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THE BIG FREEZE

By BOYD ELLANBY

And now we'd like to present Sam Baracol. You never heard of Sam? Buccaneer Baracol, the scourge of statesmen, the baiter of bureaucrats? The round little man who can make an honest, if slightly discolored, penny out of nothing at all? Why, we thought everybody knew Sam!

Here is his latest adventure — the best possible introduction to a genius who knows more angles than a mathematics major. It deals in such unrelated objects as clay pigeons, sun dials and dinosaur bones, bustles, pink umbrellas, croquet balls and the ceiling price on tin. Put them together, add a low temperature reading on the thermometer, and you'll have one of the zaniest and most ingenious hunks of chicanery in recorded history!

OF THE many things in the universe that Sam Baracol detested, it was boredom he hated most.

Sam sat alone at his table, irritably fingering the green paper cap he had not bothered to put on, touching the shiny tin horn he had not bothered to blow, and reflected that New York night-clubs were dull places. But not so dull, he hastily reminded himself, as open Space, or a hotel room.

Only a few people lingered at the untidy tables, finishing their

drinks or sipping coffee as they tried to sober up enough to get home. Long ago, whistles had blown and bells had rung to usher in the year 2100, and along with the other customers Sam Baracol had hoisted his bulky figure to an upright position when the orchestra played *Auld Lang Syne*, and had lifted his champagne glass in a vague toast.

There was nobody on Earth whom he particularly wanted to toast, and nobody in the galaxy either, for that matter. Sam was



a wanderer; he never stayed Earthbound long enough to make any emotional ties. So he had saluted, mentally, the peculiar madness of the stubborn archaists on Aereopagis III whom he had opposed with such disappointing lack of success on his last ramble among the stars, and meditated regretfully on their mania for living in a facsimile of the early twentieth century, a mania which had shut him out from as profitable a deal as he had ever schemed for.

But in rejecting the benefits of the last thousand years of technology were they really so mad, he wondered, as he set down his glass. Closing his eyes he could feel again the quietness of Aereopagis III where no telecast ever interrupted a conversation, and except at the one secluded port no jet ever screamed through the skies. He could see the pretty white houses which would never be made dingy by smoke, the sheep on the distant hills, the rolling meadows yellow with wheat, the velvet grass lawns where in the afternoons white-flanneled men strolled beside ladies who raised frilly parasols against a gentle sun; where they picnicked under shade trees or amused themselves at old-fashioned games with balls, and were never molested by the harsh reproof of a park warden or a scowl from a passer-by.

The crash of a cymbal woke him. He looked around to find that the orchestra were packing their instruments ready to go home, and silent waiters had slipped into the empty spaces of the room and begun to clean up the debris of New Year's Eve. Sam hated to be left alone. He sipped at his drink and, with sudden petulance, he flicked his knuckles against the shiny horn and knocked it to the floor.

A waiter pattered over and stooped to pick up the horn, looking at Sam resentfully as he dusted it off. "What'd you do that for, mister? You might have bent it so we couldn't use it next year."

"A pure accident, I assure you, waiter."

"It didn't look like no accident to me. I happened to see you bang it off the table, on purpose like. Here we go to the trouble to provide real, genuine, tin horns for New Year's Eve, expecting our customers to appreciate it, and what do they do? Some of them try to slip them under their capes and sneak home with them, and some just knock them around as careless as if they was plastic."

Sighing, Sam reached for his wallet. "There, there, waiter, don't start crying. After all, tin is cheap."

"It ain't the expense, mister. It's the trouble. If you only knew

what it was like trying to get some released from the Commodity Bureau!"

"Ah, yes, our wonderful, omniscient, omnipotent Commodity Bureau. How I love them!"

"You must be drunk, sir," said the waiter, gently polishing the horn as he moved away. "Better be getting home to bed."

"Presently. Presently."

At the bar along the wall the barkeeper set down a bottle, yawned, and switched on the telecaster behind him. The milky screen came alive and a bleary-eyed newsman materialized, his voice booming out in the middle of a word.

"—erature around minus ten degrees. Sleet or snow ending about noon today.

"Flash! Price controls were removed today from clay pigeons, dinosaur skeletons, and sun dials. The Stablization Office of Commodity Bureau stated that none of them are important in the economic life of the United World.

"Flash! The World Naval Expedition to Gallipolis VII has just reported —"

A roar of laughter billowed from somewhere in the room drowning out the grating voice of the newsman. Sam jumped at the sound and turned completely around in his chair to look.

Three tall men sat at a bottle-littered table against the wall.

They roared, they howled, they rocked back and forth, punched each other in the ribs, and gasped for breath as tears rolled from their eyes.

Sam cocked his head, listening, then quickly drained his glass, set it down, and moving as lightly as a bobbing balloon he stepped over to the noisy table, drew up a chair at one corner and sat down.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," he said. "My name is Baracol, Sam Baracol. Would you be kind enough to tell me what it is that amuses you so much?"

The men stopped laughing and three pairs of swimming blue eyes stared at Sam.

Sam was a short, pudgy young man, whose body swelled down and out from his chin, just grazed the table-top, and curved sharply back to his thighs. Scanty brown hair fuzzed above his forehead like the down of a chick, and his mouth was wide and full-lipped. He looked as amiable as a fat brown teapot, but his small gray eyes were alert.

"Do we know you?" said one of the men.

"Not yet," said Sam, smiling in a friendly way. "But you musn't resent the intrusion of a stranger, gentlemen. On New Year's Eve, aren't we all friends? I'm curious to know what you find to laugh about in this monotonous world. And I have a

constitutional aversion to stifling my curiosity."

"Well," said the tallest of the three men, "if you put it that way, I guess we don't mind telling you. You heard that newscast just now?"

"I did."

"Well, I suppose you'll find it hard to believe but, as a matter of fact, that announcement has just turned us into bankrupts. All three of us."

"Hmmm," said Sam. "And is that funny?"

The man doubled over in a new paroxysm, and wiped his eyes. "Don't you think so?" he said.

"As a matter of fact, no."

"But think of it, man! Think of the wild, incredible coincidence! The mere thought of clay pigeons, sun dials, and dinosaur bones being bracketed together is enough to make you smile. And when you further realize that, dissimilar as these things are, lifting the price controls will bankrupt the three of us at one stroke, then you ought to be rolling in the aisle. Why, it stretches the laws of chance to the ultimate. Such a combination of events wouldn't happen again in a million years!"

"I doubt that it's happened even now," said Sam thoughtfully. "Would you explain?"

"Certainly. But first let me introduce ourselves. We are the

three Hardlan brothers, Marcus on my left, Verus on my right, and myself, Fabian Hardlan. Our father, I regret to say, was a classics scholar. Well, we come from three corners of the continent to meet tonight for our first reunion in a year, and what happens? We go bankrupt. I know you won't believe this, Mr. Baracol, but it just so happens that my brother Marcus is the world's one remaining manufacturer of clay pigeons, my brother Verus just happens to be head of one of the two firms that still manufacture sun dials (the other is in Tibet), and I just happen to be the discoverer and promoter of one of the richest pits of dinosaur bones that's ever been found in the world. Now do you see why we're laughing?"

Sam Baracol scratched at the downy fuzz on his head. "Well, no. Your story is peculiar, I'll admit. But it's scarcely amusing."

An uncertain frown creased Fabian's forehead, and the euphoric smiles began to fade from the faces of his brothers.

"You don't think it's a joke to become a pauper, even when it happens in triplicate?" he pleaded. "Like three men slipping on three banana peels?"

"Well, no. I've always thought money was nice to have. But are you sure of your facts? I should think that instead of becoming

paupers, you would now all become millionaires, since there is no regulation to hold down the prices you may charge for clay pigeons, sun dials, and dinosaur skeletons."

"Oh no, Mr. Baracol. Don't you realize that there is practically no market for our products? There hasn't been for some years. Stabilization Office has kept the prices artificially high on the occasional sales we have made, but without its support they will fall close to zero. Clay pigeons are used only for an archaic sport, which none but wealthy eccentrics ever indulge in any more. And who uses a sun dial these days, except to ornament a garden, or as a stage prop in an old-fashioned drama? And as for dinosaurs, well, the museums are glutted, filled to the windows. No sir, you behold three paupers before you. Why, we can't even afford another bottle of champagne!"

"Let me remedy that situation," said Sam. "Waiter!"

As the cork popped and the glasses were filled, Marcus spoke for the first time. His smile had drooped into melancholy, and he shook his head. "You know, boys, maybe this man is right. Maybe it isn't so funny after all."

"I have often meditated on the amazing decisions of our Commodity Bureau," Sam remarked, "and marvelled at the all but incredible decisions they make.

If a commodity is scarce, and therefore valuable, they hold the price down to rock bottom, thus discouraging increased production, and they then monopolize the entire output for themselves. If a thing is plentiful and is widely produced, they keep the price sky-high so as not to hurt the bank accounts of the producers.

"It has long been obvious to me that ninety-eight per cent of the Bureau staff are nincompoops — but not a hundred per cent, we must remember. The elephant, it has been said, dances badly; but we are forced to admit that he does dance. This particular decision, on the face of it, is without logic or reason, and if I had not met you gentlemen I should not have thought twice about it, but would have ascribed it to the predominant idiocy of the Bureau. Having met you, however, and being constitutionally unable to swallow a coincidence the size of a camel, I am moved to ask you, bluntly: what have you got that Commodity Bureau wants?"

The Hardlan brothers stared at him.

"Come again?" said Fabian.

Sam's shrewd gray eyes were thoughtful, his voice as mealy as a magazine salesman's. "I mean, and you will see it for yourselves after you've recovered from tomorrow morning's head-

ache, that the Bureau didn't just reach into a basket at random, pull out clay pigeons, dinosaur skeletons, and sun dials, and take off their price ceilings. If these things aren't important to the national economy, why bother with them at all? It can't matter what prices they bring, one way or the other. But it does matter to the Hardlan brothers. It takes away their bread and butter. Therefore, my friends, I repeat: what have you three got that the Bureau wants?"

Fabian moved uneasily, Marcus and Verus shifted their eyes, and they all three sighed.

"He's right," said Verus.

"Of course," said Marcus.

"We should have thought of it," said Fabian. "To be perfectly frank with you, Mr. Baracol, we are, all three, metallurgists by training, particularly in the field of substitute metals; and it is our misfortune, besides, to be highly gifted in our profession — probably the most talented men on the continent."

"Indeed?"

"And ever since we abandoned our professions several years ago, the Bureau has been hounding us, urging us back into harness. They've tried persuasion, appeals to our patriotism, and even bribery."

"And what, specifically, do they want you to do?"

"They want us to make a

substitute tin," said Fabian miserably.

"Tin?"

"Yes, a tin substitute, something that will have the properties of tin. They have kept pointing out — as if it mattered to us — that the earth is running out of tin, that much less than one ten-millionth of the earth's crust contains the metal, and that it is nearly all gone. They would be delighted to have any one of the forms, any one of the ten isotopes, that we could concoct. It is our duty, they say, to use our great talents to provide a tin substitute."

"Well," said Sam reasonably, "isn't it your duty?"

"But lab work is so monotonous!" said Fabian. "Try this mixture, try that mixture, try the next mixture, day after day! Life is short, and we didn't want to spend it juggling precipitates, so we simply resigned and chose the most useless, little-needed occupations we could find that would still yield us a bare living, so that our time would be our own to use as we liked."

"You amaze me," said Sam, "but you have my sympathy. I know a group of colonists on Aereopagis III who have exactly the same irrational wish."

"I wish them luck," said Verus sadly. "But for us, there's no use struggling any more. We have to eat. Back to the lab for us."

"Not necessarily," said Sam, "now that you have met me. Just give me a minute to think. I'm a great one for ideas. Waiter!"

"Sorry, sir," said the waiter. "But it's after four o'clock and the boss wants to close up."

They looked around. Most of the lights had been turned out, and the place was empty except for an undistinguished man who sat at a table near the door, his chin in his hands.

"Then we had better go," said Sam. "Will you gentlemen permit me to stroll along with you? We might perhaps have a nightcap at some more friendly establishment while we continue our talk."

"Thank you," said Fabian. "I'm just beginning to realize how unpleasant it will be to be sober. But I must remind you, we're broke."

"That may be. On the other hand, your situation interests me, and when Sam Baracol is interested, he usually gets an idea. And Commodity Bureau has never done me any favors that I remember. Come, my friends."

They slipped on their over-capes, pulled on their hoods, and walked to the door.

The nondescript man waiting at the table jumped up as they approached and cleared his throat. "Just a minute, Mr. Hardlan!"

The three brothers turned their heads in unison. "Well?"

"My boss has got a proposition for you."

Fabian shook his head and turned up his cape collar. "We have no comments to make for Newsbureau."

"But I'm not from Newsbureau, Mr. Hardlan. Don't you remember me?"

Fabian looked him over from head to toe. The man was dressed in a brown cape, brown shoes, brown neck scarf, and his large-pupiled eyes were brown. His sallow face was mottled with red, and he wore an anxious, puzzled expression, slightly resentful, like that of an overgrown school boy confronted for the thousandth time by a difficult question and an unsympathetic teacher.

"I never saw you before in my life," said Fabian coldly, "but I don't like your face."

"You didn't like it before, either, Mr. Hardlan; it gets this way, sometimes, in cold weather; but that's neither here nor there. Surely you remember me? My name's Engstrom, and I parlayed with you a few months ago about getting back to the lab, but you wouldn't talk business. But now, I thought to myself, surely you'd be ready to listen to me."

"No comments for Newsbureau," said Fabian stubbornly.

"But look, Mr. Hardlan, it would be to your advantage—"

Pushing the three brothers through the door, Sam turned

carelessly to the stranger.

"It is even more to their advantage, my friend, that they have met me. My name is Sam Baracol, and I feel the stirring of an idea. Happy New Year!"

It was just turning daylight when the man in brown got out of the elevator and walked into a dark office, on through a doorway camouflaged as a water cooler, and on into a windowless room, softly lighted, with soundproof walls.

The sharp-faced man at the desk looked up from his papers. "Well, Engstrom. Where are they?"

"In a bar — in an automat — maybe in jail. How do I know? They wouldn't talk business, Mr. Blake."

"Then you didn't put it to them right, or else they're crazier than I thought."

"I did my best, Mr. Blake."

"Don't they know they're cleaned out?"

"They know, all right."

"What do they think they're going to use for money from now on?"

"Search me, Mr. Blake. Some little guy got in ahead of me, that's all. Said he had an idea, and he simply took the Hardlans and put them under wraps."

"Who was he?"

"Don't know. He just said that his name was Sam Baracol and

that he had a big fat idea."

"Buccaneer Baracol!" said Blake. "The last I heard of him he was on Mars, in Canal City. That's bad. Still . . ." he tapped his pen thoughtfully against his sharp white teeth, "I don't think even the Buccaneer wants to be stuck with supporting the world's leading producers of clay pigeons, sun dials, and dinosaur bones, indefinitely."

"Keep a watch on them, Engstrom. I'll be willing to bet we have those Hardlan boys back in the lab within six months' time, thankful for any kind of a job. I'll think up some other scheme. There's more than one way of skinning a cat, you know."

"That's what people say," said Engstrom doubtfully. "But I never could figure out more than one."

"Nobody asked you to," snapped Blake. "Just keep tabs on those men!"

It was not difficult to keep track of the Hardlans.

For the next six months, the production of sun dials zoomed to a record high. Verus and his two helpers settled down in Maine to an eighteen-hour schedule of crushing gravel, setting molds, and etching in the faces of the dials. Marcus lived at his kiln near the Arkansas clay pits, shovelling out his brittle discs by the dozens, day after day,

and Fabian in his pit in Wyoming lovingly picked and chiselled and brushed the mammoth dinosaur bones, working harder than he had ever worked in his life before.

For Engstrom and his two assistants from Commodity Bureau, these were the six dullest months of their lives, one man in a country farm house near the gravel pit, one in a country hotel in Arkansas, and Engstrom himself in a chilly shack in Wyoming. There was never anything new or exciting to report back to New York, and there was nothing for them to do but look on as the undisturbed Hardlans worked.

The brothers produced their goods, paid their bills, and seemed entirely unaware that no market existed for their products anywhere in the world. Then, suddenly, towards the end of June, they shut down production. They tidied up their work places, housed their various products in suitable warehouses, padlocked the premises and again converged on New York, still followed by their wearied observers. They met at their hotel, drank a mutual toast, then arm in arm the three brothers walked into the sunny street and entered a travel bureau.

"We'd like some literature on travel," said Fabian.

"Where to?"

"Give us all you've got. South America, Europe, Asia, the solar planets, the galactic systems."

"But some of those trips are very expensive, sir!"

"I dare say," said Fabian nonchalantly. "But within a very few days we expect to have money to burn."

Their pockets stuffed with literature, they returned to their hotel and locked themselves in their suite.

Engstrom left a man on watch and then dutifully reported to Commodity Bureau.

"But it just don't make no sense," he concluded his synopsis. "It don't add up."

Blake stared at his desk, blinking his sharp eyes. "Things always add up if you know what figures you ought to start with. If you start with two and two and get five, that simply means you've left out a figure somewhere along the line."

"Maybe so," said Engstrom. "I never did understand arithmetic very well."

Sighing, Blake closed his eyes. "And they expect me to run an organization like Commodity Bureau with the help of dolts like you!"

"No need to call me names, Mr. Blake. You give me a job to do, I do the best I can, I can't do no more."

"I don't doubt it. Well, we'll just have to hunt for that missing figure, that's all. And there's one thing I'd like to know. What's become of Sam Baracol?"

Sam Baracol was reclining in a deep wicker chair on the porch of a clubhouse, sipping a glass of lemonade filled with cracked ice, and looking over the wooden railing at Lake Contrary, the most beautiful lake on Aereopagis III. His downy hair was fluffed by the breeze, and he gave a dramatic, nostalgic sigh.

"I sympathize with you, Mr. Mayor," he said. "This planet is indeed a paradise. Eternal summer, no irritating animal or insect life, gentle rains, soft winds—a veritable garden spot in the galaxy!"

The Mayor beamed and folded his hands. He wore tightfitting gray trousers over spatted white shoes, a massive gold watch chain which spanned his yellow vest, and long moustaches which curled down from his complacent mouth.

"Earth hath not anything to give more fair, Mr. Baracol," he said, waving his hand towards the view.

At the lakeside, ladies modestly dressed in the puffed sleeved and bloomered bathing costumes of 1900, their faces sheltered under cartwheel hats of straw, shrieked as they daringly touched toe to water. On the lawns, long-skirted ladies and straw-hatted men decorously struck croquet balls towards wickets and, at a distance, gentlemen in white flannel trousers cast horse-shoes at a stake.

"It is indeed beautiful!" said

Sam. "No, I hardly wonder any more, Mr. Mayor, that you refuse to jeopardize this peaceful scene by opening up your planet's tin deposits. It's true, of course, that the deposit is the richest I've seen in my years of wandering about the galaxy, and that it lies beyond the mountains and hundreds of miles from your delightful garden city so that it could not possibly corrupt the innocence of this Arcadia. But even granting all that, still I am at last convinced, in part by my first visit to you a year ago, and even more so by my present visit, that it would be sacrilege to take even the slightest risk of altering this enchanted Eden. It is almost the real thing. It is indeed all but a paradise!"

The Mayor bristled and sat up straight. "And what do you mean, Mr. Baracol, *almost* the real thing? I'll have you remember, sir, that my great-grandfather founded this colony in the pioneering days of galactic travel; life on Earth had become disgustingly crass, mechanical, and unaesthetic. It was his life-work to reproduce here, with the help of sympathetic friends, the actual life and culture of the golden age of the world. 1910! The time before atomic power, the time before the great wars, the time before space travel, the time before — abhorrent thought! — the United World. What age was

ever happier than the early 1900's? When was life more serene? Never, sir! And all of us, the descendants of those first dedicated colonists, will keep the tradition to the death. We seceded, sir, from Earth, and we have never regretted it. And yet you have the effrontery to call our colony 'all *but* a paradise.' What more, sir, could you ask?"

"I do beg your pardon," said Sam. "I would not for the world offend such delightful hospitality as yours. It is my misfortune, I confess, to be constitutionally unable to speak any way but frankly. But I beg your pardon and we'll say no more about it."

"That won't do. Explain yourself, sir."

Sam set down his lemonade glass apologetically. "Well, since you press me, Mr. Mayor. As you say, this place is indeed perfect, and if I weren't constitutionally unable to settle in any one spot, I'd probably apply for citizenship here myself. But alas, that is not to be thought of. There are a few little things that have been bothering me, however, a few touches of *verisimilitude* which seem to be lacking. But then, of course, they are hardly worth mentioning, and I should never have brought them up."

"Mr. Baracol, you have gone too far. What do you find lacking?"

"Well," said Sam, "for one thing, I regret to notice that all of you depend on mechanical clocks to tell the time by. Very efficient, of course, but I can't help feeling it — not precisely an anachronism, of course, but a little out of keeping with the spirit of the place — that you harbor these conspicuous, noisy objects in your pleasant rooms. How much lovelier it would be, for example, if the green lawns and gardens here were dotted with graceful sun dials, twined with ivy, blending into the landscape."

"True," said the Mayor, looking out at the velvet lawn. "But making a sun dial is a skilled operation. None of us would know how to mark the dial."

"And then," said Sam, warming up, "there's the matter of the games you play. Croquet is healthy, dignified exercise, and so is throwing horseshoes, and so are the graceful calisthenics of archery. But I should think that some of your more venturesome spirits must at times long for a more dashing, a more vigorous outlet for their skills. Skeet-shooting, for example, a gentlemanly diversion which had many devotees during the first half of the twentieth century. Ah, there's a sport! How thrilling it is to watch the graceful gray disc soar into the air, to swing the gun, and with clear eye and unerring marksmanship to shatter the clay

pigeon neatly out of the air."

The Mayor looked pensive. "I've always fancied my own marksmanship, as a matter of fact. Few men, I think I am safe in saying, would surpass me."

Sam nodded. "I don't doubt it in the least, sir. And then there is one other thing, which I really hesitate to mention to a man of your background and lineage, but you asked my frank opinion, you know."

"Don't be afraid, Mr. Baracol. We pride ourselves, remember, on our appreciation of a man's integrity, however clumsy his manner."

"Thank you," said Sam. He hesitated then, pulling his vest over his rounded stomach. He drank the last of his lemonade, twirled the glass round and round in his plump fingers, avoiding the avid eyes of his companion.

"Well, get on with it, man! What else is lacking to our colony?"

"A sense of the past."

"What do you mean?"

"Where are your beginnings? Earthmen of 1900 could look back on centuries of development, on millenia of evolution. But your colony here began from scratch, with the coming of your great-grandfather and his friends, a mere hundred and fifty years ago, to a perfect habitation. But to a planet, alas, which boasted only of vegetable life. You have there-

fore no continuity with man's past, but have sprung full-blown from the sea of Space. When your children ask you about man's history, you are unable to take them to a softly lighted museum and show them the actual remains of man's ancestors — the fossils. Think, Mr. Mayor, how much more complete, how much more poetic it would be if you could lead them to that massive room under the skylight and show them the skeletons of dinosaurs!"

From one of the club rooms behind them sounded the brassy gong of a grandfather's clock striking the hour. The soft notes of the cuckoo called four times from the parlor, and at the same instant a set of chimes tinkled into a complex melody.

"Four o'clock," said Sam. "Time for me to be getting back to the port. My ship will be ready for take-off."

The Mayor frowned and moved impatiently in his chair. "Don't hurry away, Mr. Baracol. It's odd, you know, but I never noticed before how noisy clocks can be. Won't you have another lemonade?"

"Well," said Sam. "Just one for the skies, then."

Glass in hand, he sauntered to the railing and gazed out towards the rolling expanse of the lawns, then shook his head and sighed.

"Perhaps you'll join me for my last stroll, Mr. Mayor? Green

is such a beautiful color," he added, as they walked slowly over the grass of an empty croquet ground. "Especially in this sunlight."

The Mayor did not answer. He was looking thoughtfully at the long shadow cast by Sam's portly figure; absently he picked up a mallet, swung idly at the striped ball and watched its swift roll through a distant wicket.

"What an amazing shot!" said Sam. "Just as I suspected, you would have made an expert marksman back in the good old days. Few would have dared take you on at a match."

The Mayor coughed, looking sidewise at Sam. "I've been wondering, Mr. Baracol, if you might not be willing to do a favor for us the next time your business takes you to Earth?"

Sam beamed. "Anything at all, my dear sir. Anything within my powers I can do — you have only to command. Shall we turn back now? For I must be on my way."

"Then could we commission you to purchase and ship us a moderate supply of clay pigeons, sun dials, and dinosaur bones?"

"I should never have mentioned them," said Sam, sighing. "I would do anything in the world for you and your colonists, Mr. Mayor, but not even Sam Baracol can perform the impos-

sible. Perhaps you do not realize that for centuries sun dials have been made only for ornament? And that clay pigeons were used in a game which has long been obsolete? And as for dinosaur bones . . ." He shook his head regretfully. "Not that I won't do my best, of course."

The Mayor whacked a second croquet ball with such force that it rolled out of sight over a hillock. "It was unkind of you, Mr. Baracol, to point out flaws in our life here which cannot be corrected, and thus, so to speak, to introduce a triple-headed serpent into our Eden."

"It was indeed," said Sam. "I shall never forgive myself. I should never have mentioned such trifling imperfections in your paradise. But even if by some remote chance I should happen to locate those items for you — and I shall certainly try — I'm afraid the problem of payment — forgive my mentioning it — would finally defeat us. Since you have seceded from Earth, so to speak, you probably have no currency which would be acceptable in exchange."

The Mayor smiled. "If that is the only problem, we have nothing to worry about."

"Good! I'm happy to hear that."

"I can arrange to turn over to you our entire crop of wool for sale on Earth."

They were ascending the steps

to the porch as Sam shook his head. "I'm afraid that won't do," he said, reaching for his hat. "I'm afraid you scarcely realize how far our technology has progressed, sir. There's no market for wool anymore. Everyone uses the synthetic fabrics. Much sturdier, you see, and then we don't have the bother of keeping sheep."

"There's our wheat crop, of course."

"No, I'm afraid that would also bring you very little. Since the irrigation of the African deserts, wheat has become as cheap as paper. No, Mr. Mayor, I'm afraid, just as I suspected, that the problem of payment will defeat us. But you have no reason to look so depressed. Your country is still beautiful, without these other objects, and in this world, after all, we are not to expect perfection."

"Bong, bong, bong, bong, bong!" sounded the grandfather's clock.

The Mayor jumped.

Sam held out his hand. "Good-bye, sir. This has been a most delightful visit, which I hope to be able to repeat perhaps in five or ten years." Turning, he strode towards the door.

"Just a minute, Mr. Baracol!"

Sam paused. His heart was thudding, but he put a bland smile on his face as he turned.

"Yes, Mr. Mayor?"

"Do you suppose," he said

slowly, "that you would be able to pay for the sun dials, clay pigeons, and dinosaur bones, with a suitable commission for yourself, of course, if we granted you a concession to open up our tin deposits?"

Sam took his trembling hand away from the door. "What a brilliant suggestion, sir. How did you ever manage to think of it?"

New York in July can be very hot, and by the end of a week the Hardlan brothers were thoroughly wilted and impatient. They knew their travel folders by heart, and had decided just where to go. Verus would go to the Andes, pick up a guide and a couple of llamas, and immerse himself in the sole remaining dominion of primitives. Marcus would go to the eastern Mediterranean to survey the few surviving examples of Byzantine architecture. But Fabian had chosen to go to Mars.

The time of waiting seemed very long but at last, one evening late in July, just as they were finishing a nightcap at the hotel bar dutifully watched by the weary Engstrom, in walked Sam Baracol, plump as ever, his little eyes sparkling with satisfaction.

"My friends" he said beaming. "Let us call for champagne!"

They huddled round a table, and with the second bottle Sam glanced around the room and

proceeded promptly to business.

"As I agreed, gentlemen, I am prepared to give you a substantial payment on account for the produce you have waiting for me. It is ready, I trust?"

"Ready and waiting as per agreement," said Fabian. "But I'd still like to know, Sam, what in the world you are going to do with the stuff?"

Engstrom hitched his chair a little closer and sipped his beer. Sam looked at him speculatively.

"How do you do, Mr. Engstrom? As an old acquaintance, won't you allow me to buy you a long cool drink, tinkling with ice, before I proceed?"

Engstrom flushed as he shook his head. "Thanks just the same, Mr. Baracol, but I prefer beer. Ice makes me break out in bumps, like, sometimes."

"You astonish me," said Sam, in a puzzled voice. "But let us to business. As to what I am going to do with the stuff, Fabian, I have no objection at all to telling you. It is really a very simple arrangement. I am going to part with your entire output of sundials, clay pigeons, and dinosaur skeletons, in exchange for a tin mine on a distant planet."

"And now I'll tell one," said Fabian.

"I am amazed at your skepticism! Have you no faith in Sam Baracol?"

"Well, I won't press you. But

what will you do with the tin after you've mined it?"

"I hope I shall find a buyer, of course. What else could I do?"

"But Sam, the Stabilization Office keeps the price of tin down so low that you'll be selling it at less than cost. You'd be crazy."

"Have you never heard of the black market?" said Sam, nudging him in the ribs. "But I will not involve you. Ah, it is a beauty of a mine! A nearly pure oxide, a rich cassiterite. It will be very little labor for me to smelt down the ore with carbon, draw off the liquid, and cast it into molds. Lovely, gleaming bars of tin . . ."

"Are you serious?"

"Certainly," said Sam, his eyes twinkling. "I am constitutionally opposed to levity of any kind where money is concerned. And I shall, of course, consider it only proper to share my profits with you three. How soon, by the way, shall I have the melancholy duty of wishing you *bon voyage*?"

"We're leaving next week," said Fabian. "And I want to express right now the gratitude of all three of us for keeping us out of the laboratory and making it possible for us to enjoy life. I certainly never dreamed I'd get as far as a trip to Mars."

"Mars? An interesting planet, and Canal City is a thriving little industrial community. I usually try to stop there on my way out and back when I can manage the

time. You'll enjoy it. But take plenty of clothes with you, my dear Fabian. It can get mighty cold there."

Canal City itself could not have been colder than the atmosphere of Commodity Bureau when Engstrom made his report of Sam's reunion with the three brothers.

"So the Hardlans are leaving the continent," said Blake accusingly. "Did you see them buy their tickets?"

"Yes, Mr. Blake. But how could I stop them? That Mr. Baracol must have given them the money." Engstrom's sallow face was worried and anxious. "One's going to the Andes, one to Arabia, and one to Mars."

"They might as well be going to the end of the galaxy for all the good they'll do us now. I've spent nearly five years trying to get those men to do their plain duty, and they always slip away. What are we going to do for tin?"

Engstrom slapped his knee and snickered. "Ask Mr. Baracol."

"What's he got to do with it?"

"He said he had a tin mine. What a line that man has! I didn't pay too much attention, but he was telling them some crazy story about how he had got hold of a wonderful tin mine in exchange for those old bones and the other stuff, and was going to sell it on the black market. But he didn't take me in for a

minute. I'm not that dumb."

Blake opened his mouth and closed it. He pounded his desk. "You're incapable of judging how dumb you are, Engstrom! Quick, now, give me every word he said. Buccaneer Sam Baracol is nobody to play with. If he says he's got tin, he's got tin, and don't you ever forget it! What did he say?"

Miserably, Engstrom repeated the conversation he had heard in the hotel bar, miserably listened to Balke's opinion of him, and miserably offered a suggestion.

"Maybe we should start following the Mr. Hardlans again? Maybe the tin mine is really in Asia, or on Mars?"

"No, you idiot! The Hardlans are out of the picture now, they don't matter. Forget them. It's Sam Baracol we'd better keep tabs on. And here I'd been thinking we might be forced to lift the price control to stimulate more mining ventures. What I want you to do is this: you hunt up Sam Baracol, inform him that Commodity Bureau claims the right to buy every ounce he produces, at the present price, and make him sign a contract to that effect. Then keep an eye on him. He may try to weasel out of the deal, but he's going to keep that contract."

Engstrom stood up. "Now that's the sort of orders I understand, Mr. Blake. Don't you worry, I'll carry them out to the

letter. He won't get away with any funny business with me, I promise you."

"If only I could choose my own assistants" said Blake, sighing. "Well, that's all. But look out for the man, Engstrom. Sam Baracol is a slippery customer."

Sam was having the time of his life. He jetted up to Maine to pick up the sun dials, he jetted down to Arkansas to get his clay pigeons, and then he completed his load at the bone pit in Wyoming. There was a momentary delay in blasting starwards when Engstrom caught up with him at the spaceport in New Mexico, flourishing an iron-clad contract.

Sam objected, he argued and protested, but in the end he gave in.

"I guess you've got me, Mr. Engstrom," he said. "But can't we leave the price to be decided later, on delivery? After all, there's always the chance that when Commodity Bureau sees the superior quality of my product, they may decide to pay me at a higher rate."

"Not a chance," said Engstrom. "Why should they?"

"But after all, I went to all the trouble to locate this mine, and the problem of getting out the ore and purifying it will also be mine. And if I'm forbidden to sell on the open market, it seems to me

I ought at least to be well paid for my trouble. Don't you agree?"

"That may be, but there ain't only one price, and you know it."

"Yes, right now there is only one price. But it'll be some months yet before I shall have my first consignment ready for delivery. Who knows, in this uncertain world, what may not happen? The price may rise. The ceiling may be lifted. United World's needs are changeable, and time decays and ages move, *mutatis mutandis*. Don't you agree?"

"That's neither here nor there," said Engstrom confusedly. "All I know is, you've got to sign this contract."

Sam signed.

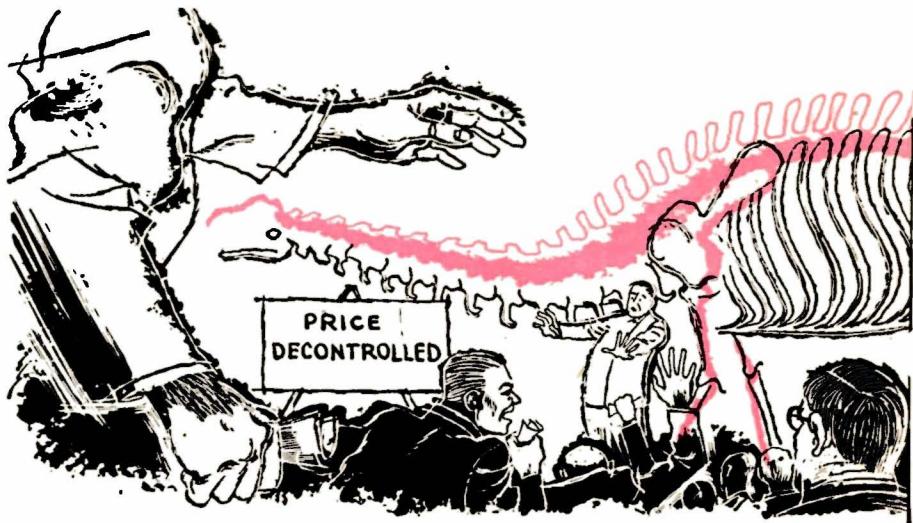
"I guess I know my job all right," said Engstrom, folding the contract and putting it in his pocket. "Now when and where will you make delivery?"

"I'd rather not be pinned down on that exactly, you know. It'll take some months, and after such intensive work I like to relax on my way home. And when I get to Canal City, I never know how long I'll stay. Suppose I let you know later?"

A grim smile stretched Engstrom's mouth as he patted his pocket and looked at Sam for a long, deliberate minute.

"Suppose you do," he said.

As always, Sam enjoyed the lift, the zoom, as the ship escaped



from the earth, and he did not mind the merging into hyperspace.

It seemed no time at all before he had delivered his triple cargo to the Mayor on Aeropagis III, accepted his grateful speeches, and departed for the other side of the mountains. No time at all before his ship was loaded and he was spaceborne again, heading for Mars. He stowed his cargo in a warehouse on the outskirts of Canal City, then settled down to a lazy life in an excellent hotel. Fabian Hardlan, he learned, was off exploring the region of the south polar cap, but would be back in a few weeks.

Sam relaxed. He studied the market reports from Earth, and

each day checked up on the pronouncements of Stabilization Office of Commodity Bureau. The price of tin, he noted, was exactly what it had been when he left Earth, so low that even the owner of a thousand slaves could not mine it at a profit.

He had been relaxing in Canal City for nearly a month when, one evening at the hotel bar, he felt a heavy hand smack him on the back.

"Hello there, Mr. Baracol," said a trembling voice. "I bet you didn't expect to see *me* here."

Sam turned around. "Engstrom! What are you doing here? And how you're shivering! You need a drink, man!"

Engstrom was wrapped as tight



as a cocoon in a brown fur cape with bulging pockets, and a brown muffler which covered his face to just below his eyes. His voice shook. "Why didn't anybody ever tell me how cold it gets on Mars? I've *never* been as cold as this in my life. Can't stand cold, anyhow!"

"Have a drink," said Sam.

"I guess I need it, even if it is warm in here."

When the hot whiskey had stopped his chill, he threw back his cape and grinned cagily.

"Surprised to see me?"

"Indeed I am! But I had been thinking about you. I was just deciding that it's about time I notified you I was ready to deliver my first consignment.

What airport would be most convenient for you?"

"No need to worry about that now, Mr. Baracol. You can turn the stuff over to me right here in Canal City."

"Here? Now?"

"That's right. Here and now. They warned me to watch out for you, and that's what I'm doing. And in case you had any idea of fooling me and smuggling a few cases onto Earth quietly, you can forget about it. I think I've nipped that little scheme of yours right in the bud."

"You do me an injustice," Sam said, shaking his head injuredly. "Indeed you do."

"That's neither here nor there. But I guess I feel warmed up

enough by this time. Let's go."

"Go where?"

"To inspect the goods, of course!" He shivered again. "I want to get it over with and catch the first ship back to Earth. How anybody ever stands this miserable climate is beyond me."

"But surely," Sam objected, "there's no reason for hurry. After all, it's a perfectly straightforward —"

"Hah!" Engstrom snorted. "Perfectly straightforward flim-flam, if I know you! Don't try any tricks with me, Mr. Baracol. I've got that contract you signed right here in my pocket, and you know what'll happen to you if you try to get out of it."

"My dear Mr. Engstrom! I assure you, I am quite ready. I was only concerned for your health."

The warehouse was a drab barracks of a building, one of fifty clustered together on the bare red sands of Mars. The two men entered a drafty corridor and walked past locked bins and compartments. They stopped at a door marked "Baracol."

Sam unlocked the door. They entered a small room, unfurnished except for a ramshackle desk with a crowbar lying on it and a glowing electric heater. A sealed crate sat on the floor near the heater.

"Well, there you are, Mr. Eng-

strom," Sam said pleasantly, pointing at the crate. He opened a desk drawer and got out some sheets of paper. "I'll just get the receipt ready for you to sign."

"Aren't you going to open the crate?"

Sam looked startled. "Is that necessary? Surely you've seen tin before."

"Open the crate!"

Sam shrugged delicately. "Oh, very well," he said. "If you insist."

Picking up the crowbar, he snapped the metal bands that bound the crate. Inside were neatly stacked blocks of gleaming tin.

"Pretty stuff, isn't it?" said Sam. "I always admire the glow of metal."

Engstrom scowled and scratched one of the bars with a fingernail. "That's funny," he said dubiously. "Looks all right to me."

"Funny?" repeated Sam. "I hardly understand. In any case, as long as you're satisfied, here's the receipt. Just sign here, please."

"Hey, wait a minute!" Engstrom pointed at the scrawled paper. "This says a hundred cases. There ain't but one case here. Before I sign anything, where's the other ninety-nine?"

"Why, obviously I didn't have room for a hundred cases in this little room. They're in a larger storeroom, down the hall. Frankly,

Mr. Engstrom, I'm amazed at your attitude. Is there any reason why they shouldn't all be just like this one?"

"That," Engstrom said grimly, "I don't know, Mr. Baracol. All I know is they told me to watch out for tricks from you. I'm not going to sign my name that you delivered a hundred cases of tin, when all I see is one. I'm not so dumb as all that."

"But surely you don't want to take the time to inspect ninety-nine more crates, each one exactly like all the others? Besides, the storeroom isn't heated, you know."

"I don't care. Time I got plenty of. Let's see those crates."

Sam shrugged his shoulders. Wordlessly he led the way back into the hall, to a corridor which led to an icy cavern of a room where sat ninety-nine more cases.

Rubbing his hands briskly for warmth, he said: "There they are. Been sitting there more than a month. Satisfied?"

"Start opening them!" commanded Engstrom. He sneezed.

Sam hesitated. His shoulders drooped. "The cold —" he began, his eyes fixed to the floor.

"Open them!"

Slowly Sam took up the crow-bar, slowly he ripped the metal bands and laid bare the contents of the first case.

In it, stacked to the top, was an

amorphous, unhealthy looking pile of gray blocks. Engstrom bent over and clutched one in his hand. It crumbled to powder. He touched another. It crumbled.

He snatched the bar from Sam's slack hand and pried open a second case, a third, a fourth. Each one contained the same: a brittle gray metal which crumbled in his grasp. He turned on Sam.

"What *is* this stuff?" he demanded.

"Tin," Sam said hesitantly.

"Oh, sure," Engstrom said sarcastically. "Of course it's tin. Any fool can tell that just by looking at it. What are you trying to pull here, Mr. Baracol?"

Sam spread his hands. This was the crucial point of his whole plan. He hardly dared breathe as he said mournfully, "It's *supposed* to be tin, Mr. Engstrom. Naturally, I didn't do the refining with my own hands. But I am sure that no one intended any subterfuge or anything like that. I suppose it's just barely possible that there has been some mistake. . . ."

"Mistake!" Engstrom sneered — and quickly converted it into a sneeze. "Curse this cold!" he said savagely. "Anyway, Mr. Baracol, we'll see what's going to be done about this. This — this junk you're trying to pass off as tin is the last sharp trick you're going to pull. I refuse to accept it."

"Refuse to accept it?" Sam's

tone was indignant, but his heart leaped with joy.

"Yes! And what's more, I'm going to see just what the home office thinks of this, Mr. Baracol. Where's your phone?"

"My what?" Sam squawked, his heart sinking into his boots.

"Your phone. Oh, don't worry, I'll reverse the charges. I believe I saw a phone in your office. Don't bother to show me the way; I can find it."

He started back along the corridor, and Sam scampered after him. "One moment, Mr. Engstrom," he wheedled. "Look, there's no need to put your department to the expense of an interplanetary phone call. If you don't want to accept the tin, by all means don't do it—I won't mind. But—"

"No, sir," said Engstrom triumphantly. "We've got you dead to rights this time. I'll get you for conspiracy to defraud—malicious mischief—oh, wait till I get to that phone!"

"Excuse me," Sam said desperately, and darted ahead of the Commodities man. He raced through the door of his office, scurried at the base of his desk for the phone wires. It wasn't the loss of money that bothered him—though he had a small fortune tied up in this deal—but for Buccaneer Baracol to lose out to a nincompoop like Engstrom—and just on a wild chance like

this—was more than merely humiliating. Sam knew perfectly well what would happen when Engstrom called the Home Office. It was not what Engstrom would expect—but it was catastrophic for Sam.

He found the phone wires at last and gave them a healthy jerk. They came free and he sat erect, searching his imagination for something to tell Engstrom when he appeared in the doorway.

But seconds passed, and Engstrom didn't appear.

"Good lord!" Sam exclaimed. Faster than he had come in, he dodged around the desk and hurried back along the corridor.

Engstrom's patient figure was sitting in a straight-backed chair outside the storage room, sniffing and looking as self-satisfied as a man with a running nose can look.

"My phone's out of order," Sam began tentatively.

Engstrom nodded. "I was afraid it might be," he said icily. "Fortunately, I found this extension here. Just be patient, Mr. Baracol. They're putting the call to Earth through now."

It took a quarter of an hour for connection to be made, and then the long delays in question-and-answer prolonged the conversation half an hour more. Sam took some slight pleasure in watching Engstrom congeal in the frigid air of the storerooms. But that

was about all he had to take pleasure in.

The whole plan was collapsing in ruins around his head. And when Engstrom stepped out of the booth, Sam saw that his worst fears were realized.

Through chattering teeth, Engstrom said: "S-s-strange thing, Mr. B-Baracol. They s-s-s-say that stuff is really t-t-tin, after all!"

"Of course," Sam said hollowly. And indeed it was. Allotropic, cold-weather tin; pure tin, which by melting and recasting would get back all of its luster and silvery gleam, but made into a dull powdery substance by the cold, cold air of Mars. Well, he told himself, it had been a flimsy trick anyhow; it served him right that it had failed.

"They s-said," Engstrom went on, "that you were j-j-just trying to evade the p-price controls — h-h-h-hoping I would turn it down so you could import it to Earth without restriction, and sell it in the b-b-b-black market for whatever p-price you could g-g-g-get. T-tough luck that we found you out, Mr. B-Baracol! Now get out your receipt, and I'll s-s-s-sign it!"

Sam, leaden-hearted, found the scrap of paper and held it out to Engstrom's shivering hand. The government man was in acute distress, he saw, eyes watering, red face mottled by the white

weals of hives, teeth chattering.

Sam narrowed his eyes. There was something familiar about this — something that he could just barely recall on the fringes of his memory.

He said smoothly: "Here's your receipt, Mr. Engstrom. Maybe we'd better go back to my hotel for you to sign it. It's hard to get a pen to write in this cold. And besides, back in my hotel I have the antidote for you —"

He let his voice trail off, in the manner of a man who realizes he has said too much.

Engstrom's head snapped up. "Antidote?" he gasped. He stared around the room, caught a glimpse of his own reflection in the glass of the phone booth door. Mottled face, streaming eyes, nostrils contorted as they fought for breath. "I'm poisoned!" he yelped. "Baracol, you're poisoning me!"

"No, no," Sam said hastily. "It's merely a simple allergy, Mr. Engstrom. Please come back, and let's get this thing signed. . . ."

"What is it?" Engstrom demanded. "What's p-p-poisoning me? Is it this s-stuff?" His sweeping gesture included the whole room of allotropic tin.

"Well, yes," Sam admitted. "Please, Mr. Engstrom, you'll feel better when we get back to the hotel. I'll give you the antidote right away. It's not serious — unless, of course, you let it go. Some people are allergic to

it. Some are not — I'm not, for instance."

Engstrom was a pitiable sight, but red sparks of rage danced in his eyes. "C-come on," he demanded. "We're going back to your hotel all right. I want that antidote. And I'm r-r-refusing this shipment, in writing. If it isn't p-poisonous, we'll prosecute you for fraud. And if it is, if you g-g-g-go ahead and import a poisonous substance to earth, the Sanitation Bureau will get after you. And then, h-h-h-heaven h-help you, Mr. Baracol!"

"All right," Sam said despondently. And carefully did not meet Engstrom's eyes until the refusal was safely signed.

Late that night, after Engstrom had radioed his report to Earth — ethergrams cost only a fraction of an interplanetary phone call's fantastic price — Sam sat with him in the snug barroom of the hotel. Engstrom was more comfortable now, and his face looked nearly normal as he sipped his hot brandy.

"Those pills you gave me helped a lot," he said grudgingly. "If it hadn't been for them I'd have you in the jug now for attempted manslaughter. What kind of pills were they?"

"Ssh," said Sam, and leaned closer to the telecaster, with its late news from Earth. When he heard the confirmation of what

he had expected — all price controls had been removed from tin, in order to encourage mining operations and research for substitutes — Sam could not refrain from patting the pocket where Engstrom's signed refusal rested, with a contented smile.

"Don't look so damn cheerful," Engstrom said sarcastically. "Don't forget I've got you coming and going. If that tin is poisonous, you can't import it. If it isn't, you've committed fraud."

Sam smiled beatifically. "Look," he said, pointing. "Fabian's back from his trip." Hardlan was smiling at them from the door.

"How's the polar cap?" Sam asked the newcomer.

"Cold. How's your tin?"

"Oh," said Sam, "it's cold too."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that it's still in the warehouse here at Canal City. Mr. Engstrom here has refused to accept it for the Commodities office, and so I am now at liberty to sell it in the open market at any price I can get. I may say that I expect to add substantially to a somewhat depleted bank account."

Engstrom's jaw dropped. "Are you crazy? You can't sell that stuff! It's poisonous — you said so yourself."

"Did I?" asked Sam.

"You sure did. Look what it did to me, back in the warehouse.

I would have died if you hadn't given me those pills. You said so!"

Sam was shaking his head. "Wrong on three counts, Mr. Engstrom," he said gently. "The tin isn't poisonous—I didn't say it was—and those pills weren't the antidote. Think back to my exact words. Did I say the *tin* was poisonous?"

"Well, I *asked*—"

"You asked me if 'this stuff' did it. I assumed you meant the cold, Mr. Engstrom," said Sam virtuously, "and I told you very truthfully that it did. I sincerely hope you did not mistake my meaning. There are a few unfortunate individuals who are allergic to cold, just as others of us are allergic to goldenrod pollen or chicken feathers. You are one of them, a fact which I should have recognized some time ago."

Engstrom choked. "But the antidote," he babbled. "Those pills—"

Sam grinned. "The pills were plain, everyday antihistamines, Mr. Engstrom. They weren't the antidote, though it is true they helped you. They are standard treatment for any case of allergy. I keep them myself in case I should accidentally run across a cat."

Engstrom leaped to his feet. "Curse you," he said in a stran-

gled tone. "Then you did trick me, after all?"

"That's strong language," Sam objected. "I told you nothing but the truth at any time."

Clutching at a straw, Engstrom said: "The antidote—you said you had a special antidote in your hotel room."

Sam smiled fondly at the Commodities man. "And so I did, Mr. Engstrom. The only suitable antidote for relief of cold allergy on a permanent basis. You will find it in any heated room, Mr. Engstrom. We call it warmth."

When Engstrom, wordlessly enraged, had left the room, Fabian Hardlan chuckled. "Sam, you're an old buccaneer, just as they say.

"I never deceive anyone," Sam said blandly. "It's so much easier to let people deceive themselves — though I must admit I had a few difficult moments with Engstrom over this tin. You know, Fabian, what a straightforward fellow I am. And yet, for some mysterious reason, I often inspire suspicion even when I least deserve it. Poor Engstrom! It's a pity he has such an untrusting nature."

"I never liked his face," said Fabian absently. "By the way, Sam, when are you going to tell me the *real* story of what you did with my dinosaur bones?"

Sam smiled dreamily.