

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

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RESCUE

By **GORDON R. DICKSON**

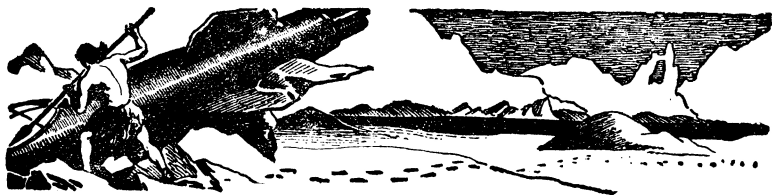
IT WAS AT noon of the third day that the four hunters of Amuk came upon the fallen star. It had not buried itself as deeply in the earth as most of its kind, but it was very shiny and hard; after trying unsuccessfully for a while to break off a piece, the hunters gave up and left it alone.

There was, however, a trail leading away from it, as of a beast that went on two legs, like the men, like the hunters themselves; out of curiosity, as much as out of their need for meat, they followed it. It led them into the jungle for some little ways, wandering here and there as if the beast was wounded, but there was no sign of

blood to be seen; indeed, when the hunters finally caught up with the thing it turned out to be perfectly whole.

They came upon it at last in a clearing, where instead of running away from them it ran toward them. And so they waited for it—for indeed they were four, and all hunters—and it came up within a spear's length and faced them and they talked with it.

It was, indeed, very like a man; it called itself a man, and claimed to have been seeking the men over great distances. But no one would have taken it for a man. For one thing it was too tall for a man, and too light, and had no beard. Also it wore the clothing of no



The star-man looked at Pibo and his people pityingly, but Pibo's reputation for wisdom hadn't been built on air.

illustrated by ORBAN

tribe. However, it spoke a variant of the Old Language, which the tribe itself had jealously preserved; and so the hunters decided to take it back to the king for instructions on what to do with it.

The king of the Men of Amuk at that time was Pibo; he was very old and had a reputation for being wise. He did not come at once to a decision, but ordered the hunters to step back and told the thing that talked like a man, and walked like a man, to seat itself and talk with him.

The beast opened the neck-part of its strange clothing and sat upon the ground; Pibo seated himself upon the black rock of judgment and questioned it, drawing

his robes around him as he talked. "Where do you come from?" he asked, in the old language.

"From Earth," said the beast. "Scout Lieutenant Holroyd Aldo at your service."

These words, of course, made no sense, but Pibo had not come by his reputation for wisdom by admitting ignorance. He nodded and went on.

"What are you doing in the neighborhood of the Tribe of Amuk?" he asked.

The beast settled himself more comfortably on the ground. "I was looking for you," he answered.

THESE WORDS were understandable, but pretty obviously

a lie. However, Pibo's wrinkled brown features gave no sign of what he thought of such a transparent falsehood; he merely nodded to the beast to go on.

"It's going to come as a bit of a shock to you, probably," said the beast, "but we've been hunting you, along with the other lost worlds, for the last eighty years. You're just lucky I found you; I'd already made my sweep of this system and was just about to give up when my drive by-pass conked and I had to flop in for an emergency-landing. The reason I missed you on my first sweep must have been because your cities are all gone. I didn't see a sign of any buildings. What are you people living in?"

"We live in trees, of course," said Pibo. He swayed a little on the black judgement-rock, considering which of many questions to ask. He finally seized on the one understandable statement out of the beast's last speech.

"You have been looking for the Tribe of Amuk eighty years," he said. "You mentioned others; who are they?"

"The people of Earth and of the twenty systems," replied the beast. "The people of forty-eight worlds; but they're all from Earth of course, just like you are."

"But *you* have been looking for eighty years," said Pibo, cunningly.

The beast laughed. "Not I, myself," it said. "I've only been searching personally for five of your years. After all, I'm only thirty-five years old."

Pibo stifled a smile of triumph. He began to feel more sure of himself, and sat on the black stone in more relaxed fashion. He began to feel almost indulgent toward the beast for letting itself be tricked into such a clumsy lie. No man lived to be thirty-five. Pibo himself was an ancient twenty-seven, three times the average age of the hunters; and no tree or bush or animal lived half the age of a man. He looked at the beast fondly. Now that he had proved his superiority by catching it in a lie, he could afford to let it string tales at will. He encouraged it with a lazy nod. "Tell me more," he commanded.

"Anything you want to know," said the beast, cheerfully, "but I ought to be asking a few questions myself. How many are there of you people?"

"Five hundred thousand," lied Pibo.

"That many?" said the beast, with a look of astonishment. "It'll be some job to reorient your bunch. Well, if you've got that many, you ought to be able to spare me about twenty men to dig my ship out. I've got to get her upright before I can extend my antenna and call my mother ship."

Pibo nodded; but said nothing. The beast looked relieved. "I suppose you wonder how this all came about?" he asked. "How much do you people remember of the past?"

"We know all our history," said Pibo. "Nothing that ever happened to Men has been forgotten by the Tribe of Amuk."

"That so?" inquired the beast. "Tell me, just how does your history run?"

"From the beginning to the present," replied Pibo. "It is all remembered. From the time the earth split open and gave forth the first man, to the end of the world when the sun will trip his feet on the mountains as he passes and fall into the jungle, setting the world on fire."

"My God!" said the beast. Then checked it itself and said no more. Pibo looked at it curiously, wondering if perhaps he had not made a mistake to say what he just had. Then he remembered the stupid lie of the beast about the years it had lived, and felt reassured. Still, it was a very strange beast, and it behooved him to find out about it. Also, Pibo was very old and the old are inquisitive.

"Are you surprised?" Pibo asked the beast.

The beast looked at Pibo cautiously. "I see I've made a mistake," it said. "You people are in for extensive reorientation. It was

the fact you spoke such good lingo that fooled me."

"Eight and eighty-eight are the tongues of men," said Pibo, automatically, "but there is only one Old Language. How could there be more?" He looked at the beast. "How did you learn to speak it, beast?"

THE BEAST jumped a little at the last word. He looked around and saw where the hunters had drawn close and leaned upon their spears, listening. He put his hand to the middle of his body as if searching for something; but the hand found nothing and he pulled it away again. There was a little sweat that came out on his forehead and the hunters scented Fear.

"Hold on, there," he said. "I'm a man just like the rest of you. I learned what you call the Old Language the same way you did—by growing up with other human beings."

"What are human beings?" asked Pibo. The hunters moved closer.

"People like yourself," cried the beast. "Men—and women and children."

"There are the Men, and there are beasts," replied Pibo; "these others I have never heard of." He made an imperceptible little gesture to the hunters, that they should draw back, for their near-

ness was alarming the beast. Then he went on. "Tell me about them."

"Well, I'm not supposed to," said the beast, "I'm just a scout-pilot; you ought to be told these things by the reorientation-crew." He looked Pibo in the face and

continued a little helplessly. "Well, I'll try."

Pibo nodded.

"You see—" began the beast stumblingly, "We were all Earthmen once—"

"That indeed would be so,"



said Pibo. "For did not the first man come out of the earth?"

"But—well, anyway," went on the beast. "We grew in numbers and—er—developed until we could fly in the air; then we got better so that we could fly between the stars."

"Truly," said Pibo, "truly that is some feat, for the stars are very close together, as any man by himself may see by looking."

"No," said the beast; "no, that is one thing you must change your mind about. You see, those stars that look so small when you look at them from here, are really great big places where other men live."

"Now this is impossible," said Pibo. "How can something so small be so big?"

THE BEAST thought for a minute and the hunters smelled Fear again. "Look," he said. "If you stand and watch a man go away from you, doesn't he get smaller the farther away he goes?"

"That I have seen," said Pibo.

"Then these big places look so small because they have gone so far away from you—the world that they have grown very small, and everything on them."

"Now, this is indeed something new," admitted Pibo. "And to me it sounds like the truth; for since the earth is the center of all bigness, since it is from what everything came, things do get smaller

as they get away from it. For are not the leaves near the top of the trees smaller than those below, and do not all birds grow smaller as they rise in the sky? But—" he added struck by a certain thought, "how is it that you are so large, if you come from so tiny a place?"

The perspiration shone greasily on the beast's forehead. "Why," he said, "when I got closer to the earth, I got bigger, of course."

Pibo thought this over in the time it took for an insect to crawl halfway across the clearing. Finally he spoke again. "You must understand," he said, lowering his voice to a confidential tone that the hunters could not overhear, "that I can't just accept something like that just on your say-so. I am the King of the Men of the Tribe of Amuk. If you were not from so far away, you would have heard of me. It is my job to sit here on this black stone and pronounce solemn judgements. But I'm also an individual, aside from my official position—an individual with an individual's interest in what may be of personal benefit. Now, I'd like to hear more of all these interesting things you talk about; but before we go any further, do you happen to have any small item of proof with you that would indicate that more talk would be to both our advantages?"

The man—as he called himself—sitting on the ground, nodded.

He reached through a slit in his strange clothing. "I have here—" he began.

"Just a minute," said Pibo. He motioned for the hunters to draw further away, which they did without protest. They were all healthy young men without too much in the way of brains—interested in the more concrete verities of food, women and hunting, and quite willing to let the King settle matters. "Go ahead," said Pibo.

The other drew out a small rounded object, about the length shape of a thumb-sized piece of peeled stick. It shone like calm water in the sunlight. "This is a very useful thing," said the man. "And if you'll supply me with twenty men to put my ship back on its feet, I'll give it to you and show you how to use it."

"It strikes me," said Pibo, rubbing his old chin, "that something that small could hardly be worth twenty men; I might give you one or two."

"Twenty," said the man. "There's lots of men in the world, but there's only one of these."

"Oh, well," said Pibo, "why quibble? You and I are above such things. What does it do?"

"This," said the man. He turned one end of the stick that seemed to rotate separately from the rest of it and a faint beam sprang from it to strike the ground a few feet from Pibo's feet. Almost imme-

diately, the ground began to smolder and smoke. Little flames sprang up from the humus of dead leaves lying close. The man turned the end of the stick back, the light winked out, and he stamped on the ground to kill the flames.

"What is it?" demanded Pibo eagerly, feeling greed curl within him like a hungry snake.

"We call it a small hand-torch for cutting metal parts, but it has many uses," explained the man.

"It would be very useful for setting fire to the forest to drive game," said Pibo. "Even I could go hunting with it in my hand."

"Do I get my twenty men?" asked the other.

"You do," said Pibo. He stretched out his hand toward the object. "Give it to me."

The man withdrew his hand. "When my ship is set back upright," he said.

PIBO CONCEALED his disappointment. He made a deprecating gesture with one dark and skinny old hand. "However you wish it," he said; "these things are mere details. How is this thing constructed?"

"It is made with other things called tools in a place called a factory," said the man. "There are no words in the Old Language for how it is done."

Pibo almost sulked. The man

was either very stupid, or very smart to withhold information so neatly. "What were you doing when my hunters found you?" he asked.

The man considered his answer before replying. "I will try to explain," he said. "My ship comes from a bigger ship which we call the mother ship. When I was forced to make an emergency-landing here in the jungle, and saw that my ship was so placed that I could not extend my antenna to call my mother-ship to come and rescue me, there was only one thing I could do. That was to locate some high place like the top of a mountain, and there set off a mechanism that would go high in the air and then fly apart, into countless little bits. The winds would carry these little bits all over the world in the air. These little bits are what we call radio-active; and there is a mechanism on the mother-ship that can smell them from a great distance. When I do not return, the mother-ship will come looking for me. They will listen for my radio-signal; and if that does not come, they will look for the little bits—using their smelling-apparatus. If they smell them, they will stop and search the world closely until they find me."

Pibo nodded, absorbing this all with his black, button-bright eyes.

"These others on the mother-

ship," he said, "they are men, too—they are not beasts?"

The man chuckled. "They're men; I give you my word on it," he answered.

"Good," Pibo said, "we could use another tribe around here; the Men of the Tribe of Amuk often go footsore and hungry."

The man looked surprised.

"With five hundred thousand of you," he began. "I should think—"

Pibo instantly saw the error of his earlier lie. "Do not all men go hungry at times?" he countered. "When a man is far from home and hunting is bad, is he not often hungry?"

The man laughed. "That's something that's going to be changed for you and your people, oldtimer," he said. "Out where I come from nobody ever has to go hungry."

"Is that the truth?" said Pibo.

"Of course," said the man. "We have something which we call civilization, which means people-and-machines-working-together. There are great artificial places to live where the weather cannot get at you."

"Even the thickest trees," interjected Pibo, "will not shelter a man from a heavy rainstorm."

"The great caves we have built do that," replied the man, "for I suppose you'd call them caves. The great places which make food produce for all."

"Who hunts?" asked Pibo, dubiously. "Who goes tired and thirsty while ranging the jungle?"

"There is no jungle," cried the man. "There is no need to hunt."

PIBO LAUGHED. "This is foolish," he said. "The jungle is all about us. Look for yourself."

"But the jungle will be there no more when my mother-ship comes, and others like it," said the man. "They will clear out the trees and the undergrowth. They will heal your sick people. They will give you machines to build great structures, and other machines to fly you through the air like a bird. You will live longer and be happier. You will be safe from all dangers and fears. There will be shade for the day and light for the night."

"Bah," said Pibo. "This is impossible."

"Impossible?" said the man—and there was the light of triumph on his face. "How about that cutting-torch I showed you, and promised you for the men you will lend me? Do you have anything like that? If that is real and does what you saw it do, then everything else I say must be real and true, also."

His voice rang out over the clearing; and Pibo did not answer. Instead he sat like an old idol in black stone, perched on his seat of judgement and thinking deeply. He

sat in this fashion, pondering what the man had said; the slow minutes crawled past, and crawled past, one after the other, like worms that travel in a long line, the nose of each to the tail of the one before it. He thought of what the man had said, and he thought of the stick that set fires; he thought of the future the man had painted and he thought wryly that he was probably the only man in the tribe with wit enough to consider the implications of the situation.

At last, when the sun had moved a good forefinger's distance across the sky, he gave over his thinking; turning to the hunters, gave them an order in their own language to kill the man. And the four of them leaped upon him and pulled him down on the ground, to cut his throat. The man screamed.

"Why are you doing this?" he shrieked at Pibo. "It was the truth I told you; the truth!"

"I don't disbelieve you," replied Pibo, not moving from his judgement seat. "What you had to say was fantastic; but there is enough evidence in the form of the Old Language, and certain almost-obsolete tribal customs, to convince me that what you picture is probably the truth. After all, I have always been a wise man and age has mellowed my thinking-processes. I realize that nothing is impossible.

"However—", continued Pibo,

rather unnecessarily—for the jagged stone knives of the hunters had done their work and the man from the stars was busily engaged in gasping out the last of his life into a widening pool of his own blood on the ground—"there is the moral question to consider.

"I cannot honestly see but what a transition to such a paradise as you picture would be destructive to the ancient and honorable virtues of our independent way of

life. The social-structure of the Tribe of Amuk might well collapse. Possibly the hunters might not even need me to think for them any more. And the Gods forbid," finished Pibo, folding his robes around himself judicially, and looking at the now-dead man from the stars, "that I should do myself out of my job in the summer of my old age."

