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THE ORIGINAL
**SCIENCE
FICTION**
STORIES

Volume 9

JANUARY, 1959

Number 5

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Next issue on sale December 1, 1958

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, January, 1959, published 10 times a year (monthly, except for October and December) 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. Entire contents copyright 1958 by Columbia Publications, Inc. 35c per copy; yearly subscriptions \$3.00. Printed in the U. S. A.

make

a

prison

by *LAWRENCE*

BLOCK

The Altheans had never seen a being like this one before, but they knew he was dangerous. So every precaution had to be taken to make his prison escape-proof.

THE FIRST Althean said, "Well, the tower is completed."

The second Althean smiled. "Good. It is all ready for the prisoner, then?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure he'll be quite comfortable? He won't languish and die in such a state?"

"No," said the first Althean. "He'll be all right. It's taken a long time to build the tower, and I've had ample opportunity to study the creature. We've made his habitat as ideal for him as possible."

"I suppose so." The second Althean shuddered slightly. "I don't know," he said. "I suppose it's nothing more than projection on my part, but the mere thought of a *prison*..." He broke off and shuddered again.

"I know," said the other, sympathetically. "It's something none of us have ever had to conceive of before. The whole notion of locking up a fellow-being is an abominable one, I'll admit. But for that matter, consider the creature itself!"

"It wouldn't do for him to be loose."

"Wouldn't do! Why, it would be quite impossible. He actually *murders*. He killed three of our fellow-beings before we were able to subdue him."

THE SECOND Althean shuddered more violently than before, and it appeared for a moment as though he was about to become physically ill. "But *why*? What type of being is he, for goodness sake? Where does he come from? What's he doing here?"

"Ah," said the first, "now you've hit upon it. You see, there's no way of knowing any of those answers. One morning he was discovered by a party of ten. They attempted to speak to him, and what do you think his rejoinder was?"

"He struck out at them, the way I heard it."

"Precisely! Utterly unprovoked assault, with three of their number dead as a result. The first case of murder on record here in thirty generations. Incredible!"

"And since then..."

"He's been a prisoner. No communication, no new insights, nothing. He eats whatever we feed him—he sleeps when the darkness comes and wakes when it goes. We have learned nothing about him, but I can tell you this for a fact. He is dangerous."

"Yes," said the second Althean.

"Very dangerous. He must be kept locked up. Of course, we wish him no harm—so we've made his prison as secure as possible, while keeping it as comfortable as possible. I daresay we've done a good job."

"Look," said the second, "perhaps I'm squeamish. I don't know. But are you sure he can never escape?"

"Positive."

"How can you be sure?"

THE FIRST Althean sighed. "The tower is one hundred thirty feet high. A drop from that distance is obviously fatal. Right?"

"Right."

"The prisoner's quarters are at the top of the tower, and the top is wider than the base

—that is, the sides slope inward. And the sides are very, very smooth—so climbing down is quite impossible.”

“Couldn’t he come down the same way he’ll go up? It only stands to reason.”

“Again, quite impossible. He’ll be placed in his quarters by means of a pneumatic tube, and the same tube will be used to send him his food. The entire tower is so designed that it can be entered via the tube, and can only be left by leaping from the top. The food that he doesn’t eat, as well as any articles which he tires of, may be thrown over the side.”

The second Althean hesitated. “It *seems* safe.”

“It should. It *is* safe.”

“I suppose so. I suppose it’s safe, and I suppose it’s not cruel, but somehow... Well, when will the prisoner be placed in the tower? Is it all ready for his occupancy?”

“It’s ready, all right. And, as a matter of fact, we’re taking him there in just a few minutes. Would you care to come along?”

“It might be interesting, at that.”

“Then come along.”

THE TWO walked in silence to the first Althean’s motor car and drove in silence to the tower. The tower was, indeed, a striking structure, both in terms of size and of design. They stepped out of the motor car and waited, and a large motor truck drew up shortly, pulling to a stop at the base of the tower. Three Althean guards stepped out of the truck, followed by the prisoner. His limbs were securely shackled.

“See?” demanded the first Althean. “He’ll be placed in the tube like that, and he’ll discover the key to his shackles in his quarters.”

“Clever.”

“We’ve worked it out carefully,” the first explained. “I don’t mean to sound boastful, but we’ve figured out all the angles.”

THE PRISONER was placed in the tube, the aperture of which was located at the very base of the tower. Once inside, it was closed securely and bolted shut. The

three Althean guards hesitated for several moments until a red light at the base indicated that the prisoner had entered his quarters. Then they returned to the motor truck and drove off down the road.

"We could go now," said the first. "I'd like to wait and see if he'll throw down the shackles, though. If you don't mind."

"Not at all. I'm rather interested now, you know. It's not something you see every day."

They waited. After several minutes, a pair of shackles plummeted through the air and dropped to the ground about

twenty yards from the two Altheans.

"Ah," said the first. "He's found the key."

Moments later, the second pair of shackles followed the first, and the key followed soon thereafter. Then the prisoner walked to the edge of the tower and leaned over the railing, gazing down at them.

"Awesome," said the second Althean. "I'm glad he can't escape."

The prisoner regarded them thoughtfully for several seconds. Then he mounted the railing, flapped his wings, and soared off into the sky.