

# SUPER-SCIENCE

## FICTION

Vol. 3 — No. 5

August, 1959

### CONTENTS

#### NOVELETTE

- PLANET OF THE ANGRY GIANTS *by Dirk Clinton* ..... 62  
The natives were huge, and their wrath was terrific!

#### SHORT STORIES

- THE HORROR IN THE ATTIC *by Alex Merriman* ..... 2  
It was a hideous, horrible THING on a gruesome errand
- MONSTERS THAT ONCE WERE MEN *by Eric Rodman* .... 18  
They were ghastly, utterly repulsive creatures
- BIRTH OF A MONSTER *by Richard Stark* ..... 36  
The doctor was frightened—as well as he might be!
- MAN-HUNTING ROBOT *by James Rosenquest* ..... 44  
Was Jon just the victim of a cruel, sadistic sport?
- WORLD OF CREEPING TERROR *by J. W. Rose* ..... 94  
Why was the young Earthman attacked so viciously?
- WHICH WAS THE MONSTER? *by Dan Malcolm* ..... 110  
Don't judge a being just by the appearance
- SPECIMENS *by George H. Smith* ..... 126  
The space ship was automatic. The aliens noticed this

#### FEATURES

- SCIENCE SHORTS *by Edgar P. Straus* ..... 17
- TOWARD ABSOLUTE ZERO ..... 43

#### COVER by Emsch

#### ILLUSTRATIONS by Emsch.

W. W. Scott — Editor

SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION is published bi-monthly by Headline Publications Inc., at 7 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial office at 32 West 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y. Second class postage paid at the post office at Holyoke, Mass. Single copy 35c. Subscription rates, \$4.00 for 12 issues. Not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts, and all such materials must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes. All stories printed in the magazine are fiction, and any similarity between the characters and actual persons is coincidental. Copyright 1959 by Headline Publications Inc. All rights, including translation, reserved under International Copyright Convention and Pan American Copyright Convention. Printed in the U.S.A.

# PLANET OF THE ANGRY GIANTS

by DIRK CLINTON

NOVELETTE

*illustrated by* EMSH

The inhabitants of Dunhill V were gigantic. They were peaceful and good natured until something happened to upset them—and then their wrath was truly terrific!

COMMANDER Laurence Burke, who headed the Terran colony on the planet of Dunhill V, was a small man, as Earthmen went: he was a wiry figure no more than five feet six inches tall, with hardly an ounce of superfluous fat on his body. Despite the handicap of his size, Burke had been sufficiently adept at catching the attention of his superiors to reach his present fairly important post, as head of the tiny settlement on Dunhill V. There was one aspect of the Dunhill V assignment

that Commander Burke particularly relished: although he was by six inches the shortest Earthman in the settlement, that fact tended to be overlooked in the general scheme of things—for the simple reason that the natives of Dunhill V averaged around *eleven feet* in height, thus making all Earthmen look like dwarfs and making any individual differences in height seem insignificant.

Life was fairly quiet for the small band of Earthmen on Dunhill V. There were only



some hundred and fifty of them, living in temporary plastic domes. All the colonists were scientific observers, studying the planet's ecology and trying to determine whether it would be possible and desirable for Earth to send out a full-scale colonizing mission.

There were many factors to be considered: the climate, the edibility of the native foods, the problem of indigenous diseases, and—by far the most important—the attitude of the natives toward having another civilization settle practically in its midst.

So far, work was not quite complete on the various biophysical studies, but it seemed certain that the over-sized natives were going to be cooperative. They were enormous but gentle; the giants were very human in appearance, in all but their immense size.

They lived nomadic or pastoral lives in thinly-settled villages all over the planet, and during the first six months of the Terran colony's presence among them they had shown no hostility of any kind. They hardly seemed to care about the tiny beings that had come

to visit their planet.

One day rolled peacefully into the next for Commander Burke and his men. Each week they filed a progress report with Earth on their latest investigations and findings. The oversize aliens were causing quite a stir back home, it seemed. The news of their discovery had made the front page of every telefax sheet in the civilized galaxy. No intelligent humanoid life-form of such a size had ever been discovered before.

The news had caught the fancy of the general public. Commander Burke sighed pessimistically when he heard of the reaction. He knew that now he could anticipate the arrival of trouble.

And, sure enough, trouble arrived—right on schedule.

**BURKE** was compiling the weekly report when the first harbinger of trouble showed up. It was a warm morning, the temperature already in the high eighties and mounting higher—Dunhill V's sun was a young golden star that gave off plenty of heat,

and even in the polar regions that temperature rarely got much below fifty. Burke worked rapidly, efficiently, checking through the reports from each of his subdepartments and putting his final okay on them before they were transmitted to Earth.

*Report on Flora and Fauna... Meteorological Findings... Relations with the Natives... Geological Report... Report of Medical Observations...*

Burke added his signature to each of the reports in turn and stacked them in their place. A knock on the flimsy panelling of his office door interrupted his concentration suddenly.

"Come in" he said sharply. "Who is it?"

'Looking up, he saw it was Ledderman, one of the non-coms from the Signal Department. He was just a kid, out on his first interstellar expedition, and his pale face reflected the tension he felt on barging into the Commanding Officer's quarters.

"Sir—"

"I'm not ready for you yet, Mr. Ledderman. You can tell

your boss I'll have the report ready for transmission at 1100 hours, as usual. It's only 0945 now."

"I know, sir. I didn't come to pick up the report, sir. You see, sir—"

"Well?"

The boy got control of himself. "Sir, Lieutenant Hastings sent me over here to tell you that a spaceship from Earth has just requested landing clearance at our spaceport."

Burke's eyes widened. "An official ship?"

"No, sir. A p-private one. And Lieutenant Hastings says there's a second ship crossing the orbit of the outermost planet now, and heading here too!"

Burke frowned. "Did the ship say what it wanted on this planet?"

"No, sir. It simply requested landing clearance at our spaceport."

Burke bit deeply into the stem of his pipe. This was all very irregular, he thought. Private ships had no business here until the planet was officially opened for commerce, and that was some time yet in the future.

But, on the other hand, Burke considered, someone had spent a lot of money to come out here, and no very great harm would be done by allowing a brief landing. Especially if the visitor happened to be a junketing member of the Galactic Congress, or someone else of similar influence back home.

Sighing, Burke said, "All right. Tell Hastings he can give the ship clearance. But make sure he lets the ship know that we reserve the right to revoke its landing permission at any time."

**T**WO hours later, a seventh ship stood on the colony landing field, not far from the six big ships in which the members of the colonizing group had come, six months previously. The new ship was far smaller than the expedition's vessels, which were capable of holding fifty passengers a piece; this was only an eight-or-ten passenger ship. Even then, it was too big for its occupants—or occupant, since there was only one.

He was a rugged, powerful-

ly-built man who introduced himself as Arnold Slater the moment he entered Commander Burke's office. Slater was well over six feet tall, and he stared down at the diminutive Burke with an expression of mingled surprise and mockery. Burke met his stare evenly, reminding himself that Slater, for all his brawn, was smaller than a native child.

"I'll make the purpose of my visit clear as briefly as I can," Slater rumbled, seating himself opposite Burke and knotting his thick hands together.

"Yes. Please be brief," Burke said a trifle waspishly. "I happen to be quite busy."

Slater nodded. "Are you familiar with the name of Harris Reynard, Commander?"

"I can't say that I am."

Slater looked momentarily disconcerted. He said, "I suppose that's because you've spent most of your time out here in the far solar systems, Commander. But Harris Reynard is a leading Terran entrepreneur of entertainment, with contracts on a hundred civilized worlds. He's connected with half a dozen different

forms of entertainment—of which one of the most important is his circuit of championship boxers. Do you follow me, Commander?”

“I think so,” Burke said dryly, puffing at his pipe to conceal his displeasure.

“As for myself, Commander,” Slater went on, “I’m one of Mr. Reynard’s close associates. Which is why he’s entrusted me with this mission.”

“And the purpose of your mission is—?”

Slater smiled—a cold, malevolent smile. “Mr. Reynard and I have followed with a great deal of interest the published reports of your findings here. Especially the discovery of a race of giant humanoid beings, intelligent and of enormous size. Mr. Reynard has sent me here for the purpose of obtaining one or two of these natives for taking part in boxing exhibitions.”

Burke gasped so sharply he nearly dropped his pipe. “You can’t be serious!”

Slater’s face took on a smug expression. “Mr. Reynard and I think the idea has great possibilities. We could stage contests in which two of the gi-

ants boxed each other—or in which one of them took on ordinary-sized boxing champions—”

“The whole idea is incredible,” Burke said flatly. “The natives of this planet are utterly peacelike creatures. They aren’t boxers.”

“We could train them,” Slater chuckled. “Mr. Reynard has all the galaxy’s best fight trainers on his payroll.”

“No. It’s out of the question for you to remove any natives from this planet.”

“I don’t need your permission. If they’re intelligent beings, they have the right to go wherever they want to go, and you can’t interfere if I want to offer them a legitimate contract—”

“I *can* interfere,” Burke said crisply. “This planet is still under my absolute jurisdiction. And while it is, no outsiders are going to meddle with the native life—least of all, to remove any of the people. That’s my final decision. It won’t do you any good to argue.”

“Look here,” Slater grunted. “Mr. Reynard’s an impor-

tant man. He won't take this lying down. He's got big friends in the Galactic Congress—"

"I don't give a damn if his cousin is the Galactic President," Burke snapped. "Let him go use his influence on somebody else. Until this planet is opened for private exploration, Reynard will just have to keep his filthy hands off the natives."

Slater stood up, his face an icy mask. Commander Burke remained seated, thus minimizing the difference in their heights. Slater said darkly, "Mr. Reynard don't like to be crossed. I came right out to the edge of nowhere to get those aliens, and—"

"And you're going to go lickety-split back to your boss with your tail between your legs," Burke shot back. "You've had my final answer. Your landing permission is revoked. Get yourself off this planet as fast as you can, Slater."

"I'm entitled to an overnight stay by Galactic law," Slater retorted. "My engines need checking."

Burke scowled. The law of

overnight stay was universal; little as he cared for Slater, there was no way he could argue, once he had granted original landing permission. "All right, then. Stay overnight, if you want. But if I catch you monkeying around with the natives, I'll clap you in brig so fast you won't know what happened to you. Now get out of here!"

SLATER left, favoring Burke with an ugly glare before he closed the door. The Commander sighed and mopped the beads of sweat from his forehead.

*What a filthy business*, he thought. He had not told the truth when he said he had never heard of Harris Reynard. Of course he had; everyone in the galaxy knew of Reynard, the multi-billionaire entertainment entrepreneur who had begun with dirty three-dimensional postcards and worked up to an empire of vice and sensationalism that spanned a hundred worlds. Naturally it would occur to Reynard to stage some sort of boxing exhibition involving the giant beings of Dunhill V.



The worst of it was, Burke thought, that even though it was possible to slam the door in Reynard's face now, the refusal could only be temporary. Once this planet was opened up to private enterprise, once the giants were declared an intelligent race, Reynard could send half a dozen slimy Slaters in here and sign up the natives to any sort of contract, and so long as he met the laws of galactic employment practices there wouldn't be a thing anyone could do to stop him.

*But at least I stopped him now, Burke thought. For whatever good that does.*

Burke glanced out his office window, which faced the spaceport area. Slater was trudging across the clearing toward his ship. Burke shook his head sadly. It was never wise to cross a man as powerful as Harris Reynard—but, on the other hand, it was utterly impossible to hand any of the natives over to Reynard's underling without a formal okay from home.

Reynard would probably make trouble over this, Burke thought gloomily. A few

strings pulled and the home office would transfer Burke to some frigid ice-ball of a world, or to a super-tropical place where a man rotted from the warmth in a month. *Let him, Burke thought defiantly. At least I did what I thought was right.*

He switched on his communicator and dialed the channel of the colony's signal office. Ensign Ledderman answered the call.

"Yes, Commander?"

"Is Hastings there?"

"Just a moment, sir."

There was a click and the voice of Lieutenant Hastings, the colony's chief signal officer, said, "Yes, Commander Burke?"

"What's the latest on that second spaceship, Lieutenant?"

"A hundred thousand miles up, and going into a landing orbit, sir."

"Let me know when it lands."

"Yes, sir."

"On the other ship, the one that came down a few hours ago—I've revoked its landing permission. The pilot pulled

Overnight Stay on me, but I want him to get out first thing in the morning."

"Right, sir."

Burke broke the contact and turned away, clenching his fists impotently. He felt hampered by the law—the law that said any Terran ship was entitled to land at any Terran-settled spaceport planet. Requesting landing permission was only a formality. He could get into serious trouble for refusing it, even though the ships declined to tell him what their purpose in coming here might be.

He thought again of Slater and his plan to sign up the giant aliens as boxers. The thought made Burke furious. He turned back to his work.

He was still hard at work, some hours later, when the second spaceship landed.

**L**IKE Slater's ship, this was a small one, with a capacity of less than a dozen passengers. Also like Slater's ship, this one had a combined crew and passenger list of exactly one.

He was closer to Burke's

size, a small, rabbit-like man with unhealthy yellow skin. He darted beady little eyes all around the office and said in a staccato, chattering voice, "Slater's been here already. I know he has. the tricky bastard! What sort of deal did you make with him? He didn't tie the planet up with an exclusive, did he? I could murder him for taking that shortcut! I started out first, but he—"

Commander Burke decided it was about time to cut short the flow of words. "Just one moment. Mr.— I didn't get the name—"

"Colville. Dan Colville, affiliated with W. H. Annebale's Zoological Park. I—"

"Please, Mr. Colville. Will you calm down and tell me why you've come here—slow enough so I can manage to understand each word?"

The rabbit-like man took a deep gulp of Dunhill V's oxygen-rich atmosphere. "Well. We got the word about this planet of yours—it was all in the Earth papers, you see. And Mr. Annebale—he runs the Zoo, maybe you've heard

about it, largest private Zoo in the entire galaxy— Mr. Annebale says to me, ‘Colville, we’ve got to get a couple of those creatures for our exhibition.’

“So he packs me up and sends me off here, but somehow that snake Slater found out I was heading here, and he decided to get into the act too and get a couple of the big beasts for Reynard’s circuits, and then the low-life short-cuttet me and got here first, but if he signed any exclusive contracts with you I’m going to raise the biggest damn stink this side of—”

“Slater signed no contracts with me,” Burke said sharply. His lip curled in a little gesture of disgust. “Do I understand you to say that you’ve come here to get specimens of the native life on this planet to be placed on exhibit in a Zoo?”

Colville grinned, showing beaverish teeth. “That’s the ticket! We want the big ones, the ones that look like humans only they’re ten-eleven feet high—”

Burke tapped his pipe sharply against the desk. “The

people of Dunhill V are *intelligent*, Colville. They aren’t animals you can throw into a Zoo.”

“Oh, you know what I mean,” Colville wheedled. “Sure, maybe they can talk a little, and they can build a fire. But they’re really savages, you know. Not even civilized. And we give them good care. We got specimens from all over the universe, everywhere. People travel for weeks to see our show.”

“Your show will have to get along without the natives of Dunhill V.”

“Dammit,” Colville said thinly. “So Slater *did* get an exclusive after all!”

“Slater got tossed out on his ear,” Burke said. “And you’ll get the same, I’m not interested in handing over these people for boxing matches or for zoological exhibitions or for anything else. Now, will you get the hell out of here, or—”

“Don’t get sore about it, Commander,” Colville said. He smiled craftily. “There’s a lot of natives here. Nobody would miss one or two—”

“No!”

"But I could make it awful nice to be cooperative. Mr. Annebale, he gave me a big expense account for this trip. And it wouldn't be hard for me to put you down as one of the expenses—"

Colville reached into his pocket and drew out a thick roll of crisp yellow Galactic Dollars. He riffled through the roll. They were fifties; there must have been five or six thousand dollars in the roll. Colville slapped the money down on the edge of Burke's desk and looked at him pleadingly.

"How about it, Commander? Mr. Annebale wants those big boys pretty hard. I'd hate to have to go back with an empty ship."

Burke said in a glacial voice, "Attempted bribery of a Galactic Officer is a pretty serious offence, Colville. But you're too much of a worm for me to let myself get involved in prosecuting you. Just get yourself off this planet as fast as you goddam can, and I'll forget the whole thing."

"Uh-uh," Colville said sullenly. "I'm entitled to stay overnight."

"Another space lawyer, huh? All right, take your overnight stay. But I'll give you the same warning I gave Slater: don't monkey around. Don't try to bribe any of my men and don't make trouble with the natives, or I'll give you good reason to regret it."

"You're the boy who'll have the regrets, Burke. You're passing up a chance for five thousand easy bucks, and you're gonna have Mr. Annebale mad at you for no good reason at all."

"I'll survive his anger, Colville."

"Maybe you won't."

"Let me worry about that. Just get out of my sight before I explode."

Colville scrambled. Burke realized he was quivering with anger. It took him nearly five minutes to cool himself off.

The universe, he thought, is full of rats and lice and parasites like Colville and Slater. As soon as a new planet is opened up, in rush the exploiters, looking for the quick buck, not caring how they get it.

Burke shook his head. He

had made two enemies today, powerful ones—Slater and Colville, and behind them Reynard and Annebale. Those men could make trouble for him. No doubt plenty of other good men in his position had succumbed to pressure from Reynard or Annebale in the past.

*But I won't*, Burke thought. He toyed with the idea of filing a formal complaint with the home office, and decided against it. There was no sense looking for real trouble. Reynard and Annebale were just too powerful to buck.

**N**IGHT fell on Dunhill V. The big yellow sun dropped behind the mountains that ringed the Terran settlement, and the planet's three moons appeared, two of them crescent, the third full and casting brightness across the face of the planet.

Caged in the control room of his spaceship, Slater paced uneasily up and down, back and forth, like an imprisoned tiger. As each minute of the night ticked away, so did his stay on Dunhill V, he knew.

When morning came he would have to leave. And Reynard would flay him alive if he came back without the giants.

Reynard had big plans for those giants, Slater thought gloomily. The boss had the promotion all drawn up already, a big play for the eleven-foot pugilists. The only thing missing was the main dish, the aliens themselves. And that was Slater's part of the job.

Slater hadn't expected Burke to be so tough about things. Sure, it was illegal to hoist a couple of aliens out of an officially unopened planet, but most commanders were willing to wink at that fact when you mentioned the powerful name of Harris Reynard—and if you left a few thousand Galactic bucks behind as a kind of tip.

Burke hadn't even given him the chance to bring up the subject of a possible bribe. And, Slater knew, Burke would never have accepted the bribe. The halfpint spaceman was one of those rare birds with an absolutely unbendable code of honor.

*And it was just my luck to*

*run into him on this job,* Slater thought.

His active mind ran up and down the situation from half a dozen angles. For one thing, Annebale's man Colville was here—and apparently had gotten the same cold shoulder he had. Well, that was good, but not good enough; Mr. Reynard wanted to stay one jump ahead of Annebale's freakshow, and grabbing off the aliens would be just the coup to do it.

But how could he get the big creatures? He couldn't pick the spaceship up and put it down somewhere else on the planet—if he blasted off now, without clearance, he would wake the whole camp up and have them on his tail right away, while if he waited till morning to leave they would monitor his ship until he had left the region of Dunhill V completely.

So going elsewhere was out. He had committed himself to this neck of the woods.

But there was an all-night guard posted at the entrance to the colony. He had a stunner-gun he could use to take

care of the guard, and finding his way to the nearby alien village wouldn't be much of a problem.

The real trouble was that it was risky, maneuvering around under that full moon, carting a cargo of giant aliens back and forth. If somebody came along and caught him, he would be in real hot water. Burke would be perfectly within his rights in executing him on the spot.

On the other hand, Slater thought, if he went back to Earth without the critters, Reynard would probably fire him—or worse.

He was caught either way. It was too risky to handle the job, and tough if he went back to report failure. He began to wish he had brought a confederate along with him. But that would have meant splitting the fee, and he hadn't anticipated this much trouble—

A new idea occurred. There was a perfect confederate next door. Of course, Reynard would be sore about it, but not half so sore as if he came back without anything at all. Yes, Slater thought! He smiled coldly. Cooperation

among thieves, that was the ticket!

He looked at his watch. It was past midnight, and the entire colony slept, all but the lone guard posted on night duty. Quietly, Slater opened the hatch of his small spaceship and darted across the spacefield to the place where Colville's ship stood.

**S**LATER bounded up the catwalk of Colville's vessel and rapped gently on the hatch. He didn't dare tap too loudly, for fear of arousing Burke's men—but, on the other hand, he wanted Colville to hear him.

He waited a long moment after tapping. Was Colville asleep? Damnation; this could foul up everything. Slater held his hand poised, ready to rap again in another minute if he had to.

A moment before his knuckles descended, Colville's voice came from within: "Who's there and what do you want?"

"It's Slater! Open up! I've got to talk to you, Colville!"

"About what?" came the

suspicious question from inside the hatch.

"Damn it, I'll wake the whole base up if I keep shouting from out here! Let me in and I'll explain the whole deal!"

There was silence for a moment; then, gears meshed with a tiny hum and the hatch slid open. Colville stood just inside the lip of the airlock, fully dressed, looking rattier than ever.

Slater forced his face not to reveal the contempt he felt for the sly little man. He and Colville had been rivals for years, crossing paths in the service of their respective employers. The idea of *cooperating* with Colville had never even struck him until tonight.

He stepped inside and sat down on a projecting rim. "I'm here to make a deal with you, Colville."

"I ain't interested in making any deals with you," Colville said thinly.

"Are you interested in going back from here with what you came for, or aren't you?"

"Of course I am. But it isn't any business of yours what—"

"Listen to me," Slater said.

"We're both up against a stone wall in this guy Burke. He turned me down flat and I'm pretty sure he turned you down the same way. Don't try to pretend he didn't. We both have to leave tomorrow and we're both going to have to leave without the big aliens."

"My affairs still don't matter to you."

"This isn't any time to start acting cautious!" Slater said. "I know what my boss is like, and I got a pretty good notion yours is the same way. They'll both take it out of our hides if we come back empty-handed. And singly we can't do a thing against this guy Burke. But if we team up, we can both get what we want."

Suspicion glittered in Colville's beady little eyes. "You trying to trick me, Slater?"

"Damn you, no! Will you trust me for once?"

"Trusting you ain't very safe."

"I could say the same for you," Slater retorted. "But we've got to work together on this thing. We can *both* get the aliens to take back."

"Annebale isn't gonna like it if Réynard has them too,"

Colville pointed out.

"He'll like it a lot less if he doesn't have them at all," Slater said. "Are you interested in listening to what I have to say?"

Colville paused. "Okay," he said after a moment. "Let's hear the pitch."

**FIFTEEN** minutes later Colville and Slater left the blasting area of the spacefield, allies for the first time after years of rivalry. Neither fully trusted the other—but, as Colville came to realize, unless they teamed up on this project they were both sunk.

Slater whispered, "I'll sneak up on the guard and cool him off with the stunner-gun. You wait back here with the rocket-sled and soon as I give the signal you come by and pick me up and we go to the village."

"Right."

Slater strolled forward, while Colville lurked in the shadows of the spacefield with the flat rocket-sled on which they planned to transport the giants. Up front, at the main gate, a guard paced up and



down slowly, on all-night duty. Slater gently massaged the butt of the stunner-gun in his pocket.

As he drew near, the guard turned round to face him. There was no friendliness on the man's face.

"Going for a walk?"

"Just taking the night air," Slater said. "I figured I'd get a stroll in before bedtime."

"Kind of late, isn't it?"

Slater chuckled. "I travelled two weeks to get to this planet, friend. Maybe I'm only going to be here one night, but I want to get a good look. That moonlight's pretty impressive."

"You ought to see it when all three moons are full. Happens twice a year, they tell me. The sky's full of light, and it's bright as day."

"Must be nice," Slater agreed. "Wish I could stick around to see it. But say, you must get awfully bored just wandering around all night on guard duty."

"It's only one night a month. I don't mind."

"You on all night?"

The guard shook his head.

"My relief man shows up in four hours. He stays on till morning."

"Bet you can't wait to hit the sack," Slater said. "Say, is there any law about drinking on duty? I got a little bottle of Procyon rum here that can really make your eyes glow."

"We're not supposed—"

"Oh, come on. Take a little nip," Slater urged. He reached into his pocket while the sentry was frowning doubtfully. But instead of a bottle of rum, Slater pulled out the stunner-gun. He squeezed the trigger-bulb before the guard knew what was going on.

There was no sound, no flare of light. But the guard caved in like a falling brick wall. Slater caught him deftly and eased him to the ground. With the jolt he had received, the sentry would be sound asleep for at least half a day.

Turning, Slater waved to Colville. The rocket-sled coughed a little as Colville started the engine, but Slater hoped the noise would not be enough to awaken the rest of the camp.

As the sled drew near, Slater hopped onto the seat next to

Colville and said, "Follow the road as far as it goes. We ought to reach the village pretty soon."

"You gave the sentry a good stunning?" Colville asked anxiously.

"Yeah. He's sound asleep. And his relief man doesn't show up for four hours. If we hurry, we've got it made."

**T**HE bright glow of the full moon illuminated the bumpy dirt road, while the two crescent moons added lesser light from either side that did strange things to perspective and turned shadows into grotesquely distorted nightmare shapes.

Colville drove the sled steadily along, while Slater looked back constantly over his shoulder to see if they were being followed. No sound was coming from the camp. Apparently their departure had been successful; no one had awakened.

The road branched about a quarter of a mile from the Terran camp. As they approached the branch, Colville said, "Which way?"

"How in hell would I know? Turn left. The road's wider that way."

Colville turned left, and a few minutes later they found themselves drawing near the village. The moonlight displayed it clearly: there were a few dozen straw-covered huts of enormous size scattered in a wide semi-circle, looking like monstrous mushroomrooms. Behind the village was a broad pasture area.

Colville nudged Slater. "Good Lord, will you get a look at those things in the pasture!"

Slater looked. He moistened his lips tensely. "Big, ain't they?"

They certainly were. They were some kind of cattle, sleeping in the fields. But they were the size of elephants. Even lying down, huddled into themselves, their bulk was fantastic.

"I bet your man Annebale would like to get a couple of *those* babies into his zoo," Slater said. "What a bunch of monsters!"

"He's more interested in getting the humanoids," Col-

ville replied. "Big animals themselves ain't so much. It's big animals that look like human beings that get the crowds to come."

Slater nodded. "Okay. Stop the sled here and we'll go into this hut."

Colville pulled back on the brake and the rocket-sled came whistling to a halt. They climbed down. No sound came from the sleeping village. They were less than a dozen yards away from the hut nearest to the road. Slater gestured impatiently to Colville, who was hanging back nervously.

"Come on!" Slater urged.

"Suppose they have watchdogs?" Colville whispered nervously. "Watchdogs as big as bears, maybe."

Slater pointed to his stunner-gun. "We can take care of any sort of trouble. Hurry along."

Colville caught up with him and the two of them neared the entrance to the hut. There was no door, merely a gaping opening in the crudely-plastered wall of the dwelling. Moonlight trickled in.

Slater cautiously extended

his head in the doorway. What he saw nearly made him gasp with shock.

Four giants lay sleeping on rough heaps of straw. Up till that moment Slater had never seriously considered the dimensions of a human being eleven feet tall. But now he saw them as they slept, naked, like savages.

He saw legs like tree trunks, an outstretched hand big enough to palm an Earthman's skull like a softball, a foot the size of an anvil, with toes like thick cigars. One of the four was a giantess who looked like the embodiment of all womanhood, with her watermelon-sized breasts and vast hips.

Even the size of the doorway was enough to cow an Earthman: it was at least fifteen feet high, while the roof of the hut was almost thirty feet above the ground. Everything was on a frighteningly huge scale in the hut.

"Well?" Colville whispered.

"You need a man and a woman, don't you?"

"Yes."

"And I need two young men. So we've got three out of our four right here."

Colville nodded. The couple would do just fine for Mr. Annebale's zoo. The other two seemed to be children—an adolescent boy, and a younger one who was a mere seven feet or so in length.

**S**LATER stepped inside. The hut had a peculiarly musky smell. Gripping the stunner-gun tightly, he pressed the trigger-bulb and held the beam steady on the largest of the giants, giving the native a triple dose because of his size.

"Easy there," Colville murmured. "An overdose could kill him."

"And an underdose could kill us, if he wakes up," Slater rejoined. He shifted the beam to the woman, then to the older of the two boys. Just as he finished, the younger one came awake. Eyes wide, the young giant rose unsteadily, muttering alien words.

"Slater! Over here! The young one's awake!"

Swinging round hastily, Slater applied the stunner-gun beam to the boy-giant. The brain-freezing beam took immediate effect. As the ponder-

ous native started to collapse, Slater and Colville ran to catch him, and eased him down to the bed of straw.

"Whew!" Colville exclaimed. "If we'd let him drop the thump would have awakened the whole village!"

"Don't waste time," Slater advised. "Let's find another hut and get our fourth catch."

Five natives slept in the adjoining hut—two mature ones and three more youthful specimens. Of the latter, two were girls just barely ripening into womanhood, the third a young man of about the same age as the one already asleep in the first hut.

Slater nodded approvingly. This would be just what Reynard would want: a pair of three-quarter-grown boys, big enough to be impressive (Slater estimated their height as between nine and ten feet) and still young enough to be taught the skills of boxing. Quickly, before any of them could awake, he stunned the entire lot.

He turned to see Colville staring in open hunger at the younger of the two girls. The

little rabbit man's face had a look of naked lust, even though it was obvious from her size—no more than six feet—and her small breasts that the alien girl was barely more than a child.

The expression on Colville's face was unutterably perverse, as though he were seriously considering flinging himself down on the body of the unconscious young giantess and making love to her.

Slater scowled disgustedly. "Stop making eyes at that kid, Colville. Let's get the haul hoisted aboard the sled."

That part of the job proved to be far more easily said than done. The sled was perhaps thirty feet away. But the two giant boys weighed better than three hundred pounds apiece, the woman perhaps four hundred, and the man, an eleven-footer, weighed at least five hundred pounds.

It took nearly half an hour for Slater and Colville to lug the four immense bodies out of the huts and onto the sled, and by the end of that time both were nearly at the point of collapse.

At last it was done,

though—all four stowed on the sled and strapped down. Slater took a last look around the village. Despite everything, no one had awakened.

Colville got behind the wheel of the rocket-sled. For an instant Slater was tempted, as he stared at Slater's back, to stun the smaller man and leave him here. But Slater decided against it. It would be pleasant to leave Annebale's man behind holding the bag, but there was no getting away from the fact that he needed Colville to help him load the ship.

They drove back to the Terran camp in silence. Only about an hour had elapsed since their departure. The sentry still slumbered where Slater's stunner-beam had carried him.

Colville and Slater took turns loading their ships, to avoid any possibility of trickery. First Colville lowered his cargo hoist and he and Slater dragged the giant man aboard and strapped him down in the caged area inside. Then, one of Slater's boxers was taken aboard the other ship. The loading job took the better

part of an hour. Finally it was done, though, with the giant couple safely imprisoned on Colville's ship and the two boys similarly caged on Slater's. When the effects of the stunner-beam wore off, they would not be in any danger from the captive aliens.

Colville and Slater met for the last time in the area between their ships. Colville grinned. "I guess I owe you some thanks, Slater. I couldn't have managed without you."

"Skip the sentiment. I wouldn't have teamed up with you if I thought there was any way of getting the aliens on board my ship."

Slater fingered the stunner-gun in his pocket. One quick blast, and Colville would lie here unconscious, to be found by Burke in the morning, while he got away with his cargo—

But Colville said, "Okay, I'll skip the sentiment. Suppose we just back toward our ships and get aboard. That way you can't try anything fancy on me."

"You don't trust me?"

"I never have," Colville said evenly.

Slater shrugged. It had been a good idea, anyway. Well, Reynard would have to be satisfied with having half of Earth's supply of giants, that was all. He backed toward his ship, keeping a wary eye on Colville; ascending the catwalk, he dogged shut the hatch and prepared the ship for blast-off.

Space regulations provided that he was supposed to obtain blastoff permission before leaving. But there was no one awake to give it to him, and, in any event, he had no interest in tipping his hand to Burke. He jammed down on the blastoff lever.

His ship rose on a pillar of flame. An instant later, so did Colville's.

THE double thunder of the departing ships penetrated the dreams of the slumbering Commander Burke. He rolled over on his cot, thinking that the giants must be bowling. Then he came fully awake. That sound could only have been the blasting-off of spaceships.

Now? In the middle of the

night? Without official clearance?

Burke rushed to the window and stared out. He saw twin flares of light high above the spacefield, dwindling rapidly, vanishing completely.

Colville and Slater were gone. Why? Burke's throat went dry. What had made them suddenly decide to leave, together, at this odd hour?

He dressed hurriedly. The camp was coming awake; lights were on all over the place, and men were rushing out into the compound, asking each other questions no one could answer.

"Quiet!" Burke snapped, silencing the hubbub. He picked out a man. "Lieutenant Herbert, what happened just now?"

"The—the spaceships," Herbert stammered. "Those two little ships from Earth. They both just blasted off."

"Did anybody see Colville and Slater after taps tonight?"

No one answered. Burke scowled. The first streaks of dawn were beginning to appear behind the distant mountains. "Who was tonight's sentry?"

Captain McGuire, who made up the sentry-go rotation, said, "Corporal Norris."

"Find me Norris," Burke ordered.

It took a few moments for the command to be fulfilled. Two men finally discovered the unhappy sentry lying sprawled unconscious in the tall grass near the gate of the compound, his eyes wide and glassy.

Grim-faced, Burke and Dr. Wylie, the camp's medic, inspected the sleeping sentry.

"What do you think it is, Doctor?"

Wylie shrugged. "There's only one thing it could possibly be. See the pattern of broken capillaries in the whites of his eyes? This man was rayed down with a stunner-gun, Commander."

Burke looked up slowly. He was completely wide awake now. But he still did not understand why Colville and Slater had chosen the middle of the night in which to make their unannounced departure. And why stun the sentry? Something peculiar had happened here—but—what was it? What had Colville and

Slater done? He had to know.

As the Commander stood indecisively over the sleeping form of the sentry, one of the younger noncoms came running up breathlessly.

"Sir—sir—"

"What is it, Mr. Holman?"

"I was just down the road a little way—looking to see if there was anything suspicious down there—and—and—" Holman gasped for breath. "The natives, sir. The giants."

"What about them?" Burke demanded irritably. "Spit it out, boy!"

"I'm trying to tell you, sir. They're coming up the road. The whole bunch of them marching here. And they look angry, sir. They look like they're spoiling for a fight!"

**T**HE natives reached the camp a few minutes later. They were an impressive, even terrifying sight. Never before had more than a handful come to the camp at any one time. Now there were more than fifty, clustering in thick knots and buzzing angrily to each other in their harsh, guttural

language. Many of them had not bothered to dress at all, while a few wore only the loin-cloths that were their daily clothes.

In the front of the group was the mountainous alien Burke had come to recognize as chief of the loosely-organized tribe. He was about twelve feet high and weighed close to seven hundred fifty pounds, but right now his dimensions seemed twice that.

Burke looked around. His men were pale and tense. The bulky natives dwarfed the entire compound, since their heads were nearly as high as the roofs of the one-story huts. The big creatures milled around, grunting in what looked quite clearly like rage. It was the first time Burke had seen them in any other emotional state than their normal placidity, and it was alarming to watch them grow steadily more angry.

Burke stepped forward to face the enraged alien chief, taking with him the expedition's head linguistics expert, Bryson. Bryson had studied the alien language and knew it



as well as any of the Earthmen in the camp.

The Commander felt like an absurd pygmy before the aliens. He was accustomed to looking up to other people, but not usually this far up. On Dunhill V, life had simply developed on a different scale from the rest of the galaxy.

The natives were eleven-footers; the trees towered hundreds of feet into the air; the cattle were the size of bull elephants. And now, for the first time, these monstrous people seemed to be angry—angry enough to march into the Terran camp several hours before dawn.

The alien chief rumbled out a booming complaint, far above their heads. Commander Burke said to the linguist, "Find out what he's yelling about."

Bryson said something to the alien, who became silent a moment, then poured out a flood of accusations and protests. In the middle of the outburst, Bryson turned to the Commander and said, "It seems four of his people are missing, and some others are asleep and won't wake up. Noises were

heard in the village and when the aliens investigated they found the empty beds. They think *we* kidnapped the missing ones."

"Tell them we're not responsible," Burke said. "Tell them that we're going to do everything in our power to help find the missing ones."

Bryson craned his neck and shouted a few sentences to the enraged alien chief. The reply did not seem to satisfy the giant. He stamped his foot, snarled, turned in a complete circle to signify his displeasure.

"What did he say?" Burke demanded.

The linguist's shoulders slumped. "He thinks we took the missing people to make experiments on, the way we've taken other local life-forms. Should I tell him about Colville and Slater?"

"No. That won't do any good. Just tell him again that we didn't kidnap his people, and we'll help all we can to locate them."

Bryson passed the message along. But the alien chief did not seem to be interested in listening. He grunted out a

lengthy reply, spun on his heel, and strode away with ground-shaking tread. Barking commands at his people, he shepherded the entire lot of giants out of the compound and onto the road leading back to their village.

"What was all that about?" Burke asked.

"It was an ultimatum. Either we restore the missing tribespeople by sunrise tomorrow, or he and his people will destroy our camp."

Burke had a sudden vivid mental picture of fifty or sixty massive aliens smashing and crashing their way through the buildings of the compound like bulls in a china shop. He closed his eyes for a moment, tightening his jaws.

"You think it was Colville and Slater, sir?" the linguist asked.

"Of course. Those two reptiles must have buddied up and gone to the native village together. We'll have to send out a general wide-band alarm to the Space Police—maybe they can be caught and brought back in time to head off the native ultimatum."

"If not—?"

Burke shrugged heavily. "I'd prefer not to think about the alternative possibilities, Major."

He turned and headed rapidly across the compound toward the radio shack.

THE alarm went out on ultraband to all Space Police ships that might be within a fifty light-year radius of Dunhill V. Burke's message described the two ships in detail, explained the nature of the crime, and stressed the importance of detecting the fleeing Colville and Slater and bringing the kidnapped alien giants back to Dunhill V.

By the time Burke had finished dictating the message, the sun was beginning to rise. He remained in the radio shack, watching Lieutenant Hastings code the message and feed it into the transmitters.

"How long should I send it, sir?" Hastings asked.

"Put it on a looped tape and send it out indefinitely," Burke replied. "But let one of your assistants take care of that job. I want you to set up

a subradio contact for me with the home office on Earth."

"Yes, sir."

It took twenty minutes to make contact across the light-years. There was no visual, of course; the audio signal between Dunhill V and Earth was bent by hyperspace and travelled instantly between the two planets, while conventional radio transmission would have taken years in each direction.

Burke spoke to Brigadier General Cauldwell of the Terran Extraterrestrial Development Corps. It was most unusual for an expedition to make a direct report back to Earth, and Cauldwell said so.

"These are unusual circumstances, General Cauldwell," Burke explained. "We had a couple of visitors from Earth last night."

"Visitors? What kind of visitors?"

"One man who was recruiting for Harris Reynard's boxing exhibitions, and another trying to collect specimens for W. H. Annebale's interstellar zoo. They got here in a neck-and-neck race and asked my permission to let them have a

few of the aliens to take back. I refused it, of course."

"Dunhill V—that's the planet with the giants, isn't it?" Cauldwell asked.

"Yes, sir. After I refused permission, they both claimed the right of Overnight Stay on me. There wasn't anything I could do about that. And during the night, while everybody was asleep, they stunner-gunned my sentry, sneaked out of camp and into the alien village, and kidnapped four of the aliens. They blasted off without giving notice for clearance."

"Have you notified the Space Police?"

"Of course, sir," Burke said. "But just in case these two slip through the interception net, I think they ought to be nabbed when they reach Earth. It's a flat violation of the law to kidnap intelligent alien beings like that, of course."

"You needn't point that out to me," General Cauldwell said stiffly. "How are the natives reacting?"

"They're hopping mad. They threaten to destroy the camp if we don't get the missing na-

tives back here by sunrise tomorrow."

"What are your plans in case they attack?"

Burke said, "Evacuation, sir. I can't risk the lives of a hundred fifty men, and I don't want to have to kill aliens. We'll pull out if we're faced with any real danger."

"All right, Burke. Report to me again in twelve hours and let me know how the situation stands."

The contact broke. Burke walked scowling out of the radio shack. He had a good idea of what was going on inside Brigadier General Cauldwell's mind.

Cauldwell was probably uncomfortable about the prospect of arresting anybody belonging to either Reynard or Annebale. Those two had money and they had influence. They could make or break anybody in the entire Corps, just by pulling a few high-level strings. Assuming Colville and Slater reached Earth, Cauldwell would think twice about arresting them, law or no law.

Leaving the radio shack, Burke called together his senior

officers and ordered them to begin evacuation procedure. All scientific research was to be halted and everything to be packed and placed aboard the ships. The ships were to be made ready for immediate blastoff on a moment's notice.

It was the only thing to do. Although the colony was well enough armed to fight off an alien attack, it was suicidally foolish to do so. Bloodshed would only lead to further bloodshed. A hundred fifty Earthmen could not fight off an entire planet of giant humanoids, primitive though they were.

The sensible thing to do was to retreat without striking a defensive blow. Then, perhaps, later it would be possible to renew friendly relations with the giants. Once blood was shed, Earth would have to forget all about this planet as a possible colony, for enmity would have sprung up as a result of battle.

**T**HE first reports from the Space Police ships began coming in toward noon. A dozen ships had joined the search for Colville and Slater. They

had fanned out over a wide area of space and were scanning the region with mass detectors. As yet, there was no sign of the ships, but they could not be far from Dunhill V, since less than half a day had passed since their departure.

The next report, two hours later, was equally negative. "The search is continuing," was all the Police message had to say.

Burke paced the colony grounds, supervising the evacuation procedure. Men worked grimly against the clock, getting everything worth preserving aboard the ship. There wasn't much hope of catching Colville and Slater before the deadline expired at sunrise the next day, and there was no hope at all of getting the missing aliens restored to their village in time. Not even if the ships were intercepted at this very moment could the aliens be returned before the next dawn.

And then, around mid-afternoon, the drumming began.

Linguist Bryson was the first to notice it. Burke was too

busy with the evacuation work. But the linguist caught his attention and said, "Commander, do you hear the drums beating?"

"Drums? What are you talking about, Bryson?"

"Listen!"

Burke listened. And he heard. A dull, steady *broommm - brooommm - brooommm* sound, repeated over and over, reverberating from the hills. He felt a sudden constricting twinge of fear pass across his heart.

"Those are the big drums, aren't they?"

Bryson nodded. "The ones they use when sending messages from tribe to tribe."

Burke had seen the big drums in the village. They were made of some kind of stretched animal-hide, and the drumskins were twelve or thirteen feet across. The natives had said the drums were used only in time of emergency, to send signals between villages.

The drums were being used now.

Burke cursed Colville and Slater and their unscrupulous employers for the sixtieth time

in the past two hours. The drums were beating. The peaceful giants were infuriated. The work of six months was undone overnight by two quick-footed sharpies.

Turning away from Bryson, Burke called out an order to his adjutant, Major Leroy. "Get one of the helicopters unpacked and send up a man to scout the area," Burke ordered. "We'd better find out just what the aliens are up to."

THE two helicopters had already been disassembled and stored aboard ship. It took better than an hour to get one of them in working order again. One of the noncoms was sent aloft to have a look around.

The drumbeats increased in intensity during the afternoon. As the first shadows of night began to descend, the Space Police called again: still no luck in chasing the kidnappers, but a couple of shadows had been detected on the cosmic radar screen, and the Police ships were investigating. They promised to report back as soon as anything concrete developed.

The helicopter scout re-

turned to the base just after sunset.

"Well?" Burke demanded. "What did you see?"

"Cattle, sir. All the tribes are driving their cattle together into one big field about twenty miles from here. Thousands of cattle milling around."

"How about the tribe adjoining the base? Did they drive their cattle out too?"

The scout nodded. "The pastures are empty. Every beast for miles around is either in that one field or else on its way."

Burke frowned. What kind of ceremony was this, he wondered? It didn't sound good, whatever it meant. He ordered the scout to join his group.

Night fell. In ten hours, it would be sunrise; the alien ultimatum would expire. And then—*what?*

They ate an uneasy meal in camp that night. The drumming continued steadily, rising in intensity; they could pick out definite patterns of statement and answer, though of course they had no idea of what the messages meant.

When it came time for taps,

Burke ordered a ten-man guard to surround the camp all night, plus men to man the radio shack in case of a message from the Space Police. He himself went to his own quarters. It was a long time before he could fall asleep.

**T**HERE was someone shaking him. Burke sat up groggily and blinked.

"Huh? Who is it?"

"Fedderman, sir. I've got a report from the Space Police that just came in. They've caught Colville and they're chasing Slater—they expect to nab him too within a couple of hours!"

Burke was totally awake immediately. "Thank God! What time is it?"

"Just before dawn, sir."

"Just—before—dawn. So we might make it, after all. Go wake Major Bryson. And get a jeep ready for me. Hurry!"

Fedderman raced out of the room. Burke dressed rapidly. Maybe there was still a chance, then! With Colville caught, Slater trapped in the net—

The drums were still beating.

"I hear they caught them,

sir," Bryson said as the jeep started.

"You hear correctly. Now, if we can only make the aliens believe it—"

They reached the native village within minutes. Burke leaped down from the jeep, Bryson following him. They rushed into the village, heading for the chief's hut.

"Why—the place is empty!" Bryson exclaimed.

They wandered around the deserted village. Not an alien was to be found. Burke had a coppery taste in his mouth; he sensed disaster.

The drums still rumbled in the distance. But there was the village drum, in the square nearby. So they were the drums of other villages, then.

Bryson and Burke returned to the camp. The drumming was tremendously loud now, and no pattern could be distinguished; it was just one continuous sound of thunder now.

The base was awake. Burke ordered a man to take the helicopter up again and have a look around. "The village is empty," he said. "See if you

can find out where the aliens are."

The helicopter rose into the air. Puzzled by the disappearance of the aliens, Burke sat frowning in front of his office. The colony was a dismal sight, almost totally dismantled. At a moment's notice, the evacuation could be carried out.

Half an hour later, the scout returned—landing the helicopter so clumsily that it nearly crashed. The scout clambered out. His face was white as he came rushing over to Commander Burke.

"We've got to clear out, sir!" he chattered hysterically. "The aliens—the cattle—we've got to evacuate—"

"Whoa!" Burke cried. "Slow down and tell me about it one word at a time."

The scout nodded and took a deep breath. "I—flew about twenty miles, sir. All of the aliens are massed with their cattle—one gigantic herd, thousands of animals. And the aliens are driving them this way. It's a deliberate stampede!"

"Good God!" Burke cried. A stampede of Earthsize cattle

would be serious enough. But these were cattle the size of elephants!

Whistling for attention, the Commander gave the general evacuation order. Every man to his ship, immediate blastoff. Any equipment that had not been packed would have to be left behind. There was no time to waste now.

Within minutes, the ships were loaded. Only Burke and his adjutant, Major Leroy, remained in the deserted compound. The drumming reached a fierce crescendo now—but it was no longer the sound of drums, Burke knew, but of pounding hooves.

"All right, Major," Burke said in a tight voice. "Get aboard the flagship and give the blastoff order. You're in charge."

Leroy looked puzzled. "Sir, I don't understand—"

"Didn't you hear me? Get aboard the ship, Major. That's an order."

"But what about you?"

"I'm staying here."

"What, sir? But the stampede—"



"Did you hear me? *Get aboard the ship.*"

Leroy took a hesitant step toward Burke, who immediately drew his ornamental pearl-handled gun. "Don't disobey an order, Major. Get going. I'll shoot you down if you attempt to interfere."

The Major opened his mouth, started to say something, let his mouth close. He shook his head slowly. Then, since there was nothing else he could do, he turned and ran toward his ship.

Alone now in the compound, Commander Burke smiled sadly at the empty huts, the deserted laboratory, at the alien sky of Dunhill V. The drumming grew even louder.

He knew that he had to stay here and face the onslaught. It was, in a way, his fault for not having watched Colville and Slater closely enough. Besides, he knew, if he returned to Earth the powerful influence of Reynard and Annebale would smash his career as his reward for having thwarted them. And, besides, he felt a certain obligation that dated back to me-

dieval times: this was his post, and he would not abandon it.

Flame blazed on the spacefield as the six ships of his expedition rose from the ground and vaulted skyward. Probably the men would not find out until later that their Commander had been left behind.

Burke shrugged. It was too bad, all too bad—but, he thought, soon he would no longer have to worry about it. The herd would be here, the monstrous herd, driven by their vengeful and gigantic masters. The great creatures would sweep over the empty camp, destroying everything.

Commander Burke squared his shoulders. *Maybe I'm the only hero left in the whole goddam universe*, he thought. *The only man with enough backbone to keep from selling out to the slimy rats like Reynard. Well, at least I'll die like a man should.*

He took a deep breath. He waited for the oncoming giants, for the onslaught of the whirling hooves.

THE END