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## COVER PAINTING BY CHESLEY BONESTELL

(1380 miles out from earth on the way to Mars. Ships in plane of ecliptic. South America below. Isthmus of Panama in upper distance.)  
Painting from "The Exploration of Mars," by Werner von Braun, Willy Ley, and Chesley Bonestell. To be published soon by The Viking Press.

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*Screenwriter and novelist Kem Bennett, whose THE FABULOUS WINK (Pellegrini, 1951) remains one of my all-time favorite light fantasies, has appeared here before with a gentle ghost story (The Soothsayer, F&SF, August, 1952). Now, by way of contrast, he turns to extravagant science fiction, and considers the problems of smuggling in the interstellar future. As a Cornishman, Mr. Bennett has a hereditary interest in this fine art of mocking authority; but his brandy-running ancestors never encountered an inspector of the caliber of Mr. Pedigree . . . nor did they enjoy certain advantages possessed by the carapaced contrabandists of Albenil.*

## Rufus

by KEM BENNETT

SENIOR CUSTOMS OFFICER ALBERT Pedigree watched Cosmic Space-line's flagship *Velocity* settle down on the Saharan moss like a monstrous egg-timer with spider's legs. There were thirty-two humans aboard her. They went one way. An assortment of Martian Ants, Valurians, Trots, Anks, Herolites and Blimmies went another. Then came the passengers from Albenil who were Albert Pedigree's especial responsibility and he stirred himself. There were only three. Without looking at the passenger list he knew their names — Mr. and Mrs. Ttlutlankl. And child; since her last time on Earth Mrs. Ttlutlankl had presented her husband with an heir.

Mr. Pedigree pulled a face. He took a small white pill from a bottle

in his desk and drank it down with a glass of nectar from the government dispenser by the door. He breathed deeply and squared his narrow shoulders. The pill, approved for the use of Customs Officers when dealing with difficult clients, would heighten his perception at the same time as it soothed his nerves and enabled him to approach his duties with a detached and tranquil mind.

In came the Albenili, through the air-lock whose doors swung open automatically, into the Reception Dome, down the passage to the door marked ALBENILI and into Mr. Pedigree's stiffly smiling presence. Mrs. Ttlutlankl led. Mr. Ttlutlankl brought up behind, guiding the trolley on which Ttlutlankl Junior lay, as helpless as a human baby.

Fluff-fluff-fluff went Mrs. Ttlutlankl's six large hairy feet through the thick pile of the government self-growing carpet. She stopped. Albert Pedigree looked up — and up — into Mrs. Ttlutlankl's peculiar face, ten feet above his head. "Good morning, Mrs. Ttlutlankl," he said in Albenil as good as a human tongue could hope to enunciate. "I hope you had a pleasant voyage."

"Space travel bores me to sobs," Mrs. Ttlutlankl answered. "But we're here and that's a lot to be thankful for. How have you been keeping, Pedigree?"

Mr. Pedigree could feel his pill working. Without effort he controlled the irritation produced by Mrs. Ttlutlankl's odious sophistication and familiarity. "Very well, thank you, Mrs. Ttlutlankl," he said sweetly. Then he smiled a smile of terrible hypocrisy. "Please accept my hearty congratulations." He went over to the trolley and patted Ttlutlankl Junior's carapace. It felt like patting an asbestos-lagged boiler badly in need of a shave. No love, no sentimental gooeyness, touched Mr. Pedigree's heart as he did so. It was part of the service: *Customs Officers shall at all times be as friendly, courteous and understanding as their duties permit.* "What is his name?" he asked Mrs. Ttlutlankl.

"Rufus."

"Rufus!" Mr. Pedigree stared at Baby Rufus. Six feet long. Legs, all six of 'em, invisible because they were helplessly folded beneath the

carapace. The shiny, pear-shaped head, with its embryonic antennae, its round, multi-faceted unwinking green eyes. The ferocious mandibles which even now could have seized, killed and dismembered Albert Pedigree in less than half a minute had he been foolish enough to get within range. The working tentacles sprouting like the hairs of a nightmare mustache from beneath the horrible jaws. Brrr, Mr. Pedigree said to himself and wondered why, in Star's name, he had ever volunteered for the Albenil section. Then he remembered himself. "Goo, goo," he said to Rufus. "There's a boy. There's a pretty boy." He gave the creature's carapace a last perfunctory pat and went back to his desk, steering a wide course round Baby Rufus's mandibles. "Surely Rufus is not an Albenil name," he remarked to Mrs. Ttlutlankl, pressing the button which electrically elevated his desk to the Albenil lady's eye-level.

"No, it's the name of a friend of ours in London. Rufus Polax." Mrs. Ttlutlankl's overlapping jaw-plates gaped. She was smiling. "I only hope Polax will be pleased."

Mr. Pedigree cast an eye at Rufus. That! For a godchild! Ouch. "I'm sure he'll be delighted," he said soapily. "Now, Mrs. Ttlutlankl, have you anything to declare?"

The Ttlutlankl's baggage slid out of a chute in the wall and came to rest on a bench at the Albenil lady's forefeet. Great plastic boxes, each containing a spare carapace. It was

the custom for well-to-do Albenili to have their natural and ugly carapaces surgically removed and to wear instead artificial carapaces of many colors and patterns according to the occasion. The best carapaces were manufactured on Earth in Cincinnati, North America, and Birmingham, England, and their sale formed an important part of the commerce between Albenil and Earth.

Mrs. Ttlutlankl was waving a tentacle at the carapace-cases. "Just personal things, Pedigree — and a few rather dreary little presents for friends."

"Enumerate them, please," Mr. Pedigree said, his fingers poised above the writing machine.

"A necklace of Albenil garnets for Rufus Polax's daughter," Mrs. Ttlutlankl started. "A toy anti-gravity carriage for the small son of another friend. An artificial memory for Professor Blotto of London University . . ." Her clicking, metallic voice went on and Mr. Pedigree did his duty with the writing machine, recording the list of declared articles for Mrs. Ttlutlankl to sign later on. While his fingers moved with automatic dexterity, however, his mind was hard at work on another project. He was thinking of diamonds. Albenil diamonds were the size of hens' eggs and worth anything from five thousand Earth-dollars upwards. The terms of a commercial treaty between Earth and Albenil laid down that the export of Albenil diamonds should be

controlled entirely by the Albenil Diamond Monopoly, and made it an offence for Earthlings and Albenili to carry diamonds either out of Albenil or into Earth. This was because a backward halfwit in his dotage could, on Albenil, go out for the day with a bucket and spade and collect diamonds enough to make himself a millionaire in Earth currency. Not unnaturally, the Albenil World Government, on to a Very Good Thing, desired at all costs to keep the diamond prices up.

Mrs. Ttlutlankl had finished enumerating her dutiable possessions. Mr. Pedigree added dates, times, passport particulars, names, identity numbers and half a dozen other pieces of seemingly futile information to the form in his writing machine. At the same moment he was asking himself where the Ttlutlankls had hidden the diamonds this time. This was their thirteenth visit to Earth. (Thirteen, thought Mr. Pedigree, an unlucky number in ancient times. Aha!) On three occasions Mr. Pedigree had been clever, or fortunate enough to catch them smuggling. That in itself was something, but since he did not for a moment imagine that the Ttlutlankls had been diamond-less on the other ten occasions, it was not much. The score so far was 9-3, a figure that Mr. Pedigree found humiliating and was determined to better.

"Sign here, please, Mrs. Ttlutlankl. . . . And here. . . . And here. . . . And here. Thank you."

Mr. Pedigree transferred the form to an auto-duplicator-cum-teleprinter-cum-microfilm filing machine. He pressed several buttons. Mr. Pedigree operated the lift control switch and his desk sank gently down to ground level again. Mr. Pedigree eyed the carapace-cases with a beady, calculating eye. The overture was over. The performance was about to begin. Feeling Mrs. Ttlutlankl's greeny-yellow insect's eyes boring into the back of his neck but ignoring the mocking malevolence that he knew they contained because he was armored in zeal and righteousness, Mr. Pedigree seized his microwave searching projector and switched it on to the first of the carapace-cases. He watched the screen on the wall of the room for the image it would register if the microwaves passed through matter possessing the molecular structure of a diamond. No image appeared. Mr. Pedigree had known it wouldn't; the Ttlutlankls were not amateurs.

He laid aside his machine and stared up into Mrs. Ttlutlankl's face. "Compartments, please, Mrs. Ttlutlankl." With a long-suffering gesture of the tentacles the Albenil lady folded her legs beneath her carapace and sank into a sitting position. Mr. Pedigree fetched his little ladder. It was not possible to use the projector on Mrs. Ttlutlankl because the microwaves had a powerful destructive effect on living tissue. Pity. On his hands and knees Mr. Pedigree crawled over Mrs. Ttlut-

lankl's stylish cobalt-blue carapace. He opened the compartments which served the lady as pockets and carefully went through the contents. Tap-tap-tap went his little hammer as he searched for hidden compartments, listening carefully for hollowness. Nothing. He climbed down carefully. It was within his power to demand that she remove her carapace. He thought of doing so; then decided not to. Intuition told him that she was clean. Besides, it would have meant seeing Mrs. Ttlutlankl in the raw, as it were, and that Mr. Pedigree had no desire to do.

"Is that all, Pedigree?" Mrs. Ttlutlankl asked calmly. "May we go now? Rufus will be wanting his four o'clock feed very soon."

Mr. Pedigree held his smile firmly in place. The threat of being obliged to watch Rufus taking nourishment made his blood run cold; after all, he could not even watch a bull-fight without feeling upset. He gently shook his head. "Not just yet, Mrs. Ttlutlankl. I have to do my duty. I shall not be long."

Mrs. Ttlutlankl's jaw-plates gaped in a hypocritical smile. She started sharpening her mandibles by clashing them together, knowing that it was a noise that Mr. Pedigree did not care for.

Mr. Pedigree shut his ears. He turned to look at Mr. Ttlutlankl, his mind seeking inspiration from past successes. Mr. Ttlutlankl had been very silent — far more silent

than usual. Why, Mr. Pedigree asked himself, had Mr. Ttlutlankl said not a word, neither of greeting, nor protest, nor impatience? Because he was doting upon the near-helpless chunk of infant Albenil on the trolley in front of him? Hmmm. Perhaps. Because he was dematerializing? Surely not! Mr. Pedigree found himself almost unable to believe it. Admittedly the Albenil ability to dematerialize small objects seemed like the answer to a smuggler's prayer, but faced with an inspector of Mr. Pedigree's caliber it was acceptedly futile and Mr. Pedigree could hardly bring himself to think that Ttlutlankl would be anything so foolish.

Yet, staring at Ttlutlankl with experienced eyes, Mr. Pedigree found himself becoming more and more persuaded. Such stillness. Such silence. Such a brown study of concentration.

"Mr. Ttlutlankl," Mr. Pedigree said in a honeyed voice. No response. "Mr. Ttlutlankl!" he said again, this time more firmly. No response.

Mr. Pedigree marched up to Mr. Ttlutlankl and beat an imperious tattoo on his carapace with his little hammer, at the same time shouting in a loud voice, "Mr. Ttlutlankl!"

"Yes, Mr. Pedigree?"

"Please come to the desk."

Up went Mr. Pedigree's desk on its electrical ram. Fiercely Mr. Pedigree stared into Mr. Ttlutlankl's great, sad, green eyes. "Multiply fifteen by one hundred and forty-seven," he shouted.

"Two thousand, two hundred and five," said Mr. Ttlutlankl.

"Multiply thirty-three by nineteen hundred and eight!"

Mr. Ttlutlankl's antennae quivered. He looked at his wife, at his forefeet, and back again at Mr. Pedigree. "Sixty-two thousand, nine hundred and seventy-four," he said with a great effort.

"Wrong!" said Mr. Pedigree triumphantly. "Give me the square root of fourteen thousand, seven hundred and twenty-two."

"I can't," said Mr. Ttlutlankl apathetically.

"How long," said Mr. Pedigree, "would it take for a bath with a capacity of nine hundred gallons to fill if water were running into it through a pipe delivering two and three-eighths gallons every seven minutes?"

Diamonds the size of golf-balls gleamed in the air three feet from Mr. Ttlutlankl's mandibles. They fell with a clatter on to Mr. Pedigree's desk and he caught them swiftly before they had time to roll off. Mr. Pedigree was delighted. Mr. Pedigree said, "Aha! How foolish of you, Ttlutlankl!" Mr. Pedigree moved a mental scoreboard to register 9-4 while Ttlutlankl bowed his pear-shaped head. By destroying Ttlutlankl's concentration with his sums Mr. Pedigree had prevented the Albenil gentleman from holding the diamonds in a state of dematerialization. He was proud of himself.

There were five diamonds. As Mrs. Ttlutlankl's voice said, "Why Klankli, you ass! What a damn silly thing to do! You know you promised never to do it again," Mr. Pedigree gathered them up, popped them into a box, put the box into a self-locking drawer and started pressing buttons.

The picture of a court of law flashed on the television screen on the wall behind Mr. Pedigree. PERMANENT CRIMINAL COURT, WORLD CENTER THREE, said the caption, JUDGE BINKS PRESIDING. Judge Binks peered out from beneath his symbolical wig, hard old eyes resting with a flicker of recognition on the Ttlutlankl family, whose images were being beamed on to a duplicate screen in his courthouse.

"Klankli Ttlutlankl," Mr. Pedigree was saying into a microphone on his desk, "age two hundred and nine, an Albenil citizen, resident on Albenil, charged with smuggling five Albenil diamonds valued at thirty-two thousand Earth-dollars in contravention of Earth Law twelve thousand six hundred and twelve. . . ."

"How do you plead, Klankli Ttlutlankl?" the voice of the Clerk of the Court asked a few minutes later.

"Guilty, Your Honor," Klankli said with every appearance of remorse and humility.

"The diamonds will be confiscated and you will pay a fine of ten thousand Earth-dollars or their Albenil

equivalent," Judge Binks said, passing judgment. "If you do not wish to pay, or cannot, the alternative is ten years residence on a Lunar Corrective Settlement."

Klankli Ttlutlankl shuddered. Mrs. Ttlutlankl already had her wallet out.

"One, two, three, four, five," Mr. Pedigree counted happily. "And five. Ten thousand dollars, correct. Thank you, Mrs. Ttlutlankl."

"To hell with you, Pedigree," Mrs. Ttlutlankl answered calmly. "Can we go now?"

Mr. Pedigree glanced at the clock on the wall, saying five past four, and at Baby Rufus, whose mandibles were gnashing in a furious manner. He winced. "Yes," he said. "Yes, you may go now."

A few hours later, in the luxurious London hotel which specialized in catering for the needs of well-off Albenili, Mr. and Mrs. Ttlutlankl waited until the door of their suite had closed behind the manager. For several moments they faced one another, rubbing antennae affectionately. Then Mr. Ttlutlankl said tenderly, "How beautiful you are, my love. Your eyes are like forest glades." A sensitive and poetical race, the Albenili — and practical as well, for a few moments later Klankli Ttlutlankl was on the telephone, saying, "Hatton Garden Diamond Exchange? Is Mr. Rufus Polax in the building? . . . Hello, Rufus? We've arrived. Come over."

While her husband telephoned, Mrs. Ttlutlankl went to the place where Baby Rufus lay immobile on his trolley. She took a screwdriver from a compartment in her carapace and removed his head. Then she reached into the orifice behind and pressed a switch. One of her tentacles went out, effortlessly lifting Rufus's carapace. Except for a small compartment containing the machinery which caused Rufus's mandibles to

gnash furiously every six hours, in a most realistic fashion, his 'colossal body was hollow.

Mr. Ttlutlankl came to stand at his wife's side. Together they spent a long time staring down at the contents of their unnatural child. Hundredweights of diamonds. Tons, literally, of diamonds. "Ah, well," Mr. Ttlutlankl said. "That's that. Never have to do it again, my dear, will we now?"

