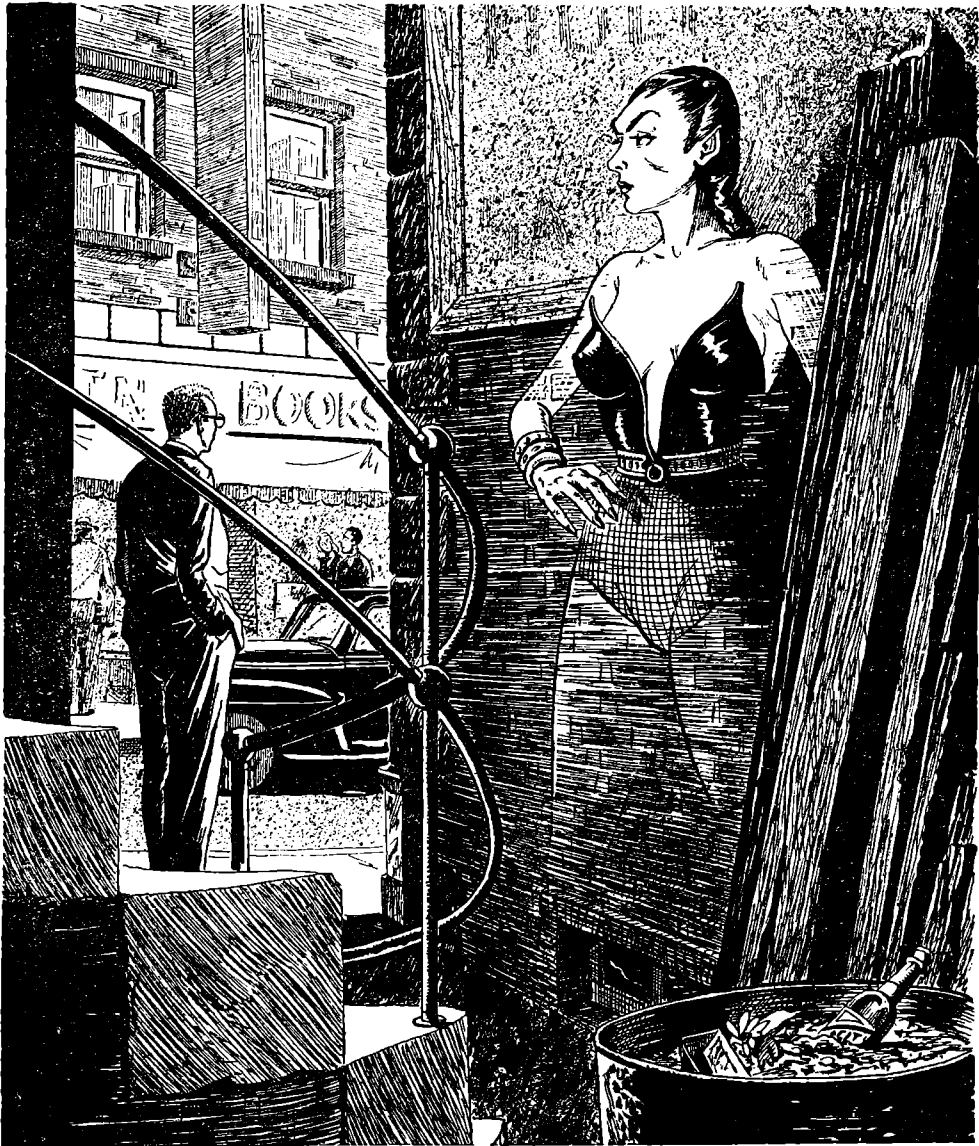
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IS THAT YOU XELUCHLI?

By DICK HETSCHEL

Orena and Xeluchli meant well. But had they obeyed the rules, had they remained bodiless observers, they would have saved BUP, that .02F star, a hellaceous catastrophe.

IT WAS a perfectly conventional tour, once around the Milky Way with stops at several of the major stars. It was supposed to take about eighty-eight

million years so they planned to be back for supper.

In the beginning the students had remained in a fairly close knot around mundo

Karftahiti, their instructor, but as the tour progressed some of the more venturesome strayed further and further from the rest of the class.

Dro Orena and Dro Xeluchli had wandered a greater distance than usual from the crowd and were jamming experimental thought webs into a large space vortex when Xeluchli signalled to Orena to tune her mind off the lecture frequency. It was against the rules, of course, but then Orena supposed Xeluchli would take the blame for her if they were caught, so she switched over to the conversational band.

"Want to have some fun?" asked Xeluchli.

Orena continued to stare into the space vortex. "How?" she asked.

Xeluchli waved a visible thought fragment in a circle about him. "The stars," he said. "Let's explore a little on our own. They never hit the really good spots on these tours."

Orena had been thinking for a long time of doing that very thing so she hardly argued at all before letting Xeluchli convince her.

"We'll be gone only a little while and they'll never miss us," said Xeluchli as they headed for a nearby star-cluster.

EVERYTHING would have been all right if they had obeyed the rules. "Hands off the planets," the rules said, and that was really a reasonable and intelligent demand. In all fairness to them, it must be admitted that Orena and Xeluchli had no intention of breaking that rule when they strayed away from the rest of the crowd.

They found this little planet which was listed in the textbook as "Bup"; an .02f star with nine planets. By a lucky chance they were just in time to see a transient little civilization spring into being on its third planet. This was too wonderful a chance to miss so they decided to stay a few hundred thousand years and see how it would end. They would catch up with the rest of the tour afterward.

The creatures entering into civilization were bipeds and of a physical appearance rather low on the aesthetic scale but Orena and Xeluchli soon discovered that they were

bi-sexual. This pleased them very much and made them feel that they had something in common with this little civilization, for Orena and Xeluchli were bi-sexuals too, and bi-sexual civilizations were rare. Orena and Xeluchli had, in fact, been the only bi-sexuals in the touring group, which had been composed mostly of the slow-moving amoeboids from Procyon and the emotionally unstable penta-sexuals from Antares.

It was a land civilization which they had found and, just as the textbooks said, it was having its beginning in the river deltas of the continents. The bipeds were both herbivorous and carnivorous and the duration and bloodiness of their early wars was almost exactly as predicted by Globnung's food-war formula. The speed of advance of the civilization was a little slow, but still comfortably within the lower limits of the Atati equation.

Everything went well for the first five thousand years, but then Orena and Xeluchli began to catch signs of Gibrait's anachronism. They watched anxiously for a while, and soon they saw that their fears had been justified. Sociological advance had fallen so far behind technological advance that the Law of Socio-Martial Flux had been brought into play. The little civilization would almost certainly die a premature death.

Orena and Xeluchli watched the invention of greater and greater weapons and the hopeless retardation of the social system and were saddened. They had hoped to watch a real civilization and this one was not even going to go past the one-planet stage. They did not see how it could last half a century more.

"And they're bi-sexuals, too," said Xeluchli. "It's a shame. I wish we could do something."

"Yes, but you know what the rules are," reminded Orena. "We can only watch. We can't help them."

"I know," said Xeluchli a little crossly. "A bunch of poly-sexuals and sixth-degree intellectuals make rules and we're supposed to obey them. You know, I'm tempted to interfere. No one would know."

Orena objected, but she was really in favor of violating the rule, too, and after a

while she let Xeluchli have his way.

"We'll start the civilization over," he suggested. "It was low in some qualities at the very start, but if we begin it over again with two above-average specimens I'm sure it will turn out better this time."

"We'll save one of each sex and destroy the rest of the race," agreed Orena. "It will be just like one of the controlled experiments in the laboratories of Arcturus 7, but on an even larger scale. Oh, this will be interesting!"

"We'll go down to the planet ourselves," said Xeluchli, "and pick the two creatures we'll use. We'll guide them and their descendants for a while until we're sure they'll turn out all right."

They had been heading down toward the planet and now they landed on a mountaintop. "Shall we stay together?" asked Orena.

"No, let's each of us observe the creatures separately at close range for a while. Then, after we've seen enough to make a good choice, we'll pick two of them and destroy the rest."

"We'll each pick one," suggested Orena. "You pick the female and I'll pick the male."

Xeluchli agreed, and added, "When you've found him, enclose him in a bubble of mental protection and turn your mind to wavelength OEC. I'll turn my mind to wavelength HHW when I have a female protected and the combination of these waves, each harmless by itself, will result in a .0008w wave which will destroy the rest of the race. Afterward we'll meet on this hill."

THERE was a city at the foot of the mountains and Orena headed there. She intermingled her atoms with those of a building for a while and watched from one of its inner walls, trying to get some idea of the habits of the bipeds.

At first she was puzzled by the fact that only one sex of the creatures entered the room she was watching. After a while, though, she began to suspect its true nature. She was learning little here, so she went out into the streets of the city where she could observe all phases of life.

At first she assumed a shape that the

bipeds could not see, but after a while she decided that she could best accomplish her purpose in the guise of one of the bipeds themselves. She turned herself into a female of the species and began in earnest her search for a desirable male.

She found that the society was very primitive in most respects and that it was not at all difficult to integrate herself into it. This was a new experience for her and one of the most thrilling things that had ever happened to her. One by one she dropped the use of senses and mental ranges not possessed by the bipeds to make the game more exciting. Soon her senses and thoughts were operating on a level hardly above that of the creatures themselves.

SHE often found herself wishing that she had paid more attention to her classes in the lower civilizations so she could better understand the things she was seeing. She was in no hurry to bring this adventure to an end, so for several weeks she investigated male after male, looking for one with a high socio-kinetic rating and a low or average techno-kinetic rating.

It was about thirty days later that she made her decision. She had been talking to a young male biped in a bookstore when she realized that he would do at least as well as any she had come across so far. She found that his name was Adam Henessey and she proceeded to sound him out a little further.

"And literature, then," she asked, picking up a book from one of the tables, "wouldn't you say that great literature should be placed above science?"

"Yes," Adam agreed, "the *material* is emphasized too strongly at present. We must pay more attention to the *spiritual*." He adjusted his eyelenses. "I believe that that is one of the major troubles of civilization." He tapped the ashes from his cigarette and looked at her for confirmation.

"Hell, yes!" she agreed heartily. "We are concentrating on the means and forgetting the ends."

"We are concentrating on the transient," he echoed, "and forgetting the eternal."

This bit of conversation was enough to convince the somewhat satiated Orena. She cast a web of mental protection over the

biped and set her mind to an OEI wave-length.

Obviously Xeluchli had already made his choice and set his mind to the HHW wave-length, for all the bipeds she could see except the protected Adam Henessey immediately fell to the ground and lay still. The effect was odd and uncheerful.

Now came one of the most interesting games she had played in her stay on the planet. She tried to match the biped's state of bewilderment and terror with one of her own and at the same time lead him to the top of the mountain. She could, of course, have transported him, protective web and all, to the mountaintop in a split second, but that would have seemed like cheating at the game. The web protecting Adam Henessey was invisible to his eyes and Orena continued to play the part of a fellow biped.

In his confused state, it was not difficult to lead Adam up the mountain by little suggestions or, often by merely taking the first step. She suggested that from the mountaintop they could see better what had happened and whether anyone else was alive. He even added the idea that they might get out of the area of contamination or whatever it was by climbing. "Heavy gases stay low," he said, assuming, apparently, that another war had been declared.

They were the first to reach the top. Xeluchli and his find were not yet in sight. Orena kept up her act while they waited.

She and Adam Henessey searched out over the valleys below and chattered worried ideas at each other.

Orena was secretly watching for Xeluchli whenever she looked down the mountain but soon the sun set and the light faded. It was very dark in the valleys and she did not wish to use any but biped eyes in the presence of Adam Henessey, at least not until Xeluchli arrived, so she gave up looking.

As time went by she began to get worried. It was cold on the mountain and she grew impatient to change to some other form. She searched the valleys below again, but not even a light of the dead city was visible.

The biped was growing nervous and she was not sure how much longer she could keep him here. He was standing sheltered by a crag of rock and gazing out into the dark spaces where the city had been, and for a long while Orena stood near him and looked far out into the valleys to the left.

Time passed and finally the sun began to rise and she grew more worried than ever. A terrible thought hit her and she shivered. She stole glances at Adam Henessey from time to time and she noticed that he was glancing queerly at *her* now and then. This continued for some time.

Finally she could stand it no longer.

She turned to him and asked:

"Heavens, is that you, Xeluchli?"

She really did not need an answer.