

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

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● *SPACE-AGE NOVELETS*

- LOVERS SUBVERSIVE *D. A. Jourdan* 24
After he got to know Rhea, Van was ready to commit the same crime for which he was prosecuting Dargo.
- THE RENEGADE *Thomas N. Scortia* 74
Will the irruption of Earthmen into other worlds destroy alien civilizations, regardless of our intentions? Bartok thought so...

● *SPECIAL FEATURE*

- IT'S ME, O LORD *Alma Hill* 107
We have to consider communication as a science, if man is going to live as one family. And that includes understanding the development of languages, particularly our own...

● *SHORT STORIES*

- TEMPTRESS OF EDEN *A. Bertram Chandler* 6
Human legend told the symbolic truth of a garden, a happy state, and a serpent... Was there then a serpent in this garden on a far world?
- THE MOON IS NEW *David Osborne* 61
Tests had shown that it was the solitary-minded men who could endure solo spaceflight. But that kind of man was most individualistic!
- PROTECTED PLANET *Dan Morgan* 112
Great opportunity awaits a ruthless man on a world where the natives' only defense is suicide. Or does it...

● *DEPARTMENTS*

- THE EDITOR'S PAGE *Robert A. W. Lowndes* 23
Looking at "Yesterday's World of Tomorrow: 1929".
- THE RECKONING (Your decision on our December issue) 73
- DOWN TO EARTH (Your letters and our comment) 120
- READERS' PREFERENCE COUPON (for your convenience) 130

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TEMPTRESS OF EDEN

illustration by EMSH

by A. Bertram
Chandler

*Eelulie was lovely and eager to learn, and surely
it would do no harm to give her and her people
the gift of fire...*

THE EDITOR told me, "I want you to go and get an interview with Captain Aspinall."

"But," I protested, "we ran an interview with him only six months ago."

"The public," said the Editor, "has a blessedly short memory. And we're short of material for our Sunday Supplement—just as we were half a year back. Do you think that I'd take up precious time with the meandering monologues of

retired Space Captains otherwise? Anyhow, it'll all tie in nicely with the present shindy being raised in Congress."

"Which one?" I asked.

"The one about interference with the cultures of extra-Terran races. Get the old spacehound to give you *his* views on the subject. He's bound to have some."

"Too many, probably," I complained.

"Don't argue," said the Editor.



Her name was Eelulie, and the liquid syllables seemed to describe the grace of her movements.

"Oh, all right."

I COLLECTED my visual and sound recording apparatus, packed it into the office helicopter. I lifted from the flat roof, flew southwards over the city. Captain Aspinall's house was about ten miles beyond the city limits. You couldn't miss it; it had been designed to look just like one of the old-time rockets—needle-sharp nose, vaned landing gear and all. The old boy himself was out on the lawn in front of his house. He waved me in and down. He was walking toward the aircraft, hand outstretched in greeting, before the vanes had stopped rotating. His teeth, as he smiled, were very white against the leathery brown of his face; so were his hair and eyebrows.

"Mr. Brown?" he asked, as soon as I had the door open. "Your Editor called me, and told me you were coming."

I shook hands. "Yes, my name is Brown, Captain. I was out to see you about six months ago."

"Were you, now? I must apologize for my memory. It's clear enough about everything

that happened when I was in Space, but it's just a little vague about recent events. Anyhow, come on in. Can I give you a hand with your gear?"

"No thank you, Captain. I can manage."

LOOKING—and feeling—like a walking Christmas tree, I followed him into the house. The elevator took us up to what would have been the Control Room of a real spaceship. It was spacious enough, and comfortably furnished. It was lined with bookshelves. There was an open book on one of the little tables.

"So you read, Captain?" I asked.

"Of course I read," he snorted. "You'll find precious few spacemen that don't. When you're out on the Long Haul, books are better than all the recordings ever made."

I eased my equipment to the floor. I picked up the book, and read: "*Of all the beasts which the Lord God had made, there was none that could match the serpent in cunning. It was he who said to the woman, 'What is this command*

God has given you, not to eat the fruit of any tree in the garden?' To which the woman answered, 'We can eat the fruit of any tree in the garden except the tree in the middle of it; it is this God has forbidden us to eat or even to touch, on pain of death.' And the serpent said to her, 'What is this talk of death? God knows well that as soon as you eat this fruit your eyes will be opened, and you yourselves will be like gods, knowing good and evil.' . . ."

"So you read, too," said Aspinall sardonically.

"This is the first time that I've picked up a *book* for years," I confessed. "But tell me, Captain—this is off the record—are you a religious man? Space travel seems to affect different people different ways. Some become religious. Some become even more confirmed in agnosticism or atheism than they were before."

"I wasn't religious," said the old man. "It's only recently, within the last few months, that I've come to the realization that there's something in religion. Something? *Everything*, I mean. And this is not,

I assure you, mere childish fear of the dark as one nears the end of one's allotted span. I'd be happier if the darkness, the long sleep, were all that I had to look forward to."

I LOOKED at my watch. "This is all very interesting, Captain, but I came here to record an interview. As a matter of fact, my Editor would like your views on the Anti-Interference Bill that's being debated by Congress at the present moment."

"I have views on the Bill," he snorted. "Strong views—so switch on your recorders and I'll give you your interview. And tell your Editor that if anything is cut I'll sue!"

"As you please, Captain," I told him.

I set up the automatic cameras to their best advantage, so that the Editor would have at least four different views of the Captain to choose from. One of them included my own profile, but past experience had taught me that such members of the public as tuned in to our broadcasted interviews knew me as only a disembodied voice. But I went on trying.

I didn't bother with any introductory remarks—they would all be added in the studio.

I SAID, "What are your views on the Anti-Interference Bill, Captain Aspinall?"

"It is a good measure," he replied, "as far as it goes. It should go further. It should prohibit *all* contact between Earthmen and intelligent beings living in primitive cultures."

"But surely, Captain, that is going rather too far. You—or some Survey Service Captain like you—finds a race living in the forest without fire, without the wheel, without agriculture. It can only be for this race's own good if you give them just that one little nudge onwards and upwards. I'm not proposing that you give them firearms, or any other dangerous knowledge. . . ."

"It could be," said Captain Aspinall, "that even so much is dangerous. Perhaps a story—a true story—will illustrate my point best of all.

"It was many years ago, and I had just been appointed to my first command—a three

man Scout attached to one of the big Survey Ships. We were, at the time, making a survey of the Andromeda section. I needn't bore you with an account of everything we found, it was all made available to the public on our return. All? Well, almost all.

"Anyhow, there I was in the little control room of my little Scout, monarch of all I surveyed, blasting out and clear from the big ship. I, as I've said, was Captain and, by virtue of a somewhat sketchy training in the field, Ethnologist. My Engineer was also the Bio-Chemist. My Navigator was in charge of Communications and was supposed to have a reasonable grasp of Physics, Geology and Zoology. We were, in fact, as fine a trio of brash puppies as were ever loosed upon a hitherto undiscovered planet.

FROM STAR to star we wandered, from planet to planet, investigating, exploring, logging our findings and sending lengthy reports back to the mother ship by the psionic radio. Nobody to this day has discovered why the speed of

light, and of ordinary radio waves, should be finite and that of thought waves should be, to all intents and purposes, infinite. It would almost seem that the Almighty intended that we should push out among the stars, and gave us faculties that would be of use in our voyagings. But... was it, is it, *His* intention? I'm an old man now, with my active life, most of it spent in Deep Space, behind me, and I wish I knew...

"And I'm afraid..."

"What of?" I asked abruptly.

"When you're my age, and look back," said the old man, "you'll feel the same. You'll remember occasions when an action of yours that could have brought only good in its train was not made, and other occasions when an action resulting in evil *was* made. You'll begin to wonder about the accounting to come."

"I hope I'm not treading on your religious corns," I told him, "but I'm an agnostic."

"So was I," said the Captain. He picked up the Bible from the table. "I thought that the Book was no more than

the history of an obscure Semitic people—their history and their myths and legends. Genesis—merely an attempt by the priesthood, by Moses, to explain the origin of things. Exodus—the glamorized account of a large scale slave rebellion, led by a renegade priest... That's what I used to think.

BUT AS I was saying, we wandered from world to world. Some we found capable of supporting life as we know it, but sterile. Some we found with atmospheres of chlorine or fluorine, with plants and animals evolved to live in what would be, to us, lethal conditions. On some worlds we found the ruins of cities, but of the city builders no trace. And then, at last, we found *the* world.

"We dropped down from the evening sky, feeling that the flame and the thunder of our rockets was an affront to the sunset glory. We drifted in to our landing in a broad clearing in the middle of a forest of steeple-like trees—a forest that, at first, looked like a huge spaceport berthing all the rockets in the Universe, that,

after we had disembarked from our ship, looked and felt like an enormous cathedral.

"We touched down gently, our exhaust setting fire to the grass under our venturi. Clouds of smoke and vapor obscured our view as the automatic fire extinguisher, carried by all scout ships, came into action. It was not until the smoke had cleared that the Engineer was able to make his tests of the atmosphere. He pronounced it breathable.

"We wasted no time in scrambling down to the airlock, down the ladder to the grass. The air was more than breathable—after our months in the tin coffin, with the ever-present smells of cookery, and hot machinery, and human bodies, it was like wine. Oh, I know that that's an overworked simile—but the air *was* like wine. It had a slightly higher oxygen content than the atmosphere of Earth, than the artificial atmosphere of the ship.

"THE SUN, as I've said, had just set, and the tall, steeple trees stood in dark silhouette against the orange and crimson, blue and green of the

Western sky. To the East a large, golden moon (we had visited it, and found nothing of interest) was lifting over the leafy spires of the forest, and the first, faint stars, silvery, scintillating specks against the pale, but darkening blue, were beginning to appear.

"Somewhere there were birds singing—oh, we *knew* that they were birds, we knew that they weren't some utterly repulsive (by our standards) life form that some freak of evolution had endowed with the same throat structure as the Earthly song birds. There was the shrilling of what could have been cicadas. There was the sound of chanting, approaching through the trees, the deep voices of men, the pure, silvery voices of women. It was then that I thought of the cathedral as I imagined a choir walking in slow procession along the aisle.

"Skipper,' the Navigator was saying, 'what shall we call this planet? Eden?'

"So you think that there are serpents,' I replied, jesting feebly to try to break the spell of the Sabbath peace. 'Hadn't

we better get back into the ship for our side-arms?"

"NEVER HERE,' he said. 'Never here. Can't you *feel* it? This place is...*good*.' He grasped my arm. 'I think that we should go. I think that we should log this world as uninhabited and uninhabitable, with no minerals worth the Long Haul.'

"We are officers of the Survey Service,' I told him. 'We have our job to do.'

"We stopped talking and turned to stare.

"Through the trees they came, walking slowly and in time, but with the effect of a ritual dance rather than of a march. Their naked bodies gleamed with a luminous pallor in the twilight. They were human rather than merely humanoid, and they were beautiful people. Walking with them came the beasts—great cats that could have been cousin to the Earthly tiger, graceful deer, smaller creatures like rabbits, rolling-gaited, amiable bears.

"The singing stopped—not abruptly, but dying gently

away. The leader of the people—judging by his silvery hair he was old, but his body was almost youthful—stepped forward toward us, one of the huge cats staying by his side. He said something to us, his musical voice holding an obvious note of interrogation. He gestured towards the ship, and repeated his question.

"I snapped an order to the Navigator. Reluctantly he climbed back into the ship, returned, after a few minutes, wearing the weird, bristling helmet that was the portable psionic transceiver. He stood there waiting for the native to ask his question again.

"HE SAID, 'The structure of their brains isn't quite the same as ours, Skipper. It couldn't be. But it's not too dissimilar. As near as I can make it out he's asking us who we are and just what is the flying, fiery tree...'

"That part about the 'flying, fiery tree' had me puzzled at first—then I remembered our first impression of the forest, of the way in which the steeple trees had reminded us of tier upon tier of rockets.

“Try to tell him,” I said, “that we are friends. Tell him that the “flying, fiery tree” is our home and that in it we have come from the stars...’

“I’ll try,” said the Navigator, and stood there with an expression of intense concentration on his face. ‘I *think* I’m getting it across,’ he said at last. ‘These people although primitive, are intelligent...’

The native said something.

“He says” said the Navigator, ‘that we are welcome guests in...in... The nearest I can get to it is “the garden”...’

“Thank him,” I said.

“And then—after all, this world, for all its seeming friendliness, might hold some deadly dangers—I decided that we would return to the ship, shutting ourselves in and maintaining a watch, leaving further contact with the people until the morning. Neither the Navigator nor the Engineer was pleased by my decision—but I was the Captain, and this was my first command, and I did not propose to lose it through any carelessness on my part.

“WITH THE morning, the people were there again, accompanied by their beasts. They looked no less attractive in full daylight than they had in the twilight. They brought us gifts—woven baskets of fruit that gleamed gold and green and scarlet, that tempted us to sink our teeth into them—but this, of course, we could not do until the Engineer, in his capacity of Bio-Chemist, had made his tests and analyses.

“We offered gifts to the people, but they displayed no more than a polite interest in what we had to show them. Clothing seemed only to amuse them. Knives they had, it would seem, no use for. Our food and drink they found slightly repulsive.

“Taking the precaution of arming ourselves, and making sure that the airlock was securely locked against intruders, we walked with the natives to their village. It was no more than an aggregation of simple shelters, with no pretense of orderly lay-out. There were, we noticed, no cooking fires. Neither was there evidence of

the use of the wheel or the lever.

“During our walk through the forest one point that had puzzled me was cleared up. Many of the friendly animals that accompanied the natives were obviously carnivores—the big cats, the bears, the wolf-like dogs—and yet they all seemed intent on proving the validity of the prophecy about the lion lying down with the lamb. But surely the things must eat—and I couldn’t imagine them subsisting on the fruit that grew in such profusion.

“Anyhow, during our walk to the village, we found evidence that the carnivora were just that. We found the mangled carcass of a deer, with one of the tigers tearing off great bloody hunks of flesh. It looked up guiltily as we approached. It stood there as does a domestic cat when caught out in some transgression—sullen, ears back, knowing that it is in the wrong but reluctant to admit it to itself. The leader of the people scolded it. The tiger that walked always by his side growled, leapt

forward and cuffed the other beast viciously.

“THE NAVIGATOR, who was, of course, wearing the transceiver explained. ‘As long as the animals live with the people they must do nothing to offend them. In this area—which they call, as I told you, the garden—all life is sacred. That tiger will be banished, and, in all probability, when the other tigers leave the garden, as they must do, to feed, they will seek him out and kill him...’

“‘I feel rather sorry for the brute,’ I said.

“‘The Navigator ignored me. ‘The fascinating part of it all,’ he went on, ‘is the power that these people have over the animals. The force of example, perhaps or the authority of an elder brother, a well-beloved elder brother...’

“It was then that we got to the village, and were seated, rather ceremonially, on the soft grass under the shade of a tree. The banquet that followed would have suited the tastes of some people—fruit in great variety, a beverage not unlike sweet cider with most

of the alcohol removed. Frankly, I found myself looking at the deer and the rabbits that played among us and feeling a certain sympathy for the tiger. I began to wonder if we should be allowed, as were the other carnivorae, to leave the garden to foray for fresh meat in the outside world.

“BUT WE HAD come to this world to explore and survey and investigate, not to satisfy our cravings for a steak dinner washed down with Burgundy. Any violation of the taboos of our hosts could well mean the ruin of our careers in the Survey Service. We were ambassadors as well as spacemen, and had to behave as such.

“And so, in the days that followed, we continued to behave as ambassadors. The other two had their tasks—I, as the alleged Ethnologist, had mine, among which was the learning of the language of the people and the compiling of a dictionary. This was even less easy than it would seem, one of the main stumbling blocks being that the people seemed singularly deficient in curios-

ity. At last I found one who was willing to co-operate. It was a woman, the wife of the headman of the village. She was, I think, younger than he was—much younger. She was lovely and, somehow, more of a woman than were the others of her tribe. She, like them, went naked—but her nudity was not the innocent nudity of a child. It's hard to express just what I mean—but I had, quite often, to remind myself of my ambassadorial status. I often wonder what would have happened if... Oh, it doesn't matter. Not now.

“Her name was Eelulie, and the smooth, liquid syllables bring back the memory of the smoothness of her skin and the liquid grace of her movements. She was... lovely. I've said it before, and I'll say it again. It's the only word.

“SHE practically lived aboard the ship, and soon began to evince curiosity as to the functions of this, that and the other. She acquired a taste for our food and drink—I'll always remember how much she enjoyed, after her first rather timorous mouthful, one of our

precious steaks that we broke out from the store and cooked in honor of the Engineer's birthday. I had to explain the process of cooking to her, and she was very disappointed when she learned that it would be impossible to set up a high frequency range in her village. But, after all, cooking can be accomplished by fire—people managed quite well before the science of electronics was even dreamed of.

"Her people did not, as I have said, have fire. They had—nothing. They wanted nothing. And yet, apart from the cooking angle, there must have been times, I thought, when a cold wind would sweep down from the Pole or a dismal rain would fall. It was high summer in this part of the planet where we had made our landing and, for all we knew, this might have been an exceptionally clement season.

"The real reason, of course, was that I was more than a little in love with Eelulie. I wanted to leave her a gift, something that could bring only good to her and her people. I wanted to be able to think of her being revered as

the woman who brought the boon of fire to the people. I wanted to be able to picture her, when I was back in the black deeps of interstellar space, sitting before a blaze that she herself had kindled, while around her sat the great cats and the huge dogs, grateful for the friendly warmth.

"**L**UCKILY, my sketchy training as an Ethnologist had included a course of study on the primitive peoples of Earth. I knew how fire had been made in the past. I toyed with the idea of constructing a tinder-box but abandoned it. Flints would be common enough, and tinder, but steel was the problem—not for me, but for her. Should the original box be lost, there would be no possibility of her making another. The idea of a magnifying lens, to be used as a burning glass, I rejected for the same reason. Finally I decided upon a fire-stick—you must have seen them in museums. The operator has an affair like a bow, with the bow-string passed around a pointed stick of some very hard wood, and he works this like a drill

in a hollow bored in a piece of softer wood. The friction engenders heat—and fire.

“It was fun going with her into the forest and finding the most suitable materials. It was fun, assembling the first crude machine—and it was fun, even, as I blistered my hands working at the confounded thing until I got the hang of it. It was fun teaching Eelulie the art.

“And then, at last, it was time for us to leave. Two months we were allowed for the exploration of an Earth-type, inhabited planet, and two full months we had taken. Our hold was packed with specimens and samples; our files were bulging with written accounts and reports, with films and recordings. There was nothing to hold us, but we were sorry to be going. The people were sorry to see us go.

“**T**HEY CAME down to the clearing on the morning of our blasting off. They came down to the clearing—the men, the women and the children, and their tame, attendant beasts. Amam, the headman, was there, of course.

And Eelulie. I envied Amam. Space would be very lonely, lonelier still for the memories of the golden-haired, golden-skinned woman in every corner of the ship.

“It was a cold morning—the first cold day that we had known. The wind was from the north, and was bringing with it fitful flurries of chill, drizzling rain. The people looked uncomfortable, and so did the animals. One of the tigers sneezed, and the bears were not their usual amiable selves.

“And Eelulie will change all this, I thought, more than a little smugly. She will be known as the woman who brought fire from the flying, fiery tree...”

“The people were singing a sort of farewell song. We—the Navigator the Engineer and myself—walked among them, shaking hands, speaking a few words to men and women whom we had come to especially know and like.

“I saved my farewells to Amam and Eelulie until the last. To Eelulie I said, ‘At least I have left you something against the cold.’ Amam asked,

‘What is it?’ His wife replied, ‘I will show you, after our friends from the stars are gone.’ He said to me, ‘I am not sure that I like this. For generations we have lived in harmony with our world without changing our ways.’ I have heard much of your world, from Eelulie and do not think that we should try to copy you.’ She said, ‘But I think that there is no harm in making a little comfort for ourselves, in bringing the warmth of summer into our winter days and nights.’

“‘Goodbye,’ I said. ‘I may be back. I hope so.’

“I CLIMBED the short ladder to the airlock, climbed the longer ladder up to Control. The Navigator had set the warning siren going before I got there. As I sat in my chair, at the controls, I could see the people and their animals walking slowly to the verge of the forest.

“Reluctantly, I fed power to the rockets. Slowly we lifted—slowly at first, then with mounting acceleration. We drove through the greyness of the overcast, out into the clear

sunlight above the cloud layer, which lay below us like a vast field of snow. We drove out through the last tenuous shreds of atmosphere and then, while the Navigator and the Engineer busied themselves with the preparations and adjustments that had to be made before the interstellar drive could be put into operation, fell into a closed orbit around the planet.

“I was sorry when they reported that all was ready. I was sorry when the Drive started and the beautiful world below us went out like a snuffed candle flame.

“IT WAS YEARS before anybody visited that world again. It was not, as our preliminary survey had indicated, sufficiently rich in minerals to make exploitation profitable—besides, the existence of an intelligent race militated against both exploitation and colonization. So the planet became merely a name and a number in Survey Commission’s records, a few boxes of typescript, films and tapes in the files.

“It must have been all of thirty five years before I was

in that sector of space again. It was my last voyage before retirement and I was, as you know, Captain of the biggest of the new ships, *Lode Star*, with a large crew of specialists in all fields.

"As Master of such a vessel I had something of a free hand. I could as long as I didn't overdo it, indulge my whims. And I felt the urge to revisit the planet that my Navigator, all those years ago, had called 'Eden' I wanted to meet again the kindly people and the friendly animals. I wanted... Well, I'll be frank, I wanted to see Eelulie again. We had been more than friends—the similarities of our two species had been far greater than the differences. I wanted to see how the years had treated her.

"And so, at last, we drifted slowly out of the cock-eyed Time and Space generated by the Drive, found ourselves hanging, as my Navigator had predicted that we should, over the fair planet. From our orbit it looked unchanged. I chose to make my descent in one of our Scouts—a craft very similar to the one in which I had made my landing all those

years ago. I was confident that I would be able to set her down at my original landing place—a call on the psionic radio to Central Records had supplied me with all the necessary data. I took three officers with me.

"**A**S BEFORE, it was at sunset of a fine summer's evening when we landed. Little seemed changed—at first glance. The same clearing was still there, surrounded by the same steeple-trees. When I left the ship I stepped on to the same velvety grass.

"Yet there were changes. There was evidence that somebody had built a fire towards one corner of the clearing. This pleased me. The gift that I had left for the people had not gone unused. What worried me and puzzled me, however, was the little pile of well-picked bones beside the remains of the fire.

"'A primitive culture, sir,' said one of my Lieutenants. 'Do you think that it is wise to stray far from the ship, with night coming on?'

"'Look out!' yelled one of the others suddenly. His pistol

hammered loudly. He turned in time to see one of the great cats in mid-leap, dying before it hit the ground.

“What have you done, you fool?” I demanded angrily. “These things are friendly. The natives treat them as pets.”

“It didn’t look friendly as it jumped,” said the Lieutenant sullenly. “It looked hungry.”

“I’m sorry,” I said. “You probably saved our lives. Get back into the Scout—we’ll return to the ship at once.”

“But, sir . . .”

“Get back into the Scout,” I repeated.

“I DIDN’T feel like explaining. I didn’t feel like telling them that the very atmosphere of the planet had changed, that the peace of the summer evening was not, as I had first known it, a real peace, but was now just an ominous silence through which the hunted fled and the hunters pursued.

“Worst of all was the feeling of guilt.

“I didn’t set foot upon the planet again. I sent research

teams down. I lost five men—two of them were surrounded and torn to pieces by a pack of wolves; one was savagely mauled, so that he died, by one of the tigers; the other two were ambushed by a party of savages armed with bows and arrows. The research teams brought back prisoners, and I was able to question them myself—I have an excellent memory for languages. I heard the story—it had already passed into legend and besides, as I was saying, the Mannschen Drive does odd things to Time as well as to Space, and the Drive must have been malfunctioning at the time of my first landing—of Eelulie and her husband Amam, who lived in a garden where all the beasts were friendly, and of how Eelulie was tempted by a monster who came from out of a flaming, flying tree and was given the Forbidden Fruit, the apple from the Tree of Knowledge, to eat . . .

“OH, IT ALL fitted in. I had given Eelulie fire. I had introduced her to meat as a food. In my primitive firestick I had given her a tool

that, with very little ingenuity, could be converted into a weapon. a bow. And when Man, on this world, became a killer and a hunter he lost the respect of the beasts, and was himself killed and hunted. . . .”

He picked up the Bible again. He said softly, “And to think that I, like you, once thought that this was no more than the mythology of an obscure Semitic people.”

“But it is,” I said. “It is, Captain Aspinall. What else can it be?”

He ignored me.

“What has happened to the race,” he asked softly, “who came to this world, to Earth, all those millions of years ago in their starships? They, like me, must have found Man living in a state of idyllic harmony with the brute creation. They, like me, must have been well meaning fools.

“Were they, I wonder, reptilian—so that in the legend they are referred to as ‘the serpent’? They could have been—but, on the other hand, ‘serpent’ may be only an expression of hatred rather than of fact.

“What was Eve like? Was she as beautiful as Eelulie?”

“But this is what worries me, what frightens me. . . . What happened to the man, or the being, who thought he was setting Mankind’s feet on the upward path but who, in actuality, was instrumental in causing the Fall?”

I tried to cheer him up.

“We must have Progress, Captain.”

“Why?” he asked bleakly.

And the trouble is, I’ve been wondering the same myself ever since

