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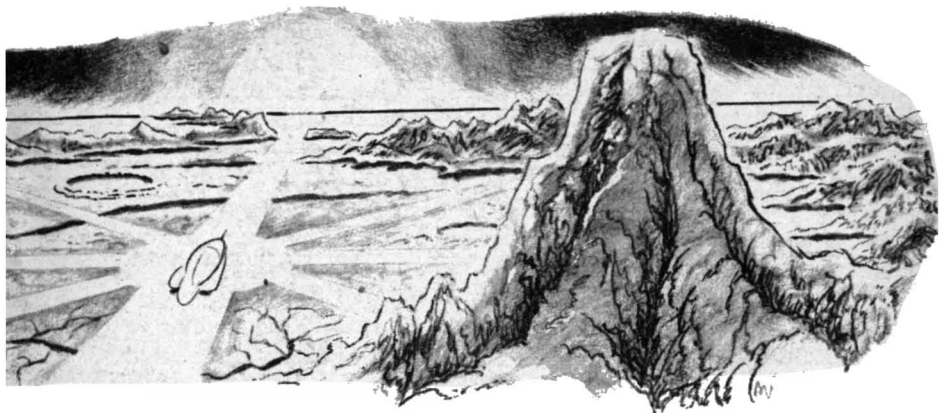
YALMAR GUNN leaned over the table and shook his large, hairy fist in the little Scientist's mild face. The gesture was pure drama, but, Norry Falk told himself, obviously Gunn was a man of dramatic gestures.

"By the stars," he bellowed with all the ferocity at his command, "you'll hand it over, or I'll lift my ship tonight and blow your deleted city to atoms!"

The two other men at the council table in the Perkunian

tower chamber held their breaths. For that matter, Norry Falk, Savant Twens Dalen's thirty-year-old assistant, had been holding his consistently since the space captain's voice had begun to rise and he had taken to fondling his flame pistol. Now even the hard-faced lieutenant whom Gunn had brought with him to the meeting removed his pipe from his mouth and seemed to grow tense.

Falk eyed bitterly the captain's



CAPTAIN'S GETAWAY

**BOLD WAS THE CAPTAIN, PIRATE OF THE VAST
INTERPLANETARY SPACES... BUT THE SCIENTIST WAS BOLDER!**

holstered gun; in view of the growing distrust between the men of Science City and the crew of the *Fomalhaut*, there had been a no-weapons clause in the terms for the parley. Ridiculous, perhaps, since the warship's guns completely commanded Science City from its berth out on the airless surface. But Falk wished ardently that he had smuggled in at least a small needle-gun on his own account.

Twens Dalen, blinking a little

at the large fist as the other let it fall, still clenched, was speaking, with a choice of words which betrayed a passion for precise statement. "It is not a question of those alternatives, Captain," he said quietly. "If Science City must be blown to atoms, as you put it, it will not be by your agency."

"What the hell do you mean?" Gunn scowled with all his big blond face. He had once been accustomed to be polite—almost

silky, in fact—with the personnel of captured cargo or passenger vessels in the depths of space; but those had been occasions on which he had held all the cards. Now his nerves were on edge; before he had left his bridge to come to the parley, he had rechecked a certain set of figures on the calculator, and the results might have shaken even a better balanced individual.

Dalen blinked again; but a little of his studiedly courteous manner fell from him as he spoke. "I'm aware, Captain Gunn, that you are the representative of no stellar government whatsoever; in short, you are a private. Furthermore, your ship escaped to Perkunas after a brush with a Bellatrician patrol cruiser in deep space, and you believe yourself to have been pursued. You have calculated the time required for the patrol ship to change course; it should arrive within twenty days."

As the pirate, silenced for once, merely stared at him, the Savant explained gently: "You see, Captain, Perkunas, though technocratically governed and devoted to the pursuit of pure science, has its working classes and its taverns—where some of your crew on leave saw fit to talk."

The Scientist's circumlocutions had given Gunn time to recover his wits. Without moving, he

said sullenly, "Okay, Doc, so you can't be kidded. But I'm not trying to kid you when I say that unless you hand over that deleted space drive, I'm going to get sort of rough with a few atomics. You know now just why I've got to have it."

There was a deadliness in the last statement that made young Norry Falk wish even more urgently for a needle-gun. It might just be possible, he reflected, to snatch the pirate's own weapon from its holster and use it . . . But the timidity of one born and bred as a comrade of Science on isolated Perkunas, with its scant million of people and its poverty-engendered immunity to raids and strife, held him back.

Dalen said, "You seem to hold the illusion, Captain Gunn, that you are in a position to dictate to me—to our planet. That is an error."

"And what do you mean by that?" demanded Yalmar Gunn, his cold blue eyes narrowed.

Dalen did not answer at once. Instead, head bowed, he was examining his wrist watch, an elaborate radium timepiece; he seemed to be adjusting it. At last, still concealing the dial from Gunn, he raised his eyes and said expressionlessly, "I frequently use this chronometer as a timer for certain mechanisms. At present, the vibration frequency

which it emits is keyed to a single control in my laboratory directly beneath this tower. If the chronometer is not set back, once every three hours, to a certain definite point, this control will automatically disintegrate the five tons of radioactive copper which form our power reservoir." He paused, then added, with a touch of apology, "An elementary device for purposes of personal security. I cannot claim that it has any scientific merit."

He did not need to add that such an explosion would blow not only Science City, but most of the planet of Perkunas, and the ship *Fomalhaut* along with it, quite literally to atoms.

By a Herculean effort, Norry Falk kept his face immobile. That was necessary, for if he had allowed anything to show there Gunn's alert, fox-faced lieutenant might have read from his expression that there was no such control as Dalen had mentioned—indeed, no five tons of atomic copper buried under Science City. And had there been, the gentle chief of the Perkunian Scientists would never have gambled with a million lives, even to save his most precious secrets.

But Captain Yalmar Gunn took the threat at face value, for the moment, at least, and on that basis he thought very fast indeed. He was motionless for one stag-

gered moment—. Then, with a roar, the blond pirate lunged headlong across the small table, seized Dalen's left wrist in a bruising grip, and twisted it savagely until he could see the chronometer dial.

In almost the same fraction of time, his companion, pipe still in mouth, moved like a rattlesnake to seize Gunn's flame pistol from its holster and train it on Norry Falk, pinning him, as it were, against the chair in which he sat.

For a few seconds they were a tableau. Then, with a satisfied grunt, Gunn released the Scientist's wrist, almost thrusting him over backward, and straightened up. He whipped a stylo from a pocket of his jacket, and fumbled in another pocket for a scrap of paper.

The slight, gray-haired Savant massaged his wrist and said something under his breath which might have been a credit even to Gunn's vocabulary. Then he controlled his breathing and said quietly, "I shouldn't trouble to write down that reading, Captain. Too much time has already passed—. And even if your time-sense were perfect enough to permit you to make exactly the proper allowance for the time since I set it last, the chronometer is adjusted to run at a varying rate requiring three factors for its determination."

If Gunn had been even half a scientist instead of a credulous swashbuckler, he would never have swallowed that. But after one indecisive moment it was plain that he had. He glared, crumpling his paper in one huge fist.

Then he said the obvious thing—said it with a bravado which proclaimed him uncertain: "You won't do it. You won't blow your whole deleted planet to hell just to keep me here."

"I wouldn't do it," said Twens Dalen gravely, "merely to keep you on Perkunas. I assuredly don't want you here. But in view of your threat to blast the city, I cannot allow you to lift your ship."

Gunn revolved the situation for a space, biting his lips painfully. It was, after all, a business he could understand. The old match-over-the-powder-barrel business. If a man thinks he has to die in one of two ways, he will choose that by which he may take his enemy with him. In fact, Gunn had heard of a rather similar case, which had ended unfortunately for all concerned—in the explosion of the old-line battleship *Virgo*.

Men are always the same in a pinch, and even this gray-headed, milk-and-water Scientist might be reluctantly classed as a man. Moreover, Gunn had the common

conviction that Scientists as a rule are cold-blooded devils—the sort who would blow up a planet as unconcernedly as he would blow his nose.

"It comes to this," said Dalen. "You cannot possibly leave Perkunas without my permission. I cannot afford to grant you that permission. We seem, Captain," he added thoughtfully, "to be seated on opposite horns of a dilemma."

Gunn, who most passionately did not wish to die, never thought of mentioning that he had nothing else to lose, since if the Bellatrixian patrol caught him they would certainly vent certain grudges against him in a very signal manner. Instead, he suggested, with the air of one proffering a very small coin: "Suppose I give you my word I won't blast you if you let me lift?"

"I'm afraid," replied Dalen regretfully, "that that wouldn't be quite adequate."

Norry Falk, watching the two principals in the meeting like a hypnotized bird, wondered how much longer this could go on. He also wondered how much more of it his nervous system could stand. It seemed impossible that either the pirate or his sly-looking lieutenant could long fail to see through the bluff.

Feeling his facial expression unable to hold up under the

strain, he half turned to look out through the double windows of the tower chamber, from which an excellent view of Perkunas' surface showed a vista of red-lit desolation awesome even to one who had known it all his life. As an excuse for his action, the raider *Fomalhaut* lay out there, a long, gleaming giant on the runway three miles away.

It was while he stared glumly at that, trying to calm the jangling of his nerves, that the import of Dalen's next words hit him.

"In spite of all difficulties, Captain," said the master Scientist, "I think we may be able to reach a compromise. As a man of Science, I have nothing against you and no interest in your quarrels with the government of Bellatrix or of any other system. Therefore—while I repeat that I must refuse to give you my space drive—I am willing to sell it to you."

Falk spun around from the window. The two pirates remained as they were—Gunn still standing, with hard knuckles resting on the polished plastic tabletop.

Hope and suspicion gleamed across his florid face. "What's the catch?" he demanded hoarsely.

"I'm not trying to trick you," said Dalen with asperity. "I'm offering to sell you the space drive, exactly as I described it to you on the day of your arrival—when I

still believed you to be a legitimately-authorized ship's captain—in return for the supply of fuel which you have aboard the *Fomalhaut*. I understand that amount to be some twelve tons—a quantity which will serve admirably in a series of experiments which I contemplate. Naturally, I am otherwise motivated to make this offer by the mutual discomfort of our circumstances."

Gunn thought hard. He was accustomed to put two and two together rapidly—though more complex operations left him baffled—and he did it now.

"Before I make any bargains," he said cautiously, "I like to know what I'm getting." He laid two blunt fingers on the table in front of the Scientist. "One: Even if I've got the space drive, how do I get away from the deleted Bellatrixers without a deleted gram of fuel? And Two—." He hesitated. Then, convinced that his opponent held most of the cards, he threw his own down, face up. "How do you figure on making sure I don't go ahead and give you the double-cross anyway?"

Twen Dalen showed his disgust at the pirate's crudity. He almost snorted. "You don't appear to have listened to my first description of the space drive," he said acidly. "If you had, you would be aware that no power is required for its use—."

Gunn had started pacing to and fro, pushing his chair out of his way with a nervous irritability in sharp contrast to the collected coolness of the aging Scientist. He interrupted, "Yeah, you said that. Practically a perpetual motion machine. I'm no physicist, but I know damn well there's a law of conservation of energy!"

"If you don't believe that the space drive will work," answered Dalen coldly, "you don't want it."

Gunn made a distracted gesture. He glanced out toward where his ship lay on the lava plateaus under the red light of the sun; but he saw instead the armed fury that was the Bellatrixian patrol cruiser, less than a hundred billion miles away now, flinging itself toward the Perkunian sun at a speed not far from that of light. Decelerating now, on the scattered track of ions left by his own deceleration. They already knew that he had headed for the red dwarf star, either to land on its single planet or to lose himself in its electrical aura. They would know where to find him . . .

He cursed the Scientist briefly but violently, and said, "I want it."

"Very well . . . I will add a little to my former explanation: Briefly, the space drive requires no energy, and the effective velocity attained by its use is infinite. To understand this statement in its en-

tirety, you would need to have an understanding of the trepidational theory of universe-building, with its corollary of the energy-death . . . But perhaps, at least, you are familiar with Einstein's law of mass-velocity relationships." Gunn shook his shaggy blond hair, and with an effort said nothing. "Surely you are aware that the mass of a ship in flight varies according to its velocity," the Scientist went on. "At the theoretical limit—the so-called speed of light — its mass would be infinite; but to reach such a velocity you would have to expend an infinity of fuel. So far as Einstein knew when he formulated his theory, about a thousand Earth-years ago, nothing ever attained that ultimate.

"But, almost thirty years ago, Uttrell of Perkunas succeeded in demonstrating the existence in our own space-time of particles which move at the theoretical limit of velocity, and whose mass consequently is infinite. From the cosmological standpoint, of course, this indicates clearly that our Universe has entered the final stage of degeneration, and will in time cease to exist as we know it . . . For practical purposes, however, such particles represent a source of infinite power, only requiring to be tapped. That is what my space drive does."

"How?" demanded Gunn.

"The mathematical explanation is somewhat abstruse; you would find it quite incomprehensible. The gross effect is the establishment of a static field which transmits the energy of any particle striking it to all the matter within the field."

Now Yalmar Gunn's shrewd mind saw the implications, and he leaped at once to the point, with an abrupt fierce eagerness. "And you can set up a field to include the *Fomalhaut*?"

The Savant nodded casually. "Without any essential change in the mechanism. I am willing to deliver to you a complete working model of the space drive as soon as you have unloaded twelve tons of atomic fuel outside Science City. You won't be needing it."

Gunn hardly heard him, for all at once the tremendous possibilities of the space drive had begun to unfold themselves before him. Five minutes earlier, the end of his illegitimate career had seemed certainty. Now . . .

He saw himself become invulnerable, outrunning the fastest warships with ease, raiding at will into the very hearts of the peopled systems. He tried to keep the eager tremor out of his voice as he said slowly, "Okay, Doc. Any chance is better than none. You're on — if the deleted thing works."

"It works," said Twens Dalen flatly, and rose to close the conversation.

Gunn likewise stood up; then a thought stiffened him with suspicion. "Wait — a — minute! What about deceleration?"

"The field," Dalen informed him, "is directional and reversible. Naturally."

"Shake on it," said Gunn with satisfaction. The Scientist took the proffered paw not without distaste, and winced at the big brute's grip. The captain went on, "I'll have the fuel chargers unloaded by tomorrow morning — that's twenty kilochrons on this asteroid, isn't it? And I'll have my crew on board, if I have to sweep every gutter in Science City."

It was marvelous how, with an escape avenue in sight, the pirate captain became once more the roughly efficient leader of men. Twens Dalen smiled covertly, and even Norry Falk, on edge as he still was, could not but be amused at the manner in which Gunn began to fire orders at his fox-faced lieutenant before the two had started down in the tower elevator.

When the door had slid to, the two men of Science looked at each other and drew a deep breath apiece. Then, with one accord, they both glanced out over the city to where the *Fomalhaut*,

a gleaming and splendid thing of sky-piercing power, lay on the high plateau.

"That will be gone tomorrow," said Dalen, with deep relief.

Later, in Twens Dalen's lower-level laboratory, the two carefully went over the little machine—if the term "machine" can properly be applied to a stable complex of matter and of tangible and intangible forces — which was in essence a modification of Utrell's apparatus for the detection of high-speed photons.

The device, unused for half a dozen, Perkunian years, was in perfect working order. Twens Dalen extracted a partly-fused metal coil from a scrap compartment, and placed it in the static field. His assistant finished setting the directional control for vertical, and activated that control. A whispering sound began as air sucked into the field. And the metal coil was gone.

A detector, however, had registered its departure in terms translatable by human eyes; the coil had gone straight up, with an instantaneous acceleration of the order of 200,000 mpsps — an acceleration which, simultaneously applied to its entire mass, must have left the coil still a coil, though it had passed without apparent hindrance through the solid ceiling of the laboratory and, some distance above it, the

airtight shell over Science City.

"It works," said Twens Dalen laconically. He crossed the room to a vision screen which was connected to every scanner inside or outside the city; a single adjustment brought the landing strip with the piratical visitor into view. The tiny figures of vacuum-suited men could be seen in the shadow of the huge hull, struggling in pairs with the weight of the thousand-kilo fuel chargers, a heap of which already rested in the plateau two hundred yards from the vessel. "Our plan also."

Falk shook his head ruefully. "Don't say 'our plan.' I had no idea what you were about until you offered him the space drive."

"It's for both of us to carry out, Norry," said the older Scientist. "I'm deputizing you to deliver the drive to Gunn—and to get away without being held as a hostage."

"Uh!" said Falk.

But he was cocky enough the next day, after his safe return from the pirate vessel.

"Nothing to it, after all," he informed the Chief Scientist, seated with a somewhat tense group of others before one of the large visiplates in the main relaxation room. Falk cast a glance at the screen, which showed the *Fomalhaut* still resting on the plateau in the dim red light of the early sun. "Just," he said, dropping into a comfortable chair and lean-

ing far back, "a matter of hiking out to the ship, tossing the space drive into Captain Gunn's eager clutches, and hiking back. He was so happy at getting his hooks on it that he didn't even consider detaining me, though I fancied there was one moment when he didn't feel too kindly toward me—when I told him he couldn't use the space drive to withdraw to a discreet distance and then turn his atomics on the city, because he'd be out of range before . . ."

He broke off, and with all the rest stared hard at the screen. An instant before the *Fomalhaut*, a thousand feet of gleaming niosteel, had lain out there; now the space ship was gone as if it had never existed, vanished like the metal coil in Twens Dalen's laboratory—at ultimate speed.

For a moment the assembled Scientists, awed despite their foreknowledge, gazed at the spot where it had been. Then as one man they rose and pounded each other on the back.

The captain of the Bellatrician patrol cruiser was a five-foot anthropomorphic robot. There are few men, save those of Gunn's type, who are willing to sever themselves from all human ties to

live the life of interstellar space.

It said, puzzled, "Am I to believe, Savant Dalen, that you have not only allowed the pirate Gunn to escape, but to escape with a weapon more potent than any yet invented?"

Twens Dalen shook his head brusquely. "He has escaped, yes, and you can never catch him. But the space drive is not a weapon; and Gunn will never come back to menace your shipping or anybody else's. You fail to understand, as did he, that infinite velocity means—infinite velocity."

The Bellatrician robot seemed puzzled, if lensed eyes can express bewilderment. "Indeed I fail to understand. You have said that the *Fomalhaut* escaped into space at the velocity of light."

The Scientist smiled. "That is correct. Gunn and his ship are now traveling at the limiting velocity of light. Therefore, according to Einstein's law, time no longer exists for them. They will traverse all of space-time in an instant.

"Gunn is alive and unharmed; indeed, he is immortal. He lives in an everlasting now which is the moment of his departure from Perkunas; and thus he will live—forever." * * *