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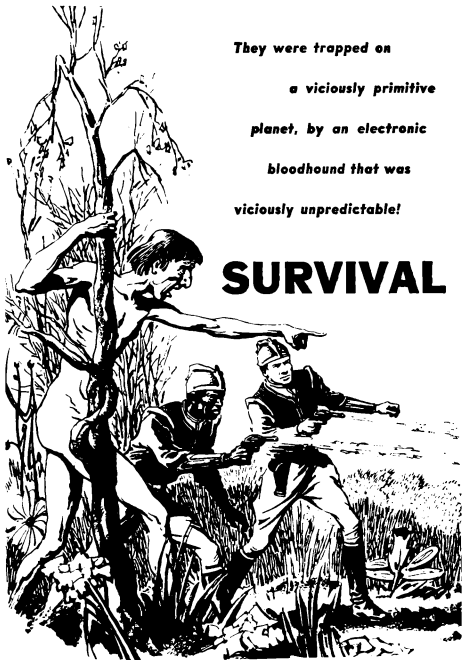
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**They were trapped on  
a viciously primitive  
planet, by an electronic  
bloodhound that was  
viciously unpredictable!**

# **SURVIVAL**



THE SURVEY TEAM was seven parsecs beyond the Rim when the bloodhound picked up their trail.

Three years earlier the inevitable had happened. The humans of the Ten Thousand Worlds had met another race with the faster-than-light space drive—and an expanding population. The contacts had been brief—and violent. Each race

had set up defenses against the other, and maneuvered for position and control of the habitable worlds separating them. The aliens' bloodhounds formed the outer circle of their defense perimeter.

The s-tracer continued its bleak chirping as Wallace read the figures on its dial and made a swift calculation. "We have time for one dip into space-

# FACTOR

by CHARLES V. DE VET

Illustrated by ORBAN



bridge," he informed Saxton, the other member of the team. "If we don't find a planet fast when we come out, we've had it."

Saxton nodded. "We'd better backtrack. Set the bridge for that star group we recorded yesterday. Hurry. We haven't any time to spare."

Four minutes later Wallace brought the two handles of the bridge control together—and the ship winked into hyperspace. Wallace's body jerked upright, and he sat stiff and straight, fighting the impulse to retch that rode his stomach muscles. The room around him took on the visual consistency of thin milk. The low hum of the ship's instruments increased in intensity through the hands that he pressed tightly to his head. Mingled with the sound of the small motors was Saxton's high strained muttering: "I can't take any more of it! I can't take any more of it!"

Then all was normal again. They were out of hyperspace.

Wallace reached for a knob on the board in front of him and began turning it slowly. Both men watched the vision panel on the front wall. After a minute a blue globe floated in from one side. "We'll have to try that one," Wallace said. "It at least has atmosphere."

"We don't have any choice,"

Saxton answered. With his head he indicated the s-tracer. Its stark chirping had begun again.

"The hound's closer than I thought," Wallace complained. "We'll have to risk a faster passage to the surface than would ordinarily be safe." Drops of perspiration that had gathered on his forehead joined together and ran down the side of his nose. He shook his head to clear them away.

By the time they entered the blue planet's atmosphere the intervals between the chirps of the s-tracer had shortened until now they were almost continuous. Gradually, as they plunged toward the planet's surface, the room's temperature rose. They stripped to their shorts and kept the pace steady. When it seemed that they could stand the heat no longer the ship paused, and settled slowly to the ground.

Quickly Wallace shut off the drive motors. The only sound within the ship was the purring of the cooling apparatus.

"Any chance that it can detect our cooling motor?" Saxton asked.

"I don't believe it can follow anything smaller than our main drive," Wallace answered. He pointed to the s-tracer. "It's already lost us. Of course we know it won't go away. It'll circle the planet until we come out and try again."

During the next hour, as the temperature within the ship returned slowly to normal, Wallace and Saxton kept busy checking the gauges that measured and recorded the elements in the planet's atmosphere.

At last Saxton sighed heavily. "Livable," he said.

"Closer to Earth norm than we could have hoped," Wallace agreed.

"What do we do now?"

"We could stay here for two years — until the bloodhound runs out of fuel. That's the estimated time it's supplied for."

"That doesn't sound like a very encouraging prospect." Saxton's dark tan features were lined with worry. "We don't have food enough, for one thing. Maybe the aliens will get discouraged and go away."

"Hardly. You've forgotten that the bloodhounds are fully automatic, and unmanned. A machine doesn't discourage very easily."

"We sure as heck ought to be able to outwit a machine," Saxton said. He thought for a moment. "If we waited until it was across the planet from us, we might have time to get out, and take another jump toward home. One more and we'd be far enough in so our own cruisers could take care of the bloodhound."

Wallace shook his head. "Its

speed is too great. Our best chance is that it doesn't hold to a straight path around the planet. The aliens—not knowing the size of any body we might land on—wouldn't set it for a deadline trajectory. I hope."

There was nothing for them to do until the s-tracer had followed the movements of their stalker long enough to make an adequate graph. They decided to go outside while they waited.

WALLACE and Saxton took only a few steps—and stopped in amazement. They had a visitor!

The native rose from his kneeling position on the ground and stood erect. Wallace studied the face of the naked, stick-thin savage, trying to penetrate beneath the dirt and grime, beneath the mask of impassive features, to find the quality that held him in questioning immobility. For a moment he succeeded.

It was not high intelligence that he found, but rather an innate conviction of power. A conviction and self-assurance so deep that it needed no demonstration for expression.

Wallace glanced at Saxton where he leaned against the spaceship's ramp, the whites of his eyes contrasting sharply with the black of his clean negroid skin. It was clear that he too

sensed the odd quality in the other. And that he was equally unable to decide whether the savage that so incuriously regarded first one then the other of them was to be feared, or accepted as amicable. But both already realized that this was no ordinary meeting between humans and an outworld native. They were on the verge of an unusual experience.

The savage had been kneeling with his forehead touching the ground when they stepped out of the ship. However, now that he stood before them, there was nothing abject in his demeanor. For a long minute he did not speak or make any motion other than to regard them. Casually then he raised his right hand and touched his chest. "Al-fin," he said.

The meaning of the gesture was apparent: Wallace readily understood that the savage was giving his name. He touched his own chest. "Ivan," he murmured.

The native turned his gaze to Saxton.

"Gus," Saxton said, shifting his feet uncomfortably.

The native nodded. "Come!" he commanded. He turned his back and walked away.

There was no question in Wallace's mind about obeying. It was only his subconscious that moved his hand, to make certain

that his gun was in its holster, and to glance at Saxton to see that he too was armed. He had walked several yards before the incongruity struck him: the savage had spoken Earthian!

THEY FOLLOWED the native for several miles over a faint game trail that wound leisurely through brush and skimpy, small-leaved trees, before either of the men recovered his composure enough to speak.

"He said 'Come'," Saxton mused. "Yet we're the first humans this far over the Rim. Where did he learn our language?"

Wallace shrugged. "I've been wondering too," he answered.

"Should we try to talk to him?" Saxton asked, glancing ahead at their companion.

The native, apparently, had no interest in their conversation. "Better wait," Wallace suggested.

"I don't understand it." Saxton's tone was querulous. "No one's allowed over the Rim ahead of us. A section has to be surveyed, and worlds declared fit for habitation, before colonists can move in. Yet we land here and find a native speaking our language."

"Perhaps he isn't a native," Wallace said.

"What do you mean?"

"When Earth first discovered

spacebridge there were no laws regulating its use. Limits were put on colonizing areas only after some of the earlier expeditions failed to report back. One of them might have been marooned here."

"Then this fellow's human?"

"He could be."

"If he is, would he be naked?" Saxton asked.

"Some of those lost expeditions disappeared as long as two thousand years ago," Wallace answered. "A colony could have slipped back a long ways in that time."

"But not this far," Saxton demurred. "They'd still have some traces of their original culture left."

"A one-ship colony would have very limited mechanical resources," Wallace said. "And they'd be isolated here. As soon as the tools and machines they brought with them wore out they'd be almost impossible to replace. The odds are they'd slip back fast."

"I don't know." Clearly Saxton wasn't satisfied—but he let the subject hang. "When we saw him kneeling on the ground, I thought that he was worshipping us. But since then he's been acting as if he thought he was the god instead of us."

They were halfway across a small clearing now and before Wallace could answer the native

ahead stopped abruptly. He stood motionless, with his head tilted to one side, as though listening. After a moment he motioned them to move to the left.

As Wallace and Saxton obeyed, Al-fin pointed urgently toward their guns. They drew, and the native turned to stare at the bushes at the far side of the clearing.

"What does he want?" Saxton asked.

"I don't—" Wallace's answer was cut off as a huge "cat," with long stilt-like legs spread wide, sprang out of the bushes—directly at them.

Wallace and Saxton sprayed the beams of their guns across the cat's chest, burning a wide, smoking gash. The beast landed, sprang again, and died.

Saxton let out a long breath of relief. "Close," he said.

Wallace stood with a puzzled frown on his face. "How did he know the animal was there?" he asked.

"He must have a good sense of hearing," Saxton answered doubtfully.

"It can't be that good," Wallace protested.

"Maybe this is our chance to get some fresh meat," Saxton said. He drew a knife from his belt and knelt beside the cat's carcass. He made several rapid cuts. After a minute he looked up. "Nothing edible," he said.

"Nothing but skin, gristle, and tendons."

They walked on.

THEY ENTERED another clearing, and found themselves in the midst of a group of naked savages, obviously Al-fin's people.

"Where did they come from?"

Saxton asked, resting his hand on the grip of his gun.

Wallace looked his way and shook his head. "No guns," he said. "We'll have to take the chance that they're friendly."

Most of the members of the group, Wallace observed, were lying on the ground, or idling about at the edges of the small clearing. He counted twenty-three—of both sexes, and varying ages. There was no sign of clothing or ornament on any of them. They were naked, filthy, and nondescript; yet each had the mark of that quality that had puzzled them in Al-fin—the deep inner assurance. A few glanced their way, but without any evidence of an unusual degree of interest.

Their attention returned to Al-fin. Streaks of sweat had made gray trails on his grimy face, and he gave off an odor that was sharp and rancid. He sat on the ground and motioned for Wallace and Saxton to do the same.

Wallace hesitated, then spread his hands resignedly. "This is

a strange game," he said. "We'll let him make the first moves." He and Saxton sat down together.

Al-fin began speaking, without inflection and with few pauses. Some of the individual words sounded faintly familiar, but the two men could make no sense of what he said.

"I'm afraid we can't understand you," Wallace told him. In an aside to Saxton he said, "He won't understand me either, but I don't think we'd better ignore him."

Saxton nodded. "I guess you are right about his being human," he said. "Some of those words were definitely Earthian."

Al-fin raised his voice in a shout, "Il-ma!"

One of the women in the center of the clearing laughed and came toward them. She was stick-thin, as were Al-fin and most of the others, and very dirty. As she came near she smiled. Her teeth were discolored and rotting. She giggled.

Al-fin indicated her with a sweep of his arm. "Mate?" he inquired.

Wallace felt himself reddening. "Is he offering her to us?" he asked Saxton.

"I think so." Saxton smiled uneasily. "It looks like it's our move now."

"We'll have to risk offending them." Wallace looked at Al-fin



and shook his head vigorously. "No mate," he said.

The woman giggled again and walked away. Al-fin seemed to have lost interest. He pulled himself jerkily to his feet and went across the clearing to the fire that the two surveyors had noted earlier. A large clay kettle rested on a flat rock over the fire.

"There's meat in that kettle," Saxton said, whimsically licking his lips. "I hope he passes some around."

"I don't think we should eat any," Wallace cautioned.

"Why not?"

"You know the saying, one man's meat . . ."

"But I'm starved for fresh meat," Saxton argued.

"We'll see if we can get him to give us some," Wallace said. "We can take it back to the ship and test it before we eat any."

They watched Al-fin as he dug in the kettle with a stick and placed the food he speared on a large leaf. He carried it to where an old man sat with his back resting against a tree trunk. The hoary veteran had a long scar on his right arm that ran from shoulder to elbow; evidently he had had a brush with one of the big cats sometime in the past. Oddly enough, he was the only native that was not thin and hungry-looking.

"He must be the chief," Sax-

ton said. "At least he's well fed."

Wallace nodded.

When Al-fin returned Saxton said, "Meat." At the same time he rubbed his stomach in a circular motion.

Al-fin paused, thinking over what Saxton had said, then nodded several times. He made a gesture with his arm for them to follow and led them to the fat old man. "Meat," Al-fin intoned expressionlessly, and stood as though waiting for the old man's reply.

"I hope he's in a generous mood," Saxton said.

They had seen no sign from the old man, but Al-fin turned to them and nodded once more. "Meat," he said. He made no further move.

"Why doesn't he get it?" Saxton asked finally. "Apparently he agrees—but he just stands there."

"Maybe we're supposed to do something now," Wallace said. "But what? Do you suppose we're expected to pay him some way?"

"That could be," Saxton answered. "Or maybe the chief's eating the last of what they have now, and they'll give us a chunk when they get some more. Anyway, let's not wait any longer. I'm starved. Even canned concentrate would taste good to me now."

BY MORNING the s-tracer had marked the tracking chart sufficiently to give them some data on the bloodhound's actions. Wallace went over it carefully.

Saxton stayed in his bunk and pretended to be still sleepy, but Wallace could feel his gaze following the work closely. When at last he looked up Saxton said, "Well?"

"We have something to work on," Wallace answered the question in his voice. "But unless we get more, I don't see how it will help us.

"The bloodhound," he went on, not waiting for further inquiry from Saxton, "is acting pretty much as we thought it would. It has no straight line trajectory. At irregular intervals it circles, backtracks, or goes off at a new tangent. Often it stays over a particular territory for longer than the three hours we'd need to get away. It's probable that at some time it will do this on the other side of the planet—where it couldn't pick up the signal of our leaving. But . . ."

Saxton was sitting up now. "But what?"

"It's following a random pattern." Wallace studied his fingernails as he sought for words to make the explanation clear. "The s-tracer will show us when it is out of range—but there's no way for us to know how long

it will stay in any one place."

"In other words there will be intervals when it will be directly across the planet from us. But unless it stayed there for close to three hours—the time we'd need to clear the atmosphere—it would pick up our signal as it came around, and run us down?"

"That's about it."

"Then we'll have to take the chance."

"We could. And if we can think of nothing better, we will. But the odds would be heavily against us. Most of its locale changes are made in a shorter period of time than we'd need to get away."

"We can't sit here for two years." Saxton was a man whose high-strung nature demanded action, and was the more inclined of the two to take chances. Wallace preferred weighing influencing factors before making any decision.

"I think we'd better wait," Wallace said. "Perhaps we'll be able to think of something that will give us a better chance."

Saxton pulled the sheet-blanket off his legs irritably, and climbed from the bunk, but he did not argue.

DURING THE MORNING Saxton killed a small rodent, but found its flesh as inedible as that of the cat. Wallace stayed

inside studying the charts and instruments.

They had their noonday meal in a small clearing by the side of the ship. Wallace had been able to find no way of solving their difficulty. For want of a better plan they'd decided to wait—while keeping close track of their stalker.

"I've been thinking about those natives," Wallace said, as they lay stretched on the grass. "If they are lost colonists—have you wondered how they managed to survive here so long?"

"I did wonder how they protected themselves against the cats," Saxton answered. "They don't seem to have any weapons."

"Al-fin demonstrated that they must have exceptionally good hearing," Wallace said. "But would that be enough? You'd think the cats would get them—when they're sleeping, if not during the day—or kill off their young."

"That's what I meant," Saxton said. "We saw no weapons, so they must have some other means of defense."

"They live pretty much like animals," Wallace observed. "Maybe they stay alive the same way. If animals aren't powerful, they're usually swift. Or they have some other survival characteristic, such as prolific propagation. But what do these savages

have—except perhaps the sharp hearing that you mentioned? That alone shouldn't be a deciding factor. Yet they were able to survive here for two thousand years."

"How about an instinct of dispersal?" Saxton asked. "There might be hundreds of groups like the one we saw."

"That would help. But my thought was that if they don't use weapons they might have gone at it from another angle: they adjusted themselves, instead of their tools, to their environment."

"Special ability stuff?" Saxton asked.

Wallace glanced over at the other man. By the look of abstraction on Saxton's face he knew that no answer was necessary. Saxton's imagination was a moving force. When a subject intrigued him he could no more abandon it and turn to something else than he could stop breathing. The trait was one that made him an ideal partner for Wallace, with his more logical reasoning, and his insistence on weighing fact against fact and belief against belief. It was, in fact, the reason the two men had been teamed. One was the intuitive, the other the harmonizing, controlling, factor in their combination.

Saxton rose and stretched. "I think I'll go inside," he said.

"I want to poke around in the library a while."

Wallace smiled and followed his companion into the ship. This at least would take Saxton's mind off their troubles. Their enforced inactivity would be less tedious for the more imaginative man.

Saxton selected several tapes from the book shelf and put them in the magnifier. "When I find something that sounds likely," he said, "I'll read it. Stop me if you want to discuss anything I find."

A HALF-HOUR later Saxton said, "Socrates maintained that the fewer our needs, the nearer we resemble gods. Do you suppose Al-fin and his tribe are approaching godhood?"

Wallace's answer, from the bunk where he lay, was a discourteous grunt.

"I thought so too," Saxton quipped. He went on reading.

Almost an hour went by before he spoke again. "This might help put our savages in the proper place in their cycle," he said. "Quote: 'Giambattista Vica, a native of Naples, held a theory that human history progressed in cycles, each of which followed the same course. The first move in a civilization began when man, terrified by the forces of nature, invented and worshipped gods in order to placate

them. Next, he made up myths of demi-gods and heroes, and arrived at the idea of kingship. Finally, from kingship he came to democracy, which degenerated into chaos; after which the next cycle started and the process was repeated."

"Interesting," Wallace said. "But even if it fits, I think we understand well enough where these people are in their cycle. What we want now is a clue as to what makes them different."

Wallace was about to doze off when Saxton said, "Listen to this: '. . . in which he first injected the hormone that produces milk in the breasts of nursing mothers into the bloodstream of starved virgin rats and then introduced newly hatched squabs into their cages. Instead of devouring the luscious meal placed before them, the starved virgin animals acted as tender foster mothers to the helpless creatures.'" He looked across at Wallace expectantly.

"I'm afraid I don't—" Wallace began.

"Don't you see?" Saxton asked. "Something about the food here has made the natives different. We've got to find that food."

"That might be true also," Wallace answered slowly. "But I'm not as interested in finding what caused the difference as I

am in finding the difference itself."

"Find one and you find the other," Saxton argued. He held up his hand as Wallace made as though to speak. "Sleep on it," he said. "Maybe we'll have some ideas by tomorrow."

THEY WERE ABLE to extract no new clues from the tracking of the bloodhound by the next forenoon. Neither man could arrive at any means of thwarting the alien machine. Wallace had checked the graph track minutely, looking for signs of a cycle, or cycles, in its movements. He ended up convinced that none existed. It apparently operated entirely at random.

At the mid-day meal Saxton suggested, "Let's pay those fellows in the woods another visit."

"We may as well," Wallace agreed. "We're helpless here until we can come up with some new idea."

They finished eating and strapped on their sidearms. They were not certain that the path they took through the woods was the same they had taken with Al-fin two days before, but at least it led in the same general direction.

An hour later they were lost. Their way had not led them to the tribe of naked savages and they had no idea where else to look. They were debating

whether or not to return to their ship when they stepped out into a clearing—one larger than any they had come on earlier.

In the center of the clearing rested a spaceship! From where they stood they could see that its hull was rusted and weather-beaten.

"That hasn't flown in a long time," Saxton said, after the first few minutes of wonder.

"Probably not since it first landed here," Wallace answered.

The clearing about the vessel had been kept free of brush and bushes, and when they went across, and through the open portal of the ship, they found the inside immaculate.

"They certainly keep it clean," Saxton observed.

"It may be a shrine to them," Wallace said. "That would explain why we found Al-fin kneeling when we landed, and yet why he treated us so nonchalantly. He was worshipping our ship, not us."

"I hope they don't find us here," Saxton remarked. "We might be violating some taboo."

Most of the interior fittings of the vessel, they found, had long ago rotted away. Only the metal parts still remained intact. The instrument board was unfamiliar to them. "Pretty definitely an early model," Wallace said.

Saxton found something on

one wall that held his absorbed interest. "Come here, Ivan," he called.

"What is it?" Wallace asked, going over to stand beside him. "Read that."

Wallace read aloud from the engraved plaque: *"Spring, 2676. We, the Dukobors, leave our Earth homes in the hope that we may find a dwelling place for ourselves and our children, where we may worship our God as we believe proper. We place ourselves in His hands and pray that He will watch over us on our journey, and in the time to come."*

"That's over nineteen hundred years ago," Saxton said.

"Soon after the discovery of spacebridge," Wallace added. Without being aware of it they both spoke in whispers.

They inspected the vessel for some time more, but found little of any further interest.

A SHORT TIME after they left the ancient spaceship Wallace and Saxton stumbled on Al-fin and his group of naked natives.

This time they made a concerted effort to communicate with Al-fin, and one or two of the others, but with no more success than before. Neither side could understand more than a few words of the other's language, and they could accomplish very little with signs.

Al-fin sat with them for a time, until they saw him tilt his head in the gesture they remembered. On his face was the same expression of listening. After a moment he rose leisurely and indicated that they were to follow him. Most of the other natives, Wallace noticed on rising, had already gone over and bunched together at one end of the clearing. They appeared restless, but not frightened.

"What's it all about?" Saxton asked.

"I suspect there's another cat in the neighborhood," Wallace answered.

Saxton pointed to the center of the clearing. Beneath a tree the oldster with the scar on his arm sat alone, seemingly unaware that the others had left him.

"Are they using their chief for a decoy?" Saxton asked.

"Perhaps the old duffer isn't the chief," Wallace answered. He reached for his firearm.

A dirt-encrusted hand closed over his own. He looked up. Al-fin shook his head.

Wallace turned to look back at the clearing just in time to see a big cat step out of the bushes. It glanced across at them with an easy hate in its red-shot eyes, and turned its attention to the fat man, who was nearer. Slowly it gathered itself to spring.

Wallace shrugged off Al-fin's hand, that still rested on his, just as the cat left its feet. He had no chance to fire. The cat finished its spring—and the ground caved in beneath its feet. A moment later they heard its snarling and spitting from several yards underground.

Calmly, unhurriedly, the natives picked boulders from the ground and carried them to the pit. They dropped or threw them down on the cat until its snarls changed from anger to pain, and died completely.

Wallace and Saxton walked to the edge of the pit and looked down. The cat was dead. Its carcass lay sprawled over those of another dozen of its kind.

"Evidently they've used this method often before," Wallace remarked. A thought occurred to him and he looked at Saxton.

Saxton nodded in unspoken agreement. "We've just seen another demonstration of that ability we're trying to find," he said.

"But what is it?" Wallace asked.

"Can it be anything except acute hearing?"

"If it was only that, how did they know where the cat would appear, and what it would do? If it had circled the pit they would have been helpless. Yet they did nothing except retreat to the far side of the clearing and wait."

Saxton shook his head in defeat. "They did act with plenty of assurance—but how did they know? Do you think we should stay around some more, and watch how they operate?"

Wallace glanced up at the rapidly moving sun. "We'd better get back to the ship," he said. "We have only about enough time to reach it before dark. We can come back again tomorrow, if you want."

THAT EVENING as he lay on his bunk, Wallace noted that Saxton was growing restless again. Their being unable to find a way to evade the bloodhound was bringing the irritable part of his nature to the surface. The time had come again to furnish diversion. "I'm sure we have all the clues on those savages," he said. "If we just understood how to fit them together."

It worked. Saxton stopped pacing and bared his teeth in a smile. "You still think they developed some special ability, don't you?" he asked. "I don't agree. Nineteen hundred years—the time the colony's been here—is too short for any change to take place. Evolution doesn't work that fast."

"I'm not thinking of the slow process of adaptation," Wallace said, "where the most fit, and their descendants, are the ones that tend to survive and propa-

gate. What I had in mind was a form of genetic change. Such as a plant, or an animal, appearing that is different from the rest of its species. A botanist, or a biologist, would call it a 'sport.' Like the appearance of a black rose on a bush of red roses. If the black rose is more fitted to survive in its environment, or if it is artificially propagated, it would soon replace the red."

"You think then that a child was born here with a difference that made it more fit to survive in this environment than the others, and that the savages we saw are its direct descendants?"

Wallace nodded.

"But wouldn't it be too much of a coincidence that the particular trait should appear just when it was needed?"

"I don't think so," Wallace said. "Nature has a way of providing the particular trait just at the time it *is* most needed. A good example is the way more male children are born during a war. There's no known explanation for something like that. But nature seems to know what is needed—and provides it."

"That sounds plausible," Saxton said, after a minute of consideration. "According to your theory, then, those savages possess an ability radically different from that of normal humans?"

"Not necessarily *radically* dif-

ferent," Wallace answered. "It would probably be a trait inherent in all of us, but not so evident, or fully developed. Or perhaps it has made its appearance before, in rare individuals, but not being a survival characteristic—where it appeared—it died. Something like telepathy, or poltergeistism, or any of the other so-called wild talents."

"I'll admit I'm stumped," Saxton said. "And I don't think we'll learn anything more here without staying and observing them a lot longer than I'd care to. If we ever get back home, there are specialists in that sort of thing, who can do more with the facts we gave them than we can."

Wallace sighed. "I suppose you're right," he said. "I hope we learn what it is before we leave, but of course we can't wait if we get the chance to go."

EARLY the next afternoon they spied a figure hurrying toward them from the edge of the wood.

"It's Al-fin," Saxton said. "I wonder why he's in such a hurry."

"He's carrying something under his arm," Wallace commented.

They waited while the native puffed his way up the bank of the small plateau on which the spaceship rested. When he reach-



ed them he stood for a moment fighting to regain his breath. It was evident that he had run long and hard.

Pushing his package under one arm, Al-fin raised the other and pointed at the sky. Bringing his arm around in a wide half-circle, he made a sound with his lips like an Earth bumblebee. When he reached the end of the half-circle he held a finger out in a long point. He ended the performance by holding his hand out toward the spaceship and making a scooping motion—as though he were throwing it into the air. Three times he repeated the maneuver.

Wallace watched him in puzzled silence. At the end of the third repetition his eyes widened with slowly dawning understanding. He ran for the portal of the ship. "I'll be right back," he tossed over his shoulder.

Inside he glanced quickly at the s-tracer. Its needles indicated that the bloodhound was directly across the planet from them!

He dashed back to the open portal. "Inside! Quick!" he called to Saxton.

Saxton wasted not a minute in obeying. As he pushed past Wallace, Al-fin came to the portal of the ship. He extended the parcel he had been carrying under his arm to Wallace. "Meat," he said. "Bye."

"Thanks," Wallace answered,

taking the gift. "Thanks—for everything." He closed the portal quickly.

THREE HOURS LATER they were in hyperspace. Another five minutes and they were in the Ten Thousand Worlds portion of the galaxy—and safe.

Saxton turned over on his side. He had made a faster recovery from the nausea of the bridge than usual. "Okay," he said to Wallace. "Give."

Wallace smiled. "Perhaps we'd better open Al-fin's gift first," he said, deliberately teasing Saxton with his procrastination. We unwrapped the several large leaves from the package on the table.

Inside was a man's fat arm—with a long scar running from shoulder joint to elbow!

SAXTON GROANED and dashed for the lavatory. This time he was sicker than he'd been during the jump. When he turned, streaks of pale green showed through the duskiness of his cheeks. "They're cannibals," he whispered.

"I wouldn't hold that against them," Wallace said. "It might have been one of the necessities of their survival."

"I suppose so." Saxton turned intently to Wallace. "This much I got," he said. "When Al-fin said 'Bye,' I figured that he was

telling us to get out. But how did he know that it would be safe—and how did you know enough to trust him?"

"I can't take too much credit," Wallace said. "Just all at once everything clicked together—at the exact moment I understood that Al-fin was trying to tell us to leave. You remember we decided that their survival characteristic would probably be something inherent in all of us, but not developed—or at least not to the extent that an isolated colony of humans would need here?"

Saxton nodded.

"Well, I'm convinced that the answer is intuition."

"Intuition?"

"Yes," Wallace said. "Everyone knows what intuition is, and has it to some degree. With no evidence to back up his reasoning a person knows that something is going to happen. Sometimes he can even give exact details. It's a definite, perceivable faculty. Yet no one has ever been able to explain just what it is, or even how it works. But if you looked at it in another way it wouldn't be so mysterious. It's another sense—too deeply buried in our subconscious to be consistently active. Those savages needed it here—fully developed—and nature provided it."

Saxton pulled himself up on

one elbow. "And with it they can practically see what's going to happen in the future," he finished for Wallace. "They can predict—and be right every time! That's how Al-fin knew it would be safe for us to leave." He paused. "It all fits. I think you've got it."

Wallace smiled. "My guess is that they can't see very far into the future. That's why Al-fin was out of breath when he came. By the time he learned about the coming opposition of our ship and the aliens' he had to hurry to get to us, and tell us, before it was too late."

Wallace rubbed the stubble of whiskers on his chin with his knuckles. "We'll have to report this planet suitable for colonizing," he said. "I hate to think what will happen to those poor savages when civilization moves in. They'll soon lose that future-seeing."

Saxton's eyes widened at some inner thought. He sat straight up in his bunk. "Will they?" he asked. "Or will it work the other way? Someday the children of those naked savages may . . ." He stopped. Wallace recognized the glaze of abstraction that moved over his features.

Saxton began to sing a stanza from an old popular song that had recently been revived: *"There's gonna be some changes made . . ."*

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