

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

No. 42

April,

1959

35¢

● SPACE-AGE NOVELETS

- LOVERS SUBVERSIVE *D. A. Jourdan* 24
After he got to know Rhea, Van was ready to commit the same crime for which he was prosecuting Dargo.
- THE RENEGADE *Thomas N. Scortia* 74
Will the irruption of Earthmen into other worlds destroy alien civilizations, regardless of our intentions? Bartok thought so...

● SPECIAL FEATURE

- IT'S ME, O LORD *Alma Hill* 107
We have to consider communication as a science, if man is going to live as one family. And that includes understanding the development of languages, particularly our own...

● SHORT STORIES

- TEMPTRESS OF EDEN *A. Bertram Chandler* 6
Human legend told the symbolic truth of a garden, a happy state, and a serpent... Was there then a serpent in this garden on a far world?
- THE MOON IS NEW *David Osborne* 61
Tests had shown that it was the solitary-minded men who could endure solo spaceflight. But that kind of man was most individualistic!
- PROTECTED PLANET *Dan Morgan* 112
Great opportunity awaits a ruthless man on a world where the natives' only defense is suicide. Or does it...

● DEPARTMENTS

- THE EDITOR'S PAGE *Robert A. W. Lowndes* 23
Looking at "Yesterday's World of Tomorrow: 1929".
- THE RECKONING (Your decision on our December issue) 73
- DOWN TO EARTH (Your letters and our comment) 120
- READERS' PREFERENCE COUPON (for your convenience) 130

Illustrations by Emsh and Orban

Editor: ROBERT A. W. LOWNDES

DOROTHY B. SEADOR, Asso. Ed.

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION, Number 42, April, 1959. Published every other month by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 241 Church Street, New York 13, New York. Second-class mail privileges authorized at Holyoke, Mass. Single copies 35¢; yearly subscription \$2.10. Printed in U. S. A.

protected

planet

by Dan Morgan

The only defense that a Ffarin had was suicide — which was perfect so far as their own internal relations went. The man who drove another to self-destruction was damned, while the self-slain were guaranteed paradise in the after-life. It looked like the perfect set-up for an enterprising Earthman, unencumbered with ideals or ethics.

THE FFARIN kept well away from Petrillo after the death of their priest. As he swaggered through the stone city in the warm sunlight, he saw faces hover in the dimness behind open doorways and disappear, but no one attempted to stop him.

Once, rounding a corner, he almost collided with a Ffarin. His hand flew to the gun at his hip, green eyes fluttering in the cage of their sockets like frightened tropical birds. But there was no need. The alien moved aside without a word and Petrillo walked on towards the temple.

He knew the way, although this was his first time on Ffarin. He had dreamed and schemed ten long years for this moment. What he intended to do was not so much a crime as a meticulously-planned business operation in which he had invested a third of a lifetime's effort. There had been the study of astrogation and the handling of a ship; the pinching and scraping—one shady deal after another, always one move ahead of the law—until at last he had accumulated enough capital to buy a small,

one-man freighter. And now he stood on the threshold of success.

The death of the priest at the landing field had dispelled any small doubts that might have lingered, despite his detailed study and research on Ffarin. The ancient cult of the race was still rigidly observed, thanks to the ETRA ruling which had made it a protected planet. No Earth ship other than the occasional ETRA patrol had landed on Ffarin since its discovery, some fifteen years before. And a careful check had shown that at this moment there was no patrol ship within half a light year of the Ffarin system. The planet lay like some ripe cosmic nut, awaiting the crushing hand of Petrillo to make it yield up its jewelled kernel.

PETRILLO rounded another corner and passed into a narrow, shaded alley. The air was humid, clinging to the nostrils of his high-bridged beak of a nose, and his footsteps soundless in the dust as though he was walking through a pool of molasses. But the discomfort was nothing in the face of

the triumphant anticipation that filled his mind.

He was no hero, no man of action, but at this moment he held the entire population of Ffarin in his power, simply by the plain fact of his different cultural background. That difference, plus his own lack of conscience, made him invincible, immune from any retaliation the Ffarin were capable of making.

The Ffarin belief in an elaborate cult of after-life rendered the present, physical existence of little importance to them except as a time of preparation. The most terrible revenge one Ffarin could wreak on another was to take his own life in full sight of his enemy. The teachings of the priest-rulers told him that by doing so he would be placing the soul of his enemy in a state of uncleanness, thus making it unacceptable on the higher plane of existence, and depriving its owner of any chance of an after-life. On the other hand, the one who had killed himself would fly straight into the arms of jewelled god of Ffarin, to live forever in a heaven of unlimited pleasure.

Petrillo's thin mouth twisted in a smile. He had done the priest at the landing field a favour.

He reached the end of the alley and stepped out into a sunlit square. The place seemed dead and deserted, but he knew that the Ffarin were watching from the square, blind eyes of a hundred windows. He slapped the weapon at his hip and walked towards the shining white bulk of the temple, puffing out his small chest like some strutting rooster. Nothing could stop him now.

THE MAIN door lay open, waiting. Petrillo passed through, without hesitation. The air inside was even heavier than that of the streets, tainted with the sickly sweetness of incense. The floor and walls were white stone, bare of any ornamentation. This was the outer hall of the temple, where the common people gathered daily to worship. The beaten brass door leading to the inner temple lay ahead of him, guarded by a big, magnificently muscled Ffarin.

The guard held a jewelled

ceremonial knife in his right hand, point downwards. His eyes, deep brown, flecked with yellow, were on Petrillo, unblinking.

The corner of Petrillo's mouth twitched. What if he had been mistaken, and there was some special dispensation for the servants of the temple? He drew his gun and stopped warily a few feet from the guard. "Let me past," he commanded.

The guard held his position squarely in the center of the doorway. "No one shall enter the inner temple of Ffarin unless called there by the high priest himself. It is forbidden by the ancient law."

"How will you stop me?" asked Petrillo.

"I shall give my life, if that be needed," said the guard, simply.

"Then I must offer the same." Petrillo checked the safety catch on his gun, raised it to his temple and began to squeeze the trigger, as he had in the encounter with the priest. These savages knew enough of guns to realize that they were weapons capable of killing; but the function of a

safety catch was beyond them.

THE EYES of the Ffarin guard dilated with fear, assuming that his soul was in immediate danger of defilement. Reaching out his right arm to its fullest extent, he paused for a brief moment in silent prayer, then plunged the razor-sharpened tip of the ceremonial knife into his own breast. He slumped to the ground with a hiss of pain.

Petrillo stepped back nimbly to avoid the falling body and lowered the gun from his head. Wiping the sweat from his pale brow he stepped delicately over the dying guard and pushed open the door.

Beyond lay the inner temple of the priest rulers of Ffarin, a great vaulted chamber of over fifty yards in length. Sunlight playing through the gorgeously ornate stained glass roof splashed the white stone floor of the chamber with a kaleidoscope of colour. Along the walls, statues carved with the virile savagery of the ancient race stood sentinel.

Petrillo began to move forward with small birdlike steps, the gun ready in his right hand.

His eyes were fixed on the dais which dominated the far end of the chamber, and the statue which stood on it. This alone was not of the ubiquitous white stone, its whole body glistening and flashing with a million lights. It was the jewelled god of Ffarin which he had come halfway across the galaxy to steal.

The tapes had lied; it was even more beautiful than he had imagined. Beautiful to him only inasmuch as its value, even when broken up, would obviously be far in excess of the estimated ten million credits. The heady wine of success rose in him.

He was trembling now as he quickened his pace, eager to place his hands on the spoils of victory. Almost at the foot of the dais he froze, his eyes flickering as he heard the creak of an opening door to his left.

PETRILLO turned to face the newcomer, aware that this was the keeper of the jewelled god, the high priest of Ffarin. He was a small, wizened man of indeterminable age, but surely very old. He

wore a drab-colored one-piece robe, fastened at the front with a clasp which bore a gleaming green star, encrusted with jewels.

"Greetings, Earthman." The high priest raised his gnarled right hand, which held a globe of crystal. A milky white, gaseous substance swirled in the interior of the sphere as it moved. "I have followed your progress with interest. I had hoped that the forces might have interceded on our behalf, but it seems that it is not the will of the god of Ffarin."

Petrillo's smile was a snarl of triumph. This old man would be no obstacle. "You know why I am here?"

The priest nodded sadly. "Yes, we guessed your purpose soon after you had landed. At first we thought you were one of the Agency patrols, but the death of the priest showed us that was not the truth."

"That was smart of you," said Petrillo.

"Can't I dissuade you from this terrible thing, my son?" asked the old man, solemnly. He lowered the crystal globe and looked down into its swirl-

ing whiteness, as if seeking some message of hope.

"You're wasting time," Petrillo said. "Why should I give up after coming so far?"

"But what of your own people? The Earth Extra Terrestrial Relations Agency promised us that we would not be molested. They will surely punish you..."

PETRILLO'S laugh echoed round the vaulted chamber like the shattering of a sheet of ice. "If they catch me. ETRA is too weak, its agents too thinly spread to enforce the rulings it has made. Protected planet—what by? That's just a lot of blarney to make you people give them trading concessions."

"That may be as you say, my son," said the old man. "We of Ffarin are not worldly. But what will become of you if you do this thing? You will never be able to return to Earth..."

"There are other worlds, like Ablon, where a man with money can get what he wants."

"And your soul?"

"The hell with my soul!" Petrillo was growing impatient.

He looked up at the statue on the dais again. "I'm taking that thing with me. None of your talk will stop me."

The priest drew himself up proudly. "I am the guardian of the jewelled god. He shall not be taken from the temple whilst I live."

"And if I kill myself here and now?" Petrillo raised the gun.

"I do not think you truly would, my son. You covet the riches of the material world too greatly," said the old man. "But it is a chance which I may not take for the sake of my sacred trust."

"Then you have no alternative, have you?" Petrillo said confidently. "I shall take the statue anyway—but your soul will be in no danger if you die first. That is more important to you than a hundred statues."

"It means nothing that two Ffarin have already died because of you?" asked the old man. "I am sorry for you, my son."

"Save your pity and get it over with," snapped Petrillo. "Where is your ceremonial knife?"

"I carry no knife—the high priest has his own way of dying." The old man dashed the crystal sphere to the ground.

PETRILLO jumped backwards as the sphere shattered on the stone floor with a loud report. The milky smoke it contained diffused slowly into the sluggish air. Panic clutched at his throat—what sort of alien trick was this?

The old man stood, his hands calmly folded over the front of his drab robe, a smile of resignation on his face.

"What was in that sphere?" demanded Petrillo, brandishing the gun.

"The spores of a mold peculiar to our planet," replied the high priest. "It enters the human body through the nerve endings and makes its way quickly towards the brain. It is a convenient way of helping the soul onwards to its next stage of existence."

"But the spores..." said Petrillo, the beginnings of horror scratching at the roots of his sanity.

"Are now spread throughout the entire chamber," said the old man calmly. "Those that

do not find a human host will die within a few minutes."

"But... *I* am human..."

The high priest smiled distantly. "I find that difficult to believe—but I am forced to admit it is the truth."

"And the spores will attack me?" Petrillo felt suddenly that his exposed flesh, his face, arms, neck and chest was tingling beneath the onslaught of a million tiny, unseen enemies. "No! I don't believe you! You would not risk your chance of after-life in this way. What if the spores should kill me before yourself?"

THE HIGH PRIEST shook his head. "No, my son. I am old—my nerve cells are already degenerating. The spores will act more quickly on me. I shall be the first to die, and the law will thus be satisfied."

Gibbering fear loomed in Petrillo's mind. Already he could detect a growing numbness in his limbs, the hand that held the gun no longer seemed to have any feeling. His sense of balance was slipping from him and he swayed where he stood, as stiff as any of the

statues that looked impassively down on him. He had planned all these years only for this to happen at the last stage. A sob forced its way through his constricted throat.

The old man lowered himself slowly to the ground and sat cross legged in front of the dais. "Make your peace with whatever god you believe in, my son. I shall meditate on the wondrous ways of Ffarin and his works yet to come, after I have passed into his keeping."

Petrillo could feel fire now, coursing through his nerves, bringing with it death. As he stood there thinking, he was already a dead man.

Whimpering with rage and fear he forced himself to move. He staggered forward until he stood in front of the priest. The numb hand that was no longer his own levelled the gun at the old man's head. "There must be something, some way in which it can be stopped. Tell me!"

The high priest opened his heavy lidded eyes and looked at the gun, a sublime calmness diffused over his lined face. "Why threaten me, my son? I am beyond that now. Make

your peace while there is still time."

The fire was a white hot pain, moving on through Petrillo's body, leaving behind it a dead numbness. His whole body was bathed in the sweat of defeat as he realized that he had been beaten.

No! Not quite... Even if he did not take the jewelled god, there still remained one way in which he could triumph over the priest. With a snarl of murderous hate he raised the gun to his own temple and fired.

THE OLD PRIEST watched calmly as Petrillo's lifeless body slumped to the floor. Then, shaking his head with a quiet sadness, he rose to his feet. Gathering his robe about him he walked back through the door from which he had come.

The small room behind the door was little more than a cell, with a bed and a chair; save for a beautifully worked tapestry on one wall. The priest walked over and unhooked one edge of the tapestry.

He bent over the sub etheric

communicator thus revealed, adjusting its controls with practiced fingers.

"ETRA agent P567 speaking from Ffarin. Are you receiving me?... Petrillo arrived as predicted. I was unable to prevent the deaths of two Ffarin whom he encountered on his way here without revealing my hand. But I can promise that there will be no more trouble with him..."

"No, that was not necessary. He killed himself, poor devil. Friend Petrillo was not a very strong character, I fear. And he *did* have an over-developed imagination—the smoke bomb quite unnerved him... No, I'm quite O.K. here, but you might remind the next patrol ship about that case of brandy I ordered—the local *eau de vie* is murder on the gut, and I'm not so young as I used to be.

"I must sign off now and go to the outer temple. The Ffarin will be coming soon to find out what has happened. I shall leave Petrillo's body in front of the dais for them to see. They will believe that, stricken with awe of the jewelled god, he took his own path to the next stage of existence...and

I would be the last to disillusion them on that score.

“What’s that?—cynic? No, you misunderstand me, Crane. They’re a wonderful people, these Ffarin. *My* people now.

Sometimes these days I get to thinking that they may be right about the whole thing. Although I hope not, for the good of *my own* soul...”

————— ★ —————