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**ALL
STORIES
NEW**

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The Grakse had been responsible for the rise of these strange creatures on the planet's surface, and didn't want to harm them. But it had to answer a

MATING CALL

by Joseph Farrell

THE GRAKSE was frantic with the mating urge by the time it entered the solar system. It had cruised from star to star while the galaxy made a half turn. The time was only a fraction of its life span, but in this fraction it was no longer guided only by the instinctive urge to seek food. Another instinct was in control; the creature was charged with heat, seeking its like.

It had never seen another like itself. On a barren planet it had grown, but there was no remembrance of when or where it had been born. The only memory was of eating, of burrowing into the rocks toward the heat and radiation that meant its nourishment was nearby.

Growing longer and fatter during an immense time, and then developing strange organs. The changes came so slowly that it didn't remember much what it had been like before they happened.

One day the desire for feeding was gone. Metallic glands, grown to maturity, sent secretions into the massive body. The Grakse didn't know why it was doing it, but it bored up through

the rock and broke out onto the surface of an airless world.

Without sight, but with far ranging senses that had grown in its heavy metallic body, the Grakse perceived the sky, a world it had not known of.

But it had been there before. Instinct and racial memory brought the creature fully to the surface, and it knew what to do.

It purred.

The purring grew into a roar as metallic glands created certain transuranic isotopes and threw them together in right proportions. Tubes opened and streams of photons were kurlled back. The Grakse rose on its own living jets and left the barren planet forever.

Its long body, built of tissues made of long-lived isotopes, was covered with a skin of highly efficient damping metal. The radiations that originated inside were turned in, deflected to strange organs and turned into propulsive power. The creature accelerated eventually to light speed and cruised through space seeking what its instinct demanded.

It sped past a sun and with spe-

cialized senses probed the planets as it passed, and there was no response. Then another and another... and no response. Sexual tension mounted and the probings grew more and more frantically.

When it approached Sol, it quivered in anticipation. The probing was answered. On the third planet of this sun it would find its mate....

THE GRAKSE who lived in the Earth had been there for many millions of years. It had dim memories of the days when it was a small creature, slithering through faults in the rocks seeking the radioactive deposits, feeding and fattening.

In those early days there were giant creatures on the planet's surface, made of the strange material, protoplasm. The Grakse paused in its feeding, now and then, to learn with its special senses something about the life that teemed on the surface of the planet. At first it seemed incredible that an organism could be composed of such light elements as were to be found on the surface. But the Grakse soon accepted that they were living beings, like itself.

Not really like itself, though; it found that out when it ventured to the surface.

It was a steaming Mesozoic swamp, and the water boiled into live steam as the Grakse came out of the ground. The Grakse slithered to a dry spot and looked around, feeling a kinship with the living things of the surface.

But the living things of the surface felt no kinship. When the enormous clouds of steam began to clear, the creatures of the surface were far away, those who were not dead or dying. In the distance, the Grakse's perception told him that they were lumbering off, terrified and falling clumsily over each other as they hurried from the area.

All over the swamp dead bodies

floated on the water, giant saurians and small ones, fish, insects. The Grakse was puzzled and unhappy. It had come for companionship, but the scene was not the one it had sensed from its ore pocket.

After a while it noticed that the forest was ablaze. This did not bother it or surprise it, for it knew that such things happened now and then.

The forest burned to ashes and the water steamed, but none of the animals came back. The ones who were dead cooked and rotted slowly.

The Grakse waited a long time, hoping some of the creatures would return. Finally its hunger made it slide back into the ground and seek out another ore pocket. It came to the surface a few times again and finally realized the truth.

The surface was not for the Grakse. The heat and radiation of its body was deadly to all the protoplasmic life. After that, it stayed far under the earth, contenting itself with perceiving what went on above by using its special senses. It was sorry for having caused trouble.

THE LIFE above was constantly changing, he noticed. Over the generations, there were some sudden changes in the species, and some slow subtle changes. One forest dwelling species caught his interest. These creatures seemed to be developing a bipedal walk and a peculiar aggressiveness. The Grakse came closer to this tribe to perceive better and then, worried, withdrew quickly.

It had noticed that after it had been near the creatures above, even if not near enough to cause them noticeable harm, they were likely to bear strange offspring. The Grakse waited anxiously, hoping that the species above had not been too badly affected.

When the strange young appeared, the Grakse felt remorse. They were born almost without body hair, naked

helpless creatures without protection against the cold. They were cursed with a curiosity that kept them in trouble. And their spines were malformed, now they were forced to walk on two legs. The Grakse felt sad. It resolved to avoid approaching any of the creatures of the surface from then on. But it was developing a strange desire for companionship.

Somehow the deformed creatures it had brought about managed to live; and some time later, the Grakse realized that they were dominating their surroundings. They used sticks and stones to slay creatures much larger than themselves. Their nakedness was no longer a handicap, for they were wearing the skins of other creatures. The Grakse began to feel a paternal affection for them.

In time, the two legged creatures began to dig into the ground for metals. This was the first time any living creature of the surface had done that. The Grakse felt a thrill of anticipation within its metallic body. Perhaps they would consume the metal and eventually develop into Grakses themselves. . . .

Between feedings, the Grakse had often pondered upon its own origin. What had been its beginning? There was no memory of a beginning, nor was there a sign of an end. Yet every living thing of the surface was born and reproduced itself and died.

The race of men did not consume the metals and become like the Grakse. The Grakse was disappointed, but it continued to feel a kinship with them. Their groups became larger and larger and at last they were in control of most of the outer planet.

The Grakse perceived contentedly that it and the men were the rulers of this planet. The inside, the greater part, belonged to the Grakse. And finally came another surprise—they were seeking out the material on which it fed!

There was plenty of it. The interior of the earth was full of radioactive matter and they were only scratching their little surface. The Grakse felt no sense of trespass. Instead, there was another hope that they would consume the food and grow into beings like itself.

This time the hope was even shorter-lived. It saw that the men knew of the danger to them and took great precautions in handling the food. Great walls of masonry and heavy metals shielded the small hoards of material they gathered. Sometimes they deliberately brought two pieces of certain materials together and a wild reaction followed. The materials were similar to some of the lighter matter of which the Grakse's flesh was composed.

The Grakse felt a strange stirring when this happened. It learned to follow movements of radioactive material to remote areas of the earth to be near the untamed chain reactions.

When the chain reaction took place, the Grakse quivered with a strange unexplained ecstasy and longing. On a smaller scale, similar things were going on in its own body, controlled and channeled by the Grakse's specialized organs.

Then suddenly the Grakse felt a new emotion. Another of its kind was near. It was approaching fast, and something was going to happen—something strange and wonderful.

THE PRESIDENT of the United States spoke from Geneva at the conclusion of the top level conference. Before other cameras, the highest executives of the other great nations were giving similar messages to their people. "My fellow Americans," said the president, "tonight I am privileged to bring you some really good news. The cold war is over. . . ."

He went on with a rehash of past events. Seven nations now had the hydrogen bomb; the amount of radiation in the Earth's atmosphere was

reaching an alarming level. He didn't go into too much detail about matters as bone tumors, mutations and other unpleasant subjects; those items were tightly classified. The president knew about them. But it was just as well if the public were not alarmed. Panic might result.

So the executives told each other. And every one of them agreed that testing of fusion weapons must stop. Damage had been done, and there would be more, but a long rest for the atmosphere would straighten things out in time.

"...complete and unrestricted inspection," said the president. "Both aerial and surface. Within a few days the United Nations Security Council will set up an official inspection program."

He took off his glasses and polished them unhurriedly. His image bounced off the space station and into television receivers all over North America. A long dramatic pause, while he faced the cameras with a tired but happy smile.

"And as proof of good faith, inspection teams have already started. A large group of American planes, filled with scientists, had already taken off for destinations throughout Russia and China. Foreign planes will soon be arriving in America. There are no restrictions on these people.

"Since the great day when American know-how and the great human resources of our country first smashed the atom, it had been the goal of the American people to dedicate this great power for peace..."

The other executives were saying the same thing, with slight variations as to which great people had first smashed the atom and which great nation had always wanted peace. But all were sincere; none had any reservations about international inspection. They knew what could be the results of further testing...

THE GRAKSE trembled with anticipation and turned toward the third planet. Inside its body, metallic glands began secreting specialized isotopes at an increased rate. Transuranic elements accumulated in its organs, overflowed, and began to circulate through its body. The Grakse strained frantically toward the third planet.

Deceleration was swift, but even the short time spent circling the planet was tormenting. The Grakse sent out an anguished call. Its mate was still on the planet. It should be out here, waiting for it.

The other was still underground, under the southern ice cap of the planet. The Grakse from space sent a frantic call to the one in the earth. Now is the time. Why don't you come?

A confused impression came back to it. There was eagerness like its own, but a strange hesitation. The Grakse in space demanded again. It begged and pleaded.

It could wait no longer. It plunged down toward the ice cap where its mate still hesitated.

THE GRAKSE beneath the Earth felt the call from space. For some time a strange craving had been developing inside it. Now instinct drove it burrowing toward the surface to meet its mate.

Its thoughts were confused. It knew that something must be done. But what? It didn't matter—a built-in knowledge would drive it on and tell it what to do. Strange things were happening in its body and it began to quiver with anticipation of what was to come.

It knew it must leave the planet and that made it think of the men. From long study of them, it knew something about their ways and their motives. It knew that they had agreed to stop exploding hydrogen bombs. And it knew why. That was too bad, for the Grakse had enjoyed the radio-

active bursts. They made it tingle inside with strange desires. . .

The Grakse stopped burrowing upward and started to think. The feeling caused by the nuclear explosions was somehow related to this craving that resulted from the call from space.

Then the Grakse suddenly knew its destiny. It started to climb upward even faster, shaking with eagerness, secreting hormones at an ever increasing rate. Preparing for the meeting. . .

It stopped, thinking of the men who had given up their weapons because the air of their planet could not stand much more radiation. The call from above became demanding. *Why are you waiting?*

The other was barely beyond the atmosphere. That was too close. The Grakse started to call for it to move away. But the other wasn't listening. It was overripe, more than ready. . .

The Grakse struggled miserably with itself, just below the surface, while the ice boiled away just above it. It was wretchedly lonesome for its kind. It clawed its way upward. But the thought of the men held it back. It writhed in indecision.

Then I'm coming after you!

It sensed the other speeding down

through the atmosphere and quivered with tumescence. Its mate was close! But it fought for control. Not here! It mustn't happen here! The men. . .

The other was burrowing into the ground toward it. The Grakse started instinctively in that direction and remembered the men again. The craving of its body was driving it toward its mate. But not here! It made a great mental effort and hurried off as fast as it could in another direction, angling to the surface.

The other turned its course to intersect. The Grakse fought against its instincts and pushed on.

ITS SHAPE was no longer just right for digging through rock. There was something different about its body. Suddenly it knew what the change meant and it turned straight up, clawing madly to gain the surface first.

The other was gaining. Once the Grakse felt itself turning back. With another effort of will, it broke through the surface.

Now. It wanted to wait here for its mate.

But it forced itself. It purred and strained upward and its jets sent it skyward.

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Mating Call

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Its body trembled with the other's nearness and every tissue of it demanded satisfaction. But it kept the men in its mind. The other was not far behind. The Grakse fought against its cravings until it could not control them any longer.

But it was far enough. They were at the orbit of Pluto. It gave one last thought to Earth; a goodbye to men from a creature they had never known.

The two Grakses squared off, circling each other carefully. A section of skin peeled off each and their backs arched into perfect hemispheres of the damping metal. A million long tentacles extended from their fronts, exuded by their glands and composed of long polymers of molecules made of heavy elements beyond those created by men.

They circled, in the ecstasy that preceded embrace. The circling slowed and they probed each other. It was time for the climax.

Suddenly they hurled themselves at each other. A million tons merged into one body. The tentacles interlocked into a perfect sphere. Perfect uniting.

Critical mass.

The damper held for a full second. The long polymers entwined to become the seeds of new Grakses. The seed exploded into space. Millions of potential new Grakses, but most would drift in space or fall into suns or land on foodless planets and die of lack of nourishment.

But a few would live and grow. The Grakse knew that and in its last second of life knew the answer to its own origin.

On Earth men saw a nova, but it disappeared and the observatories could not find it. Nor could anyone explain another slight increase of radiation in the atmosphere.

But it was a small increase, and nobody gave it a second thought.