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Careful scrutiny of assembled data on the animals so far collected for our Bureau of Imaginary Zoology indicates that none of them — hurkles, gnurrs or golen, to refresh your memory — is wholly suitable as a household pet. Kris Neville has remedied this sad lack in giving us the quiggie (the Empirized spelling; in Dobu, the beast is called a kwiggi), advertised as an ideal pet for families large or small. The quiggie is a loutish little animal about the size of a cat, green in color, a docile biped with a pronged tail and silken hair. While cute and appealing, it's about as well co-ordinated as a drunk on roller skates. Only one thing wrong about the quiggie as pet: it's an integral part of the culture of Dobu, which is not the culture of richer, warmer planets. . . .

Take Two Quiggies

by KRIS NEVILLE

"BAD NEWS," said the man from the Culture Team.

The plenipotentiary from Dobu, one Smith by name, looked hurt. He twisted his scrawny neck around to hide his disappointment and shrugged his thin shoulders to show that it really didn't matter. "Ah-so?"

"Sorry, old man," the man from the Culture Team said. "It amounts to about limited quarantine."

The Dobun made a weak gesture with his meatless arm.

"It could be worse," the man from the Culture Team said.

Mr. Smith nodded sadly.

"Don't blame us," the man from the Culture Team said. "I mean, the Culture Team. As near as we can see, you wouldn't louse up our culture if you brought in half your population tomorrow. But of course. . ." He shrugged.

"Thank you," the Dobun said humbly.

"It's the papers, really," the other said. "I suppose you've seen them? Damn' shame about the *Starflight* thing, and all that. But that's the way it is. We know it was a — ah — misunderstanding. But once the papers got hold of it. . . . Well, what I mean is, they're still hot under the collar, y'know. But we don't blame you — in Culture."

"Thank you," the Dobun said again.

"So. For a little while — until the papers simmer down, I mean — we'll have to keep you pretty much on your own planet. But there'll be trade — limited, that is — conducted from your unpopulated Valten 6 — a way-station sort of thing. We'll even furnish you a ship to shuttle the cargos to and from Dobu. But that's about the size of it. Sorry."

"I appreciate it," the Dobun said apologetically; he looked glum.

"Maybe a year. No more, at the most. Won't be too bad; you got along before we discovered you, y'know. You'll make out."

"Ah. . . . Trade?" Mr. Smith asked anxiously.

"Oh, quite. Of course, we couldn't, say, ship you any war potentials: but aside from that — " He made a sweeping gesture implying there was a wide, unexcluded field remaining.

"We haven't warred for a hundred years. Five hundred years," Mr. Smith said. "We Dobuns are peaceful."

The man from the Culture Team studied the emaciated Dobun and nodded. "I know. Culture knows. I jolly well suspect *State* knows. But the newspapers haven't heard — or, if they have — don't believe — and we can't very well go against them, what?"

"No," Mr. Smith said uncertainly. "No. Of course not."

"Fine. That's cleared up, then. . . . Now, about this trading. We'll

help all we can. Count on us. Just steer clear of stuff you could make war with us with, and State'll approve it."

The Dobun sighed.

The man from the Culture Team looked blandly around the office; he ruffled a paper. "I say?"

"Yes?"

"If it's all one to you — well, I mean, if it doesn't matter (no reason why it should, y'know?), I'd like to mention the firm of Jason and Son. Most reputable — ah — and respected firm in our System. Just mention it, that is. Can't recommend, of course: I'm a deuced official and all that. It's all one to me, but I just thought I'd mention it, what?"

"All right," the Dobun said. "I'll see them."

"Fine. I think you'll find — ah — that State will — that is, Jason and Son has worked on these matters before — quarantines, I mean — and they know how to put an agreement through State without a lot of red tape another trading company would have to go through."

"Ah — yes," said Mr. Smith.

The man from the Culture Team nodded happily; business done, he felt expansive. "You wouldn't believe," he said.

"Yes?"

"I mean: it sure takes all kinds, and you wouldn't believe the Cultures we run into. All kinds." He shook his head in some secret disapproval. "Cultures based on ritual. Cultures based on suspicion. Cultures — would you believe it? — based on suicide."

"Ah. . . . ?"

"Yes, it takes all kinds. You really meet some queer ones in this job." He hesitated, peering across his desk at Mr. Smith, making it perfectly obvious that he thought he was seeing one of the queerest right now. "Why," he continued, "there's even a culture based on lying." He leaned back in his chair and grew reflective. "Very dependable, though. You can discount all they say." He snapped forward again. "Well! It takes all kinds to make a universe — know what I mean?"

The Dobun stood up and cleared his throat.

"Well — ah — I thank you, for what you did. I appreciate it, I mean," Mr. Smith said.

The man from the Culture Team waved his hand to signify that it was all

in a day's work. "Oh?" he said. "Uh — before you go. I say, if it's not too much bother, you might tell Mr. Jason that I — ah — casually mentioned his firm."

"I will," Mr. Smith said.

Mr. Smith explained to Mr. Jason that the Dobuns were a poor people; that they had, in short, very little to offer aside from a few hand made trinkets — poor things — a few art pieces: nothing to compete with the superb machine-made multiplicity of conveniences he saw around him. He stared out the window in wonder, even as he spoke, at the parade of passing air cars.

"We've never," he said, "accumulated a superabundance of things. But our few poor wants — humble as they are — sometimes tax our strength. As you can see —" he smiled humbly — "we are not a strong, active people. Perhaps worst we need power: things to plant our fields, and —"

Mr. Jason cleared his throat. "I'm afraid, what with the quarantine, we couldn't consider giving you power sources. But —" He coughed.

"Well," the Dobun said. He paused, as if trying to imagine something else his people might need.

"Perhaps," said Mr. Jason, "I might suggest — ah — I understand it's cold on Dobu?"

"Why, yes," said the Dobun. "It is."

"Well," Mr. Jason said. "I may have the very things for you. Wool articles. Wearing apparel. Warm, soft, cozy."

"Ah. . . ."

"It's all one to me," Mr. Jason said. "I'm trying to oblige you. Fact is, the power equipment would be cheaper: but we can't do business selfish like that, now, can we: want to give you the best I can: hang the cost. You'd be surprised what wool brings on the market: fantastic sums, yes, sir." He looked at Mr. Smith and was relieved to find that he didn't give any indication of knowing what it brought on the market. "Oh, very, very dear. But I do business with satisfied customers: that's the only way, huh?"

"Well. . . ."

"And it's not easy to find something State'll okay. Lots of things you can use to make war with. Lots of things. All kinds, in fact. . . . Now, our job

is to find what you need, what's good for you; and then — if it'll pass State, why, we'll get it for you. Hang the cost, I say!"

"Well. . . ."

"Wool. My God, man! Do you know how bad you need wool? People freezing on your planet every winter for the lack of it."

"On Dobu we. . . ."

"See! It's essential: can't live without it." He leaned sharply forward and fixed Mr. Smith with a glare. "You," he said slowly, "need wool." The effect was hypnotic.

"Well. . . ."

"Fine!" Mr. Jason said. "Now. What do we need from you?" His eyes became beady in an instant. "You've brought samples, of course?"

"We have so little. . . ."

"Oh, come, now," Mr. Jason interrupted. "No apologies. Of course, we can make almost anything right here. Turn out fine 'handmades' by the dozens on our machines. But we're easy to trade with. We like to help — ah — those less fortunate. It's a duty. The responsibility of our unique position; our fine civilization. Yes, sir, the most advanced people have responsibilities, I can tell you. And it's not so easy, sometimes. But we lean over backwards to do right."

"These things —" Mr. Smith began. He bent over an array of baggage. "These things, here. I brought them with me, to show you. . . ."

As he bent over, he inadvertently brushed the catch of a wire cage. The door popped open. Out came the animal that was inside.

"What's that?" Mr. Jason jabbed a finger at the creature.

"That? Oh." Mr. Smith noticed the animal and reached out toward it. "Oh. That. The customs man sent it along to me. It has nothing to do with our trade. It shouldn't have come off the ship at all."

"What is it?"

"It's," said Mr. Smith, "a *kwiggi*."

The *kwiggi* eluded his fingers as he reached for it, and in the process it imitated a drunken sailor tangled in the rigging. It backed up, into a chair, and then it leaped away, in surprise at the sudden contact. It made motions for all the world like trying to scratch its right elbow with its right hand. No luck.

Mr. Smith reached out again. It dived quickly and playfully to the left

and banged its head with a sharp thwack into Mr. Jason's desk. It sat down and rubbed its head with both hands.

"Hummm," said the Great Entrepreneur of Jason and Son, who had been watching with interest while the animal disported itself. "Hummm. A *kwiggi*?"

"Yes," admitted Mr. Smith as he picked the animal up and returned it to the cage.

"What's the good of it?" Mr. Jason asked; and his eyes were narrowed for an instant into greedy slits.

"We eat them," Mr. Smith said apologetically.

"Well!" Mr. Jason said. "You *eat* them, eh?"

"That's what we do. I brought along a pair for my food while I was away from home."

"I — see." Mr. Jason considered. "Then you've already eaten the other one?"

"Oh, dear me, no. These are breeding stock. I eat the offspring. . . . The other one's in a separate cage back on the ship."

"Ah!" said Mr. Jason, experiencing the thrill of a financial brain wave. He tugged his chin out of place with his left hand. What cute pets, he thought. What *cute* pets.

"Hummm, ah." Mr. Jason walked to the cage and looked down, at the *kwiggi*. "Hummm." He rubbed his chin. "Hummm."

"Oh," Mr. Smith said, "you wouldn't be interested in *kwiggis*. You wouldn't want them. Now this article. . . ."

"Wait. Let me see. I could. . . . Well, maybe I'm acting quick — but — after all: a man acts quick in this line — has to — has to, to keep ahead. Look. I might be interested in some of these. Couldn't give you much for them, of course. As you said yourself, they're utterly worthless. But still, I say," he tugged at his chin again, "I just *might* be interested in them."

"A man from the Culture section — a Mr. Hart, I believe — mentioned your name," the Dobun said hopefully, feeling perhaps that Mr. Jason might be more generous knowing him to be sent by a friend.

"Yes," Mr. Jason said absentmindedly. "I'll send him a check Monday."

Wilson, of Comparative Anthropology, dropped in on Charlie Howe of Administration.

"Coffee time," Wilson said.

Charlie Howe looked up. "Uh? . . . Oh . . . hi. Sit."

Wilson sat. "I said, 'Coffee time'."

"I heard you. Minute."

". . . Whatcha doin'?"

"Check slip. Analysis." He went back to his writing.

"So? What on?"

"*Kwiggi*."

"Never heard of 'em."

"Dobun."

"Dobun, eh. What's up?" Wilson asked sharply.

"Shut up, damn it, till I finish."

Wilson broke out a cigarette, listened to the pen scratch on the paper, lit the cigarette.

"There." Charlie Howe straightened. "Have to write it out, first," he explained. "Can't think, talking." He bent across the desk and flipped the recorder switch up. He took the corded mike and read off the information into it.

"Central Lab. Organic. Check station. Preview. Re: *Kwiggi*. Life form: Dobun. Contained in a trading package deal with Jason and Son.

"Two specimens: male and female.

"Observational information. Size: about that of a small cat. Color: green. Docile. Biped. Pronged tail. Silken hair. . . . Preliminary statistics, from Dobun report (attached): Gestation period: eight days. Litter: four to six; sometimes, two. Average life: three years.

"Request routine embargo check.

"Probable commercial value: as personal pets."

He clicked off the recorder.

"*Eight* days?" Wilson asked.

"Says so. Here." Charlie Howe hammered the pen point at a word on a typed buck slip. "No typo, at any rate. I rechecked."

"Umph," Wilson grunted. "Prolific."

Charlie Howe stood up. "You said coffee?"

"Uh-huh."

The two men left the office; as they passed through the door, Wilson said, "All right, give."

Charlie Howe shrugged expressively.

They walked down the path that lead across and down the landscaped hillside toward the modernistic cafeteria. There were a hundred buildings, all told, all small and clean, unobtrusively studding the government preserve. There was a complex network of gravel paths.

"There a report out?"

Charlie Howe snorted. "Routine one. State's probably got it for approval."

"Read it yet?" Wilson asked.

"Sure."

Wilson listened to the gravel crunch under his feet for a moment. Then: "So. I'm assigned to Dobu. So. I walk into your office, and I find you're finishing a check request for commercial trading on it. And State's got a report." He brought his foot down heavily and ground off leather against gravel. "So! Nobody asked us. Nobody told us. Do they think we're mind readers, over there in State? If I hadn't come in on you when I did, Anthropology would never even've heard about it!"

"That's life," Charlie Howe admitted.

"How does State expect us to get a team down there when they won't even co-operate on simple things like this?"

"Doubt if State cares one way or the other," Charlie Howe said with a shrug. He opened the door to the cafeteria, and then he followed Wilson inside.

The cafeteria was quiet. It had all of the modern conveniences. It shined of chrome.

When they were sequestered in a far booth with their coffee, Wilson said, "Now, damn it, give me the dope on this trading deal."

Charlie Howe leveled his spoon with sugar, studied it critically; he turned the spoon sideways, and the contents spilled into the coffee. "Oh. That. Some jazbo from their government. . . ."

"Smith? Little shrimp? Speaks perfect English?"

"That's the duck. Well: He talked State into okaying a non-war material trading package with Jason and Son."

"What'd he offer?"

"Mostly artwork. Handicraft. Peculiar stuff. Some minerals, I think. I'll bet he gets a lot of junk back, too."

"Well, then, what's the tale on these *kwiggi*? That's the thing I want to know."

"Them? Dobun pets, I guess. Funny little devils. I saw the pair. This geezer — Smith? Yeah, Smith — had them with his bags. Didn't seem anxious to run 'em in on the deal. But you know old man Jason. He got his nose in the wind and started pressuring. So this guy agrees to ship in a consignment. Turned a litter over to us for the Lab. We'll check 'em, and if it's okay, all State has to do is slap on their stamp."

"What're they like?" Wilson asked.

"Cute, maybe you'd say. I don't know. Funny, all right. Eat anything. Sharp teeth. Like needles. Harmless, though. Probably make good pets. But awkward as hell. And when I say awkward, I mean awkward. When one of them gets mixed up, he doesn't look like he can find his fanny with both hands. You can't help laughing. But it's like laughing — well, there's something *sadistic* in it, laughing at a Quiggie, like laughing at a hunch backed jester, if you know what I mean. Anyhow — or maybe because of that — Jason'll make a pot full on 'em alone. High pressure stuff. 'No home in the system should be without a pair.' "

"Nothing else, then, you think?"

"Naah. . . . Lab'll fine-tooth 'em, anyway."

Wilson sipped at the coffee. "Funny one, too, that Smith," he said reflectively.

"Oh?"

"Yeah. I run an interview on arrival. I gave him the song and dance about our Anthro-Teams. But he gives me just a frozen smile. Finally he says, 'At the moment, I can't commit my government.' Damn' right he can't! Not after the *Starflight* stink!"

Charlie Howe shrugged. "I think they'd probably let you put down a team if State wasn't so damn' bull headed. I think they're trying to play along, hoping the quarantine'll blow over. I think the whole thing's more political than anything else."

"I don't trust 'em," Wilson said. He had been reading the newspapers.

Mr. Porter was a middle-size name producer of think pieces. (Editorial writers come in three sizes.) Once upon a time, he had been an idealist, of sorts, possessed of a certain moral consciousness, filled with a certain un-

usual enthusiasm, and obsessed with the importance of the free and independent press. But that was long ago.

When he sang, morosely mellow, late at night, his voice was referred to as a whiskey tenor; there were bottle scars on the vocal chords.

He quit typing, reached into his left hand desk drawer, failed to find what he reached for, and began to curse in a dispirited monotone. Eventually, as righteous indignation increased, the volume became louder.

The office door popped open, and the copy boy asked, "You call for me, Mr. Porter?"

"Where's ma God damn' whiskey?" Mr. Porter croaked.

The copy boy said that he hadn't seen it, honest, he hadn't.

Once Mr. Porter was out of the building, it was a mere minute's walk, at his headlong pace, to the bar at the corner where the working press assembled to curse the city desk, the local administration, and practically everything else under the sun, except the wife and kids.

"Hi, Porky," Warren, of the *News*, called when he came in.

Mr. Porter swiveled his head; his eyebrows went up; and then, spotting Warren, he lumbered across the room to his table and squeezed in. "God damn your bloody eyes," he said — and, to the arriving waitress, "Yours, too."

"Yes, sir," she said. "The usual?"

"Yes," he said.

"Well," Warren said, "why the fire under the boilers today?"

"Some dizzard stole ma whiskey — right out of ma desk drawer, he stole it. Damn' near a full quart. Opened it just before lunch, in fact."

"Tough," said Warren, absently studying the display of sparkling bar glass, of which there was a great variety.

"I was trying to write one of the Old Man's editorials," Mr. Porter said. "I can't do that sober: did you ever know a man to do that sober?"

"Once," Warren said.

Mr. Porter took his drink, drank it like a man, and returned the glass to the waitress.

"Against Dobu," he said.

"Naturally," said Warren, studying the moving lights of the coin-O.

"Usual sheep-dip."

Warren agreed silently.

Mr. Porter hammered the table half heartedly. "He ought to drop the crossword puzzle for a week and find out the facts of life. Honest to Jesus, if he thinks —"

"I know," said Warren. "I know." He waved his hand vaguely. "We've got Bully in our office; don't tell me about it. *He's* running for Councilman."

"A couple more," Mr. Porter brooded, taking the second drink from the waitress, "and I'll be in the mood to tackle it: but sometimes it gets you." And, with increasing vigor, "Know what I mean?"

"Yeah," Warren said; he opened his mouth to follow up his agreement with a personal illustration, but Mr. Porter cut him short.

"Please," he said. "Please. I've got the troubles today." He thumped his left shoulder with the palm of his right hand to show where they were.

"Okay," Warren said.

"Old Man wants a new Dobun story. Says, 'We've been overdoing the *Starflight* thing lately.' Says, 'Stale news,' he says. 'Nobody buys a paper to read stale news. We gotta have something new. Some fine, new outrage, that's what we gotta have,' he says."

Mr. Porter paused. Then: "Okay. It just so happens the police reporter, Harris — you know him, the runty one? hen-pecked? — stumbled across a trading deal between the Dobuns and Jason and Son. So I dug the facts out of State, and I was all ready to splatter it across the page: 'JASON PULLS THE WOOL'. That sort of thing.

"You shoulda seen the Old Man pop his cork when I told him about it. Fit to be tied. Face got red. Blood vessels stood out on his forehead like cordwood."

The Old Man was the Big, Economy Size, name editorial writer; he had responsibilities that most mere mortals wot not of.

"Advertiser, huh?" Warren asked. He was watching the new waitress dust the bar.

"And it was such a pretty little lead," Mr. Porter said. He sighed. "Have to use creative imagination again."

"How about having an Imperial Missionary slapped in the face?" Warren suggested helpfully.

"Be fine — if we only had one on their planet."

Warren shook his head sadly. "Shouldn't let a thing like that — a little thing like that — stop you." He stared at the indirect lighting fixtures.

"Tell you about the trade deal," Mr. Porter said. "Seems Jason and Son are gonna exploit some native fauna: animal pets. Called *kwiggi*. K-w-i-g-g-i. Only now they're to be known as Q-u-i-g-g-i-e. Looks better spelled." He boomed out an artificial laugh.

"Jesus," said Warren.

"Yeah. An' they'll be billed as importations from some miserable system. Some place nobody ever heard of — so the tainted name of Dobu won't contaminate their commercial value.

"Now these Quiggies," Mr. Porter continued, "are the damndest things, themselves. You know what they remind me of? They remind me of a politician trying to find out the climate of opinion on Universal Union Tariff. When you see 'em, you'll know what I mean."

He paused a moment, and then he said, "Some day I'm gonna quit this racket."

Warren was watching the new waitress again. "And write a book," he finished for Mr. Porter.

Mr. Jason beamed at the man from System Wide. "They've had that pair for just a little over a month, and now they've got forty," he said. "And State's cleared 'em, too."

The little man across the desk gave the impression of treasuring each golden word Mr. Jason let fall.

"They're shipping us twenty-five tomorrow," Mr. Jason continued. "I got the farm ready for 'em. There's a lesson in that, boy. Yes, sir, there is: be prepared, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"In that case, you brought the layout with you?"

Mr. Jason's office was an antique. In six generations, not one stick of new furniture had been added. Pictures of the long deceased Jasons and their sons leered down, their eyes hard with business acumen. The current Mr. Jason's desk was cluttered up with nick-nacks. In the vault to the left was the System's finest collection of rare stamps. The current Mr. Jason loved to collect things, and after they were collected, he loved to count them.

"Well . . . no, sir," said the man from System Wide. "But we had expected it wouldn't be until a month after the first shipment arrived from Dobu. . . ."

"From Xantope, my boy," Mr. Jason said. "We must remember that. Not Dobu. Xantope."

"Yes, sir."

"Now. Surely you have something in mind. You don't intend to have me sit here listening to a vacuum?"

The little man reddened. "Uh. . . . No, sir. That is — Well, for instance, Mr. Morrow — he's Mr. William's aide — he suggested that maybe we run an initial series — to get reader reaction, I mean — in the *Express*. On what noted people have to say about Quiggies as household pets." He rummaged in his brief case, talking all the while. "I have here an indorsement (the five thousand credit class) from Mr. Athelwood Carlton, the explorer — ha — right here it is — yes, this is it." He removed the paper and began to read. "I'm quoting. 'I have been privileged to purchase one of the first Quiggies offered for sale in this system, and I —' "

"No." Mr. Jason shook his head. "No. It needs pep. No zest in it. No enthusiasm. No fire!"

"Yes, sir; quite right there. Uh. . . . Well, we thought you might like it for us to run a picture of explorer Carlton getting out of *The Ranger*, standing there on the platform way —"

"No," said Mr. Jason. "That's not *quite* what I had in mind. I'm afraid it won't do. I want something that'll shock 'em. Hit 'em between the eyes, like with a hammer, see. Something like — FROM XANTOPE!" He held his hands wide apart. "In great big type, so they'll stop to see what it's all about."

"Yes, sir," said the man from System Wide, scribbling in his notebook. "Yes, sir. That's very good."

"Then after that — Maybe we can use the indorsements."

Mr. Jason rubbed his hands together. "There's going to be money in this. Lots of money. I'm prepared to spend a half million credits — that's a half million, my boy: figure your commission on that! Everywhere people go, I want 'em to see the word. I want everybody to be talkin' about Quiggies. I want teleo-comedians to make jokes about Quiggies."

"Yes, sir."

"If a man doesn't have a Quiggie, I want him to feel like he's a social outcast."

"Ha-ha," said the little man from System Wide. "That's very good."

"I want a slogan. Something like — ah — the one I thought of coming to the office this morning. A Quiggie is cuddly."

"Oh, that's very good," said the man from System Wide. "That's very good indeed. A Quiggie is cuddly. I'll write that right down."

". . . All kinds of money in Quiggies," said Mr. Jason, who had a nose for that sort of thing. "And not just here, either. I'm already working out arrangements with three other systems to handle distribution there. Didn't know that, did you? No, I thought not. But Jason and Son don't let grass grow. That's why I say it's going to be big. Three systems, four systems, pretty soon all the systems. A million worlds; and every one of them having Quiggie pets supplied by Jason and Son. You can think about that: put it in your advertising maybe."

"Yes, sir. We'll do just that."

"And I'll think of some other things, too. We're going to hit this from all angles."

"Yes, sir," the man agreed.

"Good. Good. I'll want to see the first layout on this first thing in the morning."

"But Mr. Jason —" the advertising man protested, thinking, perhaps, of a long, bleak night and sweat and coffee and stale tasting cigarettes.

"But? But! I don't care if you have to keep the whole staff up. I want that layout."

"Yes, sir. I understand, sir. I'll have it over here first thing in the morning."

"All right, then. See that you do. . . ."

"It's a great field you're in, boy. Great. It's what makes the wheels go 'round: advertising. We're a race of people who depend on it. Production *and* salesmanship are the keys to our prosperity. Stop advertising, you couldn't sell, and how would that be? Without advertising, people wouldn't have half the stuff they got."

"Yes, sir."

"Now. Don't sit around, boy. Waste no time. Be up and doing." He snapped his fingers twice at the retreating figure.

As soon as the door closed behind the man, Mr. Jason flicked on the frequency phone. "Get me Williams, of System Wide." Within seconds, someone was on the other end of the frequency.

"Williams. I want. . . . Oh. Hello, Johnson. No. I want Williams. . . . Oh? . . . Well, this is Jason. . . . That's better."

After a moment, he heard the familiar voice on the other end. "Williams? Jason. A little ass from your company just left. Thought I'd better phone. Look. I'd like a two page spread in the Sunday issue of the *Express*. . . . What? . . . I don't care if it is — you can tell 'em to hold it, can't you, and get the copy out tomorrow? . . . Look. Who pays for their paper, your advertising agency, or their subscribers? . . . Yeah. Yeah. . . . That's better. . . . And look, old man, ask them to take it easy on Dobu — just in case. . . . No. I don't expect anyone to cause a stink, but you know. . . .

"Maybe they'd run an editorial on the Quiggies, too; maybe Cal Hustvedt would do one. . . . Sure, he's their best, but. . . . Oh. Yeah, Porter *would* do. . . . Human interest, you know. . . . Naturally. We'll pay if you can't get it for goodwill. . . . What? . . . No. No. If you have to talk to Hartz, tell him there's absolutely no danger of Quiggies falling into the hands of the vivisectionists."

"You become fond of them," said Mrs. Leota Harris. "They're better than lap dogs, any day."

The Quiggie perked up its ears, almost as if it understood.

"See. They're intelligent."

"Well," her husband said, "I've got to admit they're smart. But I don't think they're affectionate. And that's what counts."

"You just don't like them," she said accusingly.

"So I don't like 'em," he said. "All right. I don't like 'em. I think they're selfish. I think they're lazy. I don't think they give a damn about people."

"You like bird dogs, I know."

"So," he said, "I like bird dogs."

"My God!" said Mrs. Leota Harris. "Imagine having a bird dog in this little, dinky apartment."

"I didn't say. . . ."

"I know," she said, sighing in martyrdom.

He walked to the window and looked out at the little lights sparkling below him. He slapped his hands together behind his back. There were a lot of buildings out there.

"Look," he said. "All I said was, 'I don't think a Quiggie is affectionate.'" "I heard you."

The Quiggie looked at Mr. Harris and began to lick its soft, green fur. It wiggled its pronged tail disgustedly.

"I think they're cute," said the woman. "Come here," she told the Quiggie.

It looked up at her with its bright, brown eyes. Almost indifferently it began to get up. It gave the impression of being clumsily double-jointed. It started to amble across the room. In the process, it stumbled against a chair, shook its head sadly, and veered to the left, almost tripping over its tail.

"It looks like a drunken lout," Mr. Harris said.

The Quiggie glared at him.

"You'll hurt its feelings," his wife said.

The Quiggie got its legs twisted up and stopped to look persecuted.

"See," she said. "How cute!"

The Quiggie backed up a step and upset a floor lamp.

Finally, however, it was in front of her. It climbed into her lap, using its opposed thumbs on her leg as if it were a tree trunk.

She patted its head. "My cute little Awkward," she said. It waved its tail, slapping her in the face. She held the tail down.

"See," she said. "It comes to me."

"Of course. But it doesn't really *like* you. It just tolerates you, that's all."

She sighed again.

"I can't see one lying on your grave, mourning when you're dead," her husband said. "I can't see one licking your hand."

"I don't want my hand licked," she said.

"That," he said, "is a lie."

"I meant by an *animal*."

"Skip it," he said. "Sorry I said it."

The Quiggie got down from her lap, falling all over itself, and started, more or less upright, on its hind legs, for its corner. Once there, it tried unsuccessfully to scratch its back on a table leg, and then it finally lay down in disgust. It looked at the people out of the corner of its eye for a moment, and then it went to sleep.

"It's lonely," she said. "It wants a mate."

"All right, get it a mate," he said. "I don't care. But I say a dog doesn't moon like that damn' thing. A dog likes to be around people. It's not forever laying in a corner. It's setting at your feet. I think all a Quiggie is interested in is sex."

"How do you know a dog isn't?" Mrs. Leota Harris said.

"I give up," her husband said. "I just flat give up. That's all."

"I wonder who does these things?" Mr. Saunders asked.

"What things, honey?"

"These things," he said. He hit the page with the back of his hand.

"Oh. The editorials. A man by the name of Porter, I think."

"Well, who ever he is, he's right. I mean, he's got a lot of good ideas. Take this one, now. . . ." He peered down at the print. "'It is time (it says) for the Empire to wake up to the Dobun menace. Last year fifty lives were lost.' (He means the *Starflight*, my dear.) '*And as yet no satisfactory reparation has been made.* Further, **THEY WELCOMED THE QUARANTINE!** And this is significant. They welcomed the quarantine. What does that seem to mean? It means just this: they're glad to keep us out of their system. **THEY ARE HIDING SOMETHING.** And what are they hiding? **THERE IS ONLY ONE ANSWER FROM THE FACTS. THEY ARE BUILDING UP A WAR POTENTIAL!**"

Mr. Saunders said, "I mean, he's got something there. Why did they take to the quarantine so easy? It's not natural. And there just can't be any other answer."

"Yes, dear."

"Well, if I were in the Council, I'd soon see about that. Why, we'd just take a fleet and go down there and not put up with any of their nonsense."

"You're perfectly right," she said.

Mr. Saunders smiled. "Yes, sir. There's no reason to let those things get out of hand, I tell you. The time to stop them is *now*, not tomorrow or the next day, but *now*. Before they get a chance to do — whatever they're going to do."

"Pop?" asked Willie.

". . . . Yes?"

"Speaking of doin' things now, what about the Quiggie? I mean, you never did get one."

"Oh, yes. That. . . I'll tell you, son. If you want to run down to the pet shop with me Saturday —" He gestured. He let his voice trail off.

"Gee: that'd be swell."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Saunders. "Really I don't, Ed. You know how this is such a *small* apartment. And we don't have room for a pet."

She looked around her, and automatically she numbered the gadgets with her eyes. It made her feel good, but, at the same time, it oppressed her slightly, as if she lacked, somehow, enough breathing room.

"Now," Mr. Saunders said, in reprimand. "We've already been over that before."

"They don't take up much room. And they aren't a bit of bother. It says here —" Willie picked up a magazine and began to thumb the pages — "right here: 'As pets, the Quiggies are excellent. They are quiet, friendly and amusing. They require very little space. A box in the corner of the room will do. They will eat almost anything, require no special temperature, and are one of the healthiest, hardiest life forms in the universe."

"'And *any* home with a Quiggie will be a jolly home! You can count on a Quiggie to keep you laughing.'" Willie looked up. "That's right, mom. They're funny; *really* funny. Why, I was over at Joe's, and do you know what one of their Quiggies did? He backed up and caught his tail in the 'lectric fan. Course the rubber blades didn't hurt it none, but the things it done afterwards. Joe and me could hardly get over laughing, it was so funny." He looked down at the magazine again. "And it says, 'These clean, sanitary Pets To Laugh At will be the center of every household. It's like having your very own private comedian right in your own living room.'"

"That's right, Marte."

"Oh, I suppose so."

"Mom? . . . Jerry's folks got two of them just last month. And he says they're swell, too. They've got eighteen, now. They're gonna sell them. We could get a pair and raise Quiggies and make all kinds of money, I'll bet. Everybody's buyin' 'em."

Mr. Saunders laughed. "I'm afraid we'll get in on that a little late. . . . But there were fortunes made, raising Quiggies six, eight months ago. At first. But now too many people's got the same idea, and everybody's got them for sale."

"Except us."

"Yes. Well. . . . You say Jerry's folks want to sell some?"

"Yes."

"I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you the money, and you can run over tonight and buy a pair." Mr. Saunders fished out his bill fold. "Ten credits, I guess?"

"Uh-huh. I think so."

Mr. Saunders handed over the two bills.

Willie hurried out the front door.

But he was not moving as fast as he was when he returned a few minutes later.

"He bit me!" Willie announced, waving his hand about, showing the imprint of sharp teeth.

"*What* bit you, Willie?"

"A Quiggie! It hurts."

"Here. . . . Let's see," Mrs. Saunders said. "Hum. Pretty deep. Get the iodine, Ed."

"Oh, not the iodine!"

"Yes, the iodine."

"But it'll *hurz*."

"Nonsense," Mrs. Saunders said. "Now. How did you happen to get bit?"

"Well," Willie said, "when I went out, I seen one playing in the yard. It had got all tangled up with the hose. And then it got so mad it tried to *chew* its way out. I stood there just laughing fit to kill, it looked so funny. Then after a minute when it got loose, it turned and jumped on the hose like it wanted to stomp it, and then it got all tangled up again, and its tail was waving away like nothing I ever seen.

"Well, I run up to it, and it got loose again and sidled away a couple of steps — like it was wild. Well, I just figured it had escaped from somewhere, and all I had to do was catch it, and we could save the ten credits. And then it jumped up and it *bit* me!"

"Humph," said Mr. Saunders.

"Hand it here, Ed." She took the iodine and applied it.

"Ow — oh — *ow!*"

Willie waved his hand back and forth.

"I thought you said they were *friendly*," Mrs. Saunders said to her husband.

"It says they are, right here in the book," he answered. "I guess that one must have escaped or something, and maybe they get wild, that way. I don't know."

"Well," she said, "I know one thing. We're not going to have any Quiggies in *this* house."

Jackson N. Snow was a general; he had a long career of active service on the fringes of Empire. He was, in the fullest sense, a military man. Consequently, it pained him to use his troops against civilians.

He looked out the window, into the street. A milling mob below appeared as a variegated splotch of color.

"Damned shame," he said. He turned. "Colonel! It's that damn' newspaper."

The Colonel picked up the paper from the desk and scanned the lead story. "I agree," he said. "Listen to this: 'Certainly the members of the Department of State who sanctioned the trading deal should stand before the bar of justice. WITH THEM SHOULD STAND MR. JASON. This newspaper has always championed the constitutional processes, slow and uncertain as they sometimes seem to be.

"'TRUE THAT THESE ARE DESPERATE DAYS! TRUE THAT THIS SYSTEM IS IN A *LIFE AND DEATH* STRUGGLE —

"'But we must still remember our traditional sense of —' "

"Enough!" snapped the general. He turned to the window again. "I hope there won't be any bloodshed. Jason did get away, you know? We flew him out to Central. But try and tell the mob down there that."

He walked to his desk and slumped wearily to his seat. "I know how they feel. Feel the same way myself; know what I'd like to do?"

"I can guess."

"Yeah. Take a fleet and go into the Dobun defenses. I could open them up like a can opener opens a can. I don't care *how* strong they are."

"Sure: but what good would it do?"

"None. That's the hell of it."

"Well, I wish we had something to fight besides those damn' Quiggies." The Colonel fingered the flash pistol at his side. "I remember the fighting on Meizque. Now *that* was something!"

The general agreed.

"What do you think we're going to do now?" the Colonel asked.

"I don't know. I just don't know. Council has about decided to abandon the planet. But where can we go? The whole system's infected. God knows, maybe the whole universe!"

The Colonel nodded. "Damned right. And wait'll the people hear about tighter rations; — and —"

The phone rang.

"Hello? This is Snow. . . . *What?* . . . Good God!" He sat back.

"Yes. Yes. I'll get them ready."

The Colonel raised his eyebrows as the general slammed down the phone.

"You know our warehouse stock?"

"Yes," the Colonel said.

"They got it. Last night."

The Colonel shrugged. "They can eat anything. No one's fault, of course, about the warehouse. Not yours, not mine. Not when the Quiggies are everywhere."

The general became profane.

"Well, well," the Colonel said dryly. "Looky here." Very slowly his hand inched toward his flash pistol; he slipped it out of the holster.

Sitting on the window sill was a Quiggie, its big, brown eyes glaring at the Colonel. It hunched its muscles, bared its teeth, teeter-tottered on the ledge, and then leaped at his throat.

The Colonel's flash shot caught it in mid air, and it fell dead and broken.

"At least there's still one thing they're not immune to," said the Colonel.

"It probably won't be long, though," the general said. "I wonder how that one got up here?"

The Colonel shrugged. He walked to the window and looked down. "The crowd's broke up. I guess there's an army of them coming."

"Yes, I guess so."

"We'll have to stay?" the Colonel asked.

"No. Not you. Not unless you want to. *I'll* stay, of course."

"I'll stay," the Colonel said. He closed his eyes and pictured an army of Quiggies, awkward, stumbling, clownish, and thoroughly vicious.

He could see them fording rivers and rolling in living tidal waves across open plains. He could hear the sharp click, click, chomp of their jaws. He could imagine them creeping wet and shivering out of the North Pacific

and then sliding and slipping across an iceberg after a walrus. He could see them dropping from jungle vines, and then looking hurt to find the ground so hard. He could see them daintily scratching blood out of their whiskers, and then continuing on, in their mad, deadly reelings, after everything that walked.

The first time he had ever seen a Quiggie, the man who owned it had set it on a plank extended between two chairs. The plank was a foot wide, and it was all the Quiggie could do to keep its balance as it walked. He could imagine them veering and careening and bumping together as they crowded upon and stormed across the great bridge networks on earth, even there having trouble with their balance, and occasionally plunging off ludicrously into the water, only to land swimming awkwardly for shore. He could . . .

The Colonel walked over and sat down. He inspected his gun. "For every one you kill, there's always two more."

"Yeah."

The Colonel counted his clips. "Six left. Six times fifty is three hundred. Minus one. Two hundred and ninety-nine. I'll get two hundred and ninety-nine of them."

"Damn the Dobuns," the general said. "I can see 'em right now. Waiting to take the whole universe over, when there's nothing left but them and the Quiggies."

Mr. Smith, the ex-plenipotentiary, ate his evening meal: two bites of fried *kwiggi*. He twisted uncomfortably in his long, woolen underwear. But he put up with the scratchiness of the rough wool, for, after all, it was cold on Dobu.

He had a very rude and simple house. There were only necessities, and, by Empire standards, it left something to be desired.

He was waiting for Znathao to send his son over; Mr. Smith was supposed to give the son a lecture on social living and tradition. Mr. Smith was acknowledged to be the wisest man in the whole village, and, as such, performed these little services.

The son arrived shortly.

"Please sit down," said Mr. Smith.

The boy sat down, uncomfortably.

"Ah," Mr. Smith said. "Ah. Your father tells me you put the male *kwiggi* in with the female again today."

"Yes," the boy said defiantly, "I did."

"Well," Mr. Smith said, "you'll just have to drown the little ones when they're born."

"I won't."

The refusal went deep into the bed rock of Mr. Smith's society. "Why," he said, "if you let *kwiggis* breed, pretty soon we'd have all we wanted to eat, and how would you like that, then, to be a *glutton*?"

"I'd like it."

Mr. Smith sighed. He peered at the lad myopically. But his shock was not as severe as that a traditionalist would have felt, for he had brought back some books on Cultures from his trading trip, and he realized that some people can never adjust to their own society. It was in the natural order of things.

"You've got the wrong attitude," he said.

He wished the Empire would hurry up and lift the quarantine. When they did, the Dobuns could send their misfits, like this boy, to them.

"Look, son," he said. "Promise me something."

"I don't promise nothing."

"Look. You'd like to go to a place where you could eat all you want, wouldn't you? Where you'd have plenty of everything?"

". . . . Gee. . . . Yes."

"Well," Mr. Smith said. "There is such a place. They don't think it's immoral to eat and eat."

He wished he had known that when their first ship, the *Starflight*, had landed. If the Dobuns had been able to understand the crew, the Dobuns would have given them food. But, Mr. Smith asked himself, who'd have thought they'd starve to death so soon? He shuddered. Even dead, they'd looked disgustingly fat.

"I've been there," he said. "And you could go, too. No. You *can* go. Very soon, now."

Surely, he thought, they'd lift the quarantine very shortly now. There hadn't been an Empire ship at Valten 6 for almost six months, and that was a good sign. They were about to relent.

"If," he said, "you'll be good."

“. . . Well.”

“We traded them some *kwiggis*,” Mr. Smith added as a clincher. “I’ll bet they’ve got lots, now. You could have a whole *kwiggi* to eat, if you wanted one.”

“Gee. . . . A *whole kwiggi*?”

“You’d like that?”

“You bet I would!”

“Well,” Mr. Smith said, “as soon as they let us send people to them, I’ll talk to your father. I’m sure he’ll let you go.”

“Gee.”

“If you’re good ’til then. And don’t put *kwiggis* together and things like that.”

“. . . All right. I’ll be good. I promise.”

The business was over, and Mr. Smith felt expansive.

“You know, boy,” he said, “there’s all kinds of Cultures. Some of them, you wouldn’t believe. The queerest one —” He bent forward, looking at the boy as if he wanted to say, ‘excepting, of course, the one you want to go to,’ — “is one based on —”

