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Fighting an alien champ was always risky business for an Earthman. So Filmore decided he might pick up a pointer or two before the big—

Slaughter On Dornel IV

by

Ivar Jorgensen

LARRY FILMORE STARED at his beer and mentally roasted his fight manager for the fiftieth time. Human beings were supposed to be the toughest race that the Galaxy had ever spawned, but as a fighter, Larry didn't put too much faith in the theory. He had fought a good many races throughout the Galaxy, and, although he had always come out the winner, he had plenty of scars to show for it.

He looked around the bar. It was full of various beings, none of them human except himself.

What am I doing here? he asked himself. *I'm sitting in a cheap little bar on Dornel IV, waiting for a Dornellian fighter to kill me tomorrow.*

But there was no way out of it, Filmore thought bitterly. Blackmer, his manager, had the whole thing sewed up. Larry had found

out, three months before, that Blackmer was cheating him — but that had been too late. According to the contract, Larry had to finish the season or go to prison. If he quit, he would, according to the law, be cheating his manager.

On the other hand, if he got killed during the battle, his entire check would go to Blackmer.

So Blackmer had done the smart thing — for him. He had lined up Larry with Fornax Kedrin, the champion of Dornel.

The Dornellians were big — eight feet high, with fingers that ended in razor-sharp claws. Of course, Larry would be provided with steel extensions on his fingers, but they wouldn't help much; Larry had never learned to use them. Fornax Kedrin would kill him in the first round.

Larry took another sip of his beer and stared forlornly at the

bar. With his fingers, he traced meaningless designs in the moisture left by the cold glass.

Maybe he was taking the coward's way out — but it was the only way he could see. Better a live coward, he thought, than a dead hero.

"Another beer, bartender," he called, finishing the one he held.

"Coming up, Earthman."

The beer arrived and he took a sip. Training? The hell with it, he thought happily. He was going to get himself completely stewed tonight. Live high, die young, and have a good-looking corpse.

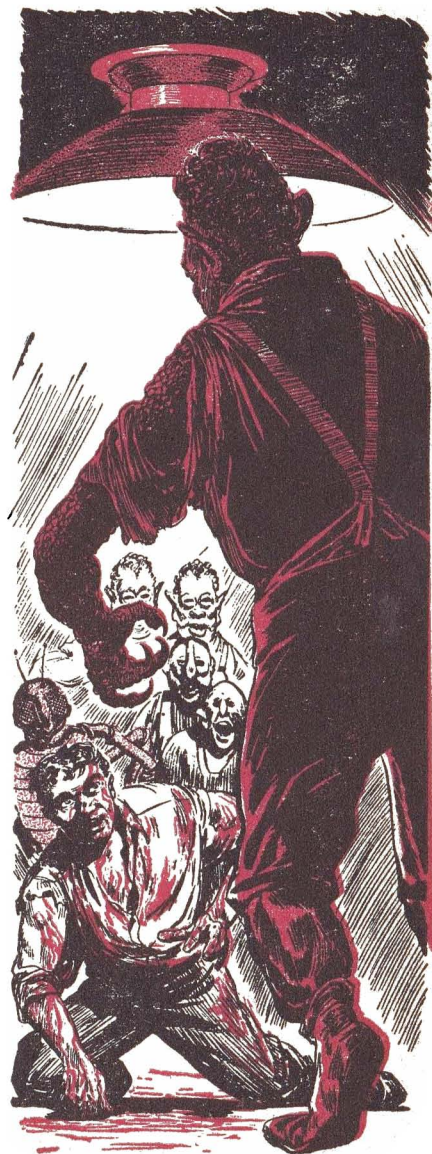
Or maybe it would be better simply to get aboard a spaceship and try to get away. Maybe the Interstellar Police would never find him.

He shook his head dismally. That wouldn't work, either. Nothing would work.

If only he'd had some practice fighting a Dornellian!

He reached out for his beer, not noticing that someone had taken the vacant seat next to him. His elbow collided with a glass. The glass tipped, pouring a green, bubbling liquor all over the Dornellian sitting next to him.

"Stupid Earthman!" snapped the Dornellian contemptuously. "A clumsy beast like you shouldn't be allowed to enter a public



place!"

With one hairy paw, the Dornellian shoved against Larry's shoulder, intending to push him off the bar stool.

Larry moved back, more in astonishment than anything else. He hadn't known that Dornellians had any particular prejudice against Earthmen, but there was unmistakable racial hatred in the alien's voice. He put out his hand to the bar and stopped himself from falling off the stool.

"What's the idea of that?" Larry growled. "That was an accident, and —"

"Are you trying to argue with me? Here is the rest of the drink!" The Dornellian laughed and heaved the remaining contents of the glass in Larry's face.

A BLINDING TIDE of red fury washed over Larry. Without thinking, reacting purely by instinct, he lashed out at the Dornellian.

His fist didn't contact; it was blocked by the heavy forearm of his opponent. A hand raked out at Larry, a hand with six fingers, each of which was tipped with long, cutting talons. Larry moved his head aside barely in time. The talons raked across his cheek, drawing blood. If he hadn't ducked, the cut would have ripped his throat

open.

The Dornellian's other hand slashed out. Larry blocked it with his own arm and sent a hard left to the midsection of the eight-foot monster.

The Dornellian backed away, snarling. The fight was on for real, now. "Little Earthman, I'm going to kill you!"

He leaped in suddenly, and his fist smashed against Larry's face. Larry rolled with the blow, but it brought the taste of blood to his mouth.

His feet moving fast, the Earthman bobbed back away from the giant. He felt a glow of pleasure within himself. Here was his chance to practice a little with a Dornellian! What better training was there for a championship bout than a barroom brawl? He had to watch out for those claws though — those deadly razors that sprouted from the Dornellian's fingertips.

Two other Dornellians started to move in, but an Aldebaranian — a huge reptilian beast, slow-moving but powerful — stepped in front of them.

"Keep back," he hissed, in his snakelike voice. "This is a personal quarrel."

Larry heard an Arcturian spider-man click his mandibles together and whisper: "Yes, let the

Earthman fight it out by himself.”

Larry wasn't too worried. He had fought to the death on half a hundred planets, and hadn't been killed yet. An ordinary Dornellian didn't bother him much. He moved in confidently for the knockout.

His fist lashed out, but his opponent was even faster. Larry connected with nothing but empty air, and the Dornellian's claws raked down his side as the other hand slammed against the side of his head.

Dazed, Larry danced back. His arm was dripping blood, and his head felt groggy and heavy.

The Dornellian threw a left jab, and Larry blocked it with his own left arm. But the giant had done something unexpected. Instead of striking with his closed fist, he had suddenly extended his fingers. The sharp claws stabbed deep into the muscle of the Earthman's forearm, sending a wave of pain to his shoulder.

Again Larry backed away, his arm aching from the wounds. Quickly, he reversed his direction and stepped back in. This time, he used a kick but the Dornellian sidestepped. The toe of Larry's boot caught his hip. Cursing, the Dornellian closed in.

He punched a hand forward, claws extended. Larry stepped to one side and grabbed the hairy

wrist. Using the giant's strength and weight to his own advantage, he propelled the monster across the room, slamming him up against the bar. Then he leaped forward to smash in the Dornellian's ribcage with his heavy boots.

He was not quick enough. The giant rolled aside and sprang to his feet. Snarling viciously, he advanced toward the Earthman.

One hand came down in a hard, chopping blow. Larry managed to fend it off, but the Dornellian's other hand slugged into the pit of his stomach.

Weak with pain, Larry staggered back. He aimed a kick at the alien's shin, and it connected hard. Taking advantage of his opportunity, Larry stepped in. His heel came down on the Dornellian's toes at the same time that his fist slammed into the bristly jaw.

The giant reeled backwards, his taloned hand slashing through the air. He regained his balance and came forward again, but this time Larry was ready for him.

The Dornellian stepped square into a blow to the stomach.

Oddly enough, it didn't seem to bother him much. Then Larry remembered that the Dornellian nervous system wasn't much like an Earthman's; the nerves just weren't in the same places.

But where were they? Again

he cursed Blackmer. The manager hadn't told him anything about Dornellians, had let him sign for the fight with Fornax Kedrin even though it would be sheer murder.

Well, Larry thought somberly, I'll learn tonight. If I ever get out of this bar alive.

HE TOOK A DEEP breath and glanced at the giant, who had recovered from Larry's onslaught. The Dornellian stepped in with a fast one-two — a rake across the face with his left and a smash to the heart with his right.

The claws to his face alerted Larry for the blow to the heart; he stepped back just enough to avoid being really hurt. But the Dornellian's talons had raked his forehead, cutting in deeply. Blood was pouring down over his eyes.

He took a quick look around the bar. The customers were gathered in a ring and were watching the contest wide-eyed, as if they were in fifty-credit ringside seats.

The Dornellian still looked relatively unscratched, while Larry knew he looked as though he'd rolled over a barbed-wire fence. But in spite of the blood, Larry had finally gotten the measure of his opponent. The eight-foot giant weighed close to five hundred pounds; his mass was too great for him to be able to handle his

body rapidly, no matter how fast his reflexes were.

Larry moved in again. He planted a hard right directly in the giant's throat — there *had* to be nerves there. The Dornellian gagged and dropped his head. Larry smiled and slammed his fist into the giant's rib cage, doubling him up even more. He could almost hear the crowd cheering now as he moved in for the kill.

He sucked in his breath and lifted one from the floor. His right fist came up from his knees, gaining speed as it rose. Like a hammer, it crashed into the hairy jaw of the Dornellian, and Larry could feel bone splintering against his knuckles.

Like an oak with rotten roots, the great Dornellian toppled to the floor. He landed with a crash that seemed to shake the building.

Larry stood over the fallen giant for a moment, catching his breath, wondering when the referee was going to start the count. Then he realized there wasn't going to be any count. There wasn't any referee.

His arms were quivering, and his face was dripping with blood. He turned away, mopping his face clean, and started to pick up his unfinished beer when the wailing of sirens echoed through the bar.

Police! Someone had called the

Dornellian police!

The Arcturian spider-man sidled up to him. "Well done, Earthman," he said in his whispering voice. "Come with me; I have a car outside." Without another word, the Arcturian scuttled toward the door.

Larry paused for a fraction of a second before making up his mind. As well trust the Arcturian as anyone; if the police caught him, his life wouldn't be worth a counterfeit credit.

No one tried to stop him as he ran out the door.

The Arcturian's car was waiting just outside. Larry climbed in, and the spider-man slammed one of his many feet down on the accelerator. The car shot off into the night, its turboelectric engine humming smoothly.

"Well, Earthman," said the grating, whispering voice, "You made hash out of the Dornellian. Frankly, I was surprised."

"So was I," Larry said. "I don't know why I'm bothering to run away. All they'll have to do is pick me up at my hotel."

The Arcturian chuckled dryly. "No. I don't think anyone recognized you. Don't forget that all Earthmen look alike to other beings. The only reason I knew who you were is that I'm a fan of yours. I was glad to see you beat that

Dornellian, believe me."

"Thanks," Larry said. "But it's not going to do me any good when I get into the ring against Fornax Kedrin. If an ordinary Dornellian citizen puts up a fight like that, what am I going to do against a professional boxer?"

The Arcturian laughed again. "Just get in there and fight, Filmore. You can handle him. I'm sure you can."

THE CAR PULLED up before the hotel where Larry and his manager were staying, and Larry got out. The Arcturian waved to him and drove off.

Wearily, Larry dragged himself inside and into the elevator.

"Seventeen, please."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Filmore," said the Dornellian elevator boy.

He pushed open the door to his room and dropped on the bed, dead tired. He didn't dare look in the mirror; he was afraid to see what a mess the Dornellian had made out of his face, which hadn't been any too neat before.

"Blackmer?" he called.

There was no answer. The manager was not around. Larry got up, looked bleary-eyed into the other room, and, seeing no one, dropped off into a deep sleep. His last thought before he blacked out was that he'd get into the ring

and do his best. He'd already beaten *one* Dornellian; how tough could Fornax Kedrin be? And what did it matter anyway? He was bound to get killed sooner or later anyway. That was the unspoken assumption every fighter operated under.

When he awoke the following morning, he didn't feel quite so certain about things. The brawl the night before had taken a terrific toll on his nervous system, and he knew that he'd be butchered if he stepped into the ring with the Dornellian champ. He was in no condition to fight.

"Blackmer? You here?"

The manager's bed had been slept in, but there was no sign of him. Larry groped for the house phone, grabbed it, spoke into it. "Do you know where Mr. Blackmer is?"

"He's in the bar, sir," said the switchboard boy. "Do you want me to call him for you?"

"Yes, please."

A moment later, Larry heard the manager's harsh voice. "Black-

mer here. Who's calling?"

"This is Larry. I'm ready for that fight, Blackmer," he said, hoping he'd have the strength to go through with it. "And after I get through with the Dornellian, I'm going to knock your teeth in. This is my last fight for you."

"Now Larry," Blackmer said. "Don't be hasty. I — "

"Shut up! We're quits! I may get killed in that ring, but I'll fight just this once and — "

"What? Haven't you heard? The fight's off!"

Larry blinked in astonishment. "How would I have heard?"

"I thought the news was all over. That's why I didn't bother to wake you. Fornax Kedrin is in the hospital. He got his jaw broken in a bar brawl last night. Nobody knows who did it. But I got another bout lined up on Domerang VI with — "

"Skip it," Larry said. "I'll discuss it with you some other time."

Larry slowly dropped the receiver back on the hook. He grinned. And then he began to laugh.