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CREATURES OF GREEN SLIME

by JAMES ROSENQUEST

THE DAY THE MONSTERS BROKE LOOSE

by ROBERT SILVERBERG



TERROR OF THE UNDEAD CORPSES

by RUSSELL THOMPSON



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THE DAY THE MONSTERS BROKE LOOSE

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

People were trampled underfoot, people were crunched by ten-foot teeth in huge, fanged jaws — people died by the hundreds that day — were eaten like tidbits!

NEXT week they'll be holding the Big Show, the Spectacular of Spectaculars, in Chicago. 150,000 people will be packed into Soldier Field to watch a couple of alien monsters rip each other to shreds.

Well, I'm not going to be there, for once. I'm going to be a couple of thousand miles away, in Los Angeles, sitting in a little bar off Wilshire where they *don't* have video, and I'll be guzzling synthoscotch and trying to forget all about my part in next week's show.

I'm the guy who caught the creatures that are going to perform next Fiveday night. I'm

Jim Barstow of Barstow Expeditors, Incorporated. *We Bring 'em Back Alive* is our motto, shamefully stolen from a great hunter of a couple of centuries ago, and right up until our last trip we were considered the top outfit in our line. But now I want to sell my share and get out of the filthy business while I still have a little piece of my soul left.

We made our first trip to World Twelve of Star System DA-7116 exactly two years ago. Herschel, my booking agent, gave me a buzz on the telestat one morning and said he had landed a fat contract for us. Barstow Expeditors



happened to be between jobs at the moment, and I was enjoying the pleasant layoff, but I obediently came shuttling across the country to New York for the contract interview.

We were being hired by J. Franklin Magnus of Magnus Promotions—the number one spectacle-producer of the twenty-second century. Magnus was famous for the way he threw money around. I flew to New York determined to soak him for all he would part with.

We met in his office on the 180th floor of the Universe Building in uptown Manhattan. Magnus was a small, roly-poly man with a deep and probably phoney sun-tan and a thick, stubby mustache died blue according to the latest fashion. He was wearing a blue-white Sirian diamond the size of a peach. He reeked of wealth.

He offered me some hundred-year-old brandy and said, "Sit down, Barstow."

I sat. He pulled out photographs in tridim solido and shoved them across the desk at me.

"Know what there are, Barstow?"

The tridims showed an animal. A big animal. Somebody had parked a two-man jetfitter in the picture to provide comparison, and I figured the beast was at least eighty feet high. It stood on two legs the size of treetrunks, only thicker, ending in flat pads. There were four more limbs, but these were made for grabbing and tearing.

The creature's head looked like it was all teeth, except for a trio of eyes the size of platters, mounted to swivel in all directions.

I nodded and said, "Sure I know what it is. It's a beastie called by a Latin name two yards long. It lives on—let me think—World Twelve of Star System DA-7116."

"Right!" Magnus exclaimed, as if I'd just answered the million-ruble question on a quiz program. Of course, it's my job to know where the really fierce creatures of the galaxy can be found.

Magnus went on, "I want you to catch me one of those things, Barstow. I'm going to match it in the arena with a pair of knifeleg killersaurs

from Procyon Eight." His eyes were glittering with delight. "Nobody's ever brought a World Twelve monster back to Earth alive before. Think you can do it?"

"Yes," I said. "For a price."

"Name it!"

"How soon do you need the animal?"

"Tomorrow. Next week. Next month. Anytime!"

I thought for a moment. "The round trip to Star System DA-7116 takes nine weeks. Allow two weeks more for catching the beast. I can deliver within twelve weeks, Magnus. Is that good enough?"

"Splendid!"

"And the price," I added casually. "I've got to figure on the cost of shipping out a three-month expedition. Insurance, food, fuel, payroll. Plus margin of profit. I'd say I could supply you with your animal for—oh, in the neighborhood of \$750,000. If that sounds okay, I can give you a detailed estimate later in the day—"

"Make it \$800,000," he said buoyantly, "and don't worry about counting the nickels.

Just get me that creature, Barstow!"

So we signed the contracts right then and there. I got \$250,000 as an advance, the rest to be paid on delivery. Delivery to be made in three months or less, of one adult and healthy creature.

I picked my crew out of the pool of thirty or forty men I use on such expeditions. Seven men, hand-picked, went along with me when we blasted off for Star System DA-7116 four days later.

I don't think historians of the future are going to be very kind to the twenty-second century. It was a century of peace, sure—harmony prevailed on Earth and for the first time in aeons no war even loomed on the distant horizon. Earth knew peace.

But, sad to say, there are various instincts of aggression and hostility bound up in the human psyche, unhappy remnants of our caveman past. And with no war to release these dark emotions, they manifested themselves in other ways. It was a bloody century

for the entertainment industry. First there was the bullfight craze sweeping the world, but that soon bored everyone. And then the human gladiators, the Roman Revival period, only that was on the shocking side, and the United States finally banned it.

There were steeplechases and jet races and all sorts of other hazardous exhibitions. The populace loved the sight of blood. They loved to feel vicarious pain.

Then along came Magnus and the others of his ilk, the monster merchandisers. It seemed that the universe was full of ferocious and ghastly creatures, many of them formidable in size, Why not, reasoned these promoters, hire explorers to bring back alien creatures and pit them against each other in the arenas?

So the spectacular contests began. My outfit and a dozen others began to roam the stars, bringing back the wildlife of a thousand worlds. The arenas reeked with alien blood. Green blood, yellow blood. The crowds loved it. They paid ten bucks a seat to watch a giant

octopus from Bellatrix VII go at a land-whale from Rigel III.

The monsters really packed them in. Guys like J. Franklin Magnus became billionaires promoting the monster contests, and guys like me built up comfortable bank accounts by supplying the raw material for these bloodfests.

This was my fortieth collecting trip. I didn't want to think about the tons and tons of monsterflesh I had ferried back to Earth to be ripped apart in the arenas, while a hundred thousand screaming maniacs yelled encouragement from the sidelines and a hundred million more sat on the edges of their seats and drooled into their video sets.

WE made the thirty-two day outbound trip without any complications, shuttling into spacewarp on schedule and shuttling out at the proper time.

"There she is," said Mickey Delacorte, our navigator, as Star System DA-7116 burst into view on our screens. It was a yellow Sol-type sun, young and hot, orbited by sev-

enteen worlds. The first nine or ten planets of the system had never been explored; they were too hot, with temperatures up around three hundred plus, and obviously life had not yet appeared on them.

World Twelve was our baby—Earthtype, though a little bigger, and still in its infancy as planets go. An exploring team had visited the place five years back; I had a copy of the report. They described the planet as "primitive," still in the era of giant plants and big animals.

We landed and set up camp next to the ship. The ship was a big one—it had to be, if we were going to transport an eighty-foot-long monster back to Earth in it—but most of the ship was given up to cargo space and fuel storage, and living quarters were on the cramped side. So we were glad to get out and stretch.

The air was fresh and reasonably breathable—a little high on carbon dioxide, but still within our tolerance levels. The sun was up on the side of the planet where we had landed, and it was *hot*; temperature was around 112, the humidity

was tremendous, and sweat poured down our sides in waves.

We didn't say much. We had worked together a long time, and we knew our jobs. We were here to catch an animal and get it home, not to see the sights or to collect souvenirs for the museum. So we set about our jobs.

Delacorte and I did the scouting work. We broke out the collapsible two-man jet-flitter and took off, making a quick reconnaissance tour of the area to find out if any of our quarry happened to be in the vicinity.

Abrams, the signalman, remained in the ship to monitor our dispatches and keep track of us. McDonnell and Webster checked through our hunting equipment, making sure that the force-field projectors were in working order and the blaster charges renewed. Crosley and Manners busied themselves with the receiving chamber for the big beastie, when we caught him—we would virtually split the ship in half the long way, hoist the trussed-up animal into his berth, and close

up the ship again. Anderson, the final man, scouted the area to see how edible the local food was.

Delacorte and I covered about three hundred square miles that afternoon in the flitter before we saw what we were looking for. We had spied plenty of other nasties—a snake that must have been a hundred fifty feet long, sunning itself by the bank of a river; crocodiles with snouts like boxcars shuttling under the surface of the water; flying creatures with leathery wings that opened out wider than the wingspread of our plane; lots of stuff like that. But so far as we were concerned these were just small fry.

We were after bigger game. We found it a little while after we saw the snake.

Delacorte, with his quick eyes, spotted it first. He sucked in his breath and pointed.

"There!"

I Looked down. The creature had emerged into a little clearing in the thick jungle, and he had heard the sound of our engines as we circled five hun-

dred to a thousand feet above him.

He was glaring up at us and snarling. I estimated that he was close to a hundred feet tall. He was waving his upper set of arms at us as if wishing we would come within reach so he could rip us apart and stuff us down that yawning mouth. His teeth were like shining swords in the bright sun.

Delacorte scribbled our coordinates down on a piece of paper and shoved them over to me. I clicked on the radio and said, "Abrams, are you getting me?"

"Clear as a bell, Jim."

"Okay. We've found one of Magnus' little pets." I gave him the coordinates. "He's big and he looks mean—just the kind we want. Alert the men. I'm going to start driving him toward the ship."

WE had caught plenty of big boys before, though never quite such a behemoth as this. The procedure was the same as always, though. First find your prey, then drive it toward the ship, then immobilize and capture. There was

no sense slapping the monster down with a force-field way out here, and then having to transport a couple of dozen tons of flesh overland for fifty or a hundred miles. We couldn't bring the ship to the monster; the next best thing was to bring the monster to the ship.

Delacorte got on the controls of the jetflitter, and I handled the artillery. This part of the operation was always tricky, and I liked to take care of it personally.

One thing I *didn't* want to do was dump a bomb right onto the beast and kill or maim it. I just wanted to attract its attention, was all.

I racked the implosion bombs out over the dropping bay and squeezed the first one down. I wanted to put it just back of the big boy, and I succeeded. It landed two hundred yards behind the monster, in some thick shrubbery, and detonated with a quick inward swooshing sound followed by a loud clap.

The monster jumped forward eagerly and snarled at our flitter above him. I had Dela-

corte take another swoop around behind the beast and I dropped two more bombs in quick succession.

Then we lit out shipward, and the thoroughly angry monster followed us.

"Cut the altitude to three hundred feet," I ordered. "Just skim the treetops."

The flitter dropped. I looked through the rear windows and saw the beast bashing along through the underbrush on our trail. We hovered in place with the rotors until the animal had caught up with us. We hung, no more than a couple of hundred feet above that yawning mouthful of yellowish swords, while the beast belowed and clawed at the sky and implored us to come within reach.

I gave it a little peppering with our light machine-gun—solid pellets, strong enough to tickle and annoy him without messing up his hide. The creature howled and ripped up a couple of tree trunks to wave at us.

"Okay," I told Delacorte. "Start heading toward the ship again."

And so it went, over the

twenty miles that separated us from the landing area. Out little jetflitter danced in and out of the monster's path while I dropped implosion bombs, fired guns, and otherwise worked hard to distract and enrage the beast. He followed along, getting angrier and angrier, probably thinking he was pursuing some new and troublesome kind of insect. He didn't know it, but we were leading him right into the jaws of a trap.

When we were a couple of miles from the ship I radioed ahead, warning the men to get ready. By this time I hoped McDonnell and Webster had checked out all the force-field projectors and had them set up ready for use. If this baby burst onto the clearing before they were prepared to nail him, our expedition would come crashing down into ignominious fiasco.

I got confirmation from Abrams: everything was set and in readiness. They were on their toes and waiting for our pet to appear.

As we approached the ship area, with the creature in anxious pursuit, I racked in the

remaining implosion bombs and brought our secondary weapon into use: gas bombs. We had devised these bombs specially for use against creatures of this size.

The gas was a light one that never got closer to the ground than forty or fifty feet. It hung in a thick cloud around the monster's head, generally slowing him down considerably, but left the operators on ground-side with free and unhindered vision so they could carry out the trapping job.

As Delacorte piloted us into the clearing where we had set up our camp, I nudged the ejector and a gas bomb went through the bay. I scored a direct hit; the bomb landed athwart the monster's skull, and a moment later a blinding cloud of dense, oily gas swirled around him. Above the noise of the jetflitter's engines I could hear the anguished roar of the maddened beast. I saw mighty arms threshing as he tried fruitlessly to sweep away the gas that clung to him.

The beast stumbled around in confused circles. I signalled Delacorte and he lifted the flit-

ter up to the thousand-foot level, where we ran no risk of getting ourselves entangled in groundside activities. I saw our men running around near the ship, manning the force-field projectors.

Then they came into play. Four projectors at once went into operation, and green beams of light converged on the monster, wrapping him in an impenetrable cocoon of neutronic force. We were bagging the ninety-foot giant as simply as if we were out netting butterflies on a balmy summer day.

Within minutes the confused and baffled beast was utterly and hopelessly bottled up. He came topping down to the ground, falling like a mighty oak, and I knew the worst was over.

"Bring us down," I told Delacorte.

By the time I leaped from the hatch of the jetfitter's cockpit, ten minutes later, my team had already done a quite efficient job. The monster lay prostrate, totally hemmed in by the force-field. We could glimpse his blazing, furious

eyes through the mistiness of the neutronic field that bound him.

Anderson and Webster were busily rigging the hoist, while the others were occupied in opening the ship and preparing the hold to receive its burden. The entire operation took no more than two hours.

The crane creaked and complained, but got the beast off the ground and into the waiting chamber. Manners supervised the closing of the ship after the atmospheric pumps had done their job. The monster was locked up in the heart of our ship. We had taken less than a day of our scheduled two weeks for the catch.

The next morning we blasted off for Earth, having taken aboard in the meanwhile enough raw meat to content the pinioned and imprisoned monster for the four and a half week journey home. We didn't congratulate each other on a job well done. We had been together too long for stuff like that.

One thing we knew, and knew silently: we had captured a jungle monarch and we were

taking him trussed back to Earth to meet a grisly fate in a public arena. We had captured a lord of a primitive world, and we were fetching him to satisfy the blood-lust of a bunch of over-fed, over-civilized Earthmen.

It wasn't a pretty thing we had done. But what the hell, we each told ourselves in silent rationalization. If we hadn't done it, someone else would have. It wasn't much of an excuse, but we tried to satisfy our consciences with it.

THE monster caused a stir when we landed it on Earth, naturally. It was the biggest alien being ever transported alive from its home world to the Solar System.

It measured 92 feet from the flaming red crest at the top of its skull to its flat pads. We didn't have any way of determining its weight, but we estimated something in the neighborhood of twenty tons. It gobbled up a ton of fresh meat a day by way of food.

Magnus gave us the big welcome—and the big check, too. Much fuss was made. As ar-

ranged, we delivered the monster to Magnus' animal ranch in Nevada; the show itself was to be held at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena.

The advertising splash was colossal. Two bloodthirsty knifeleg killersaurs were being groomed to fight our boy. The killersaurs, which came from Procyon Eight, grew to about thirty feet in height, and the lower halves of their bodies were studded with razor-keen spines. They were considered the most ferocious creatures in the galaxy, and my outfit had imported fifteen or twenty of them for various promoters. They were automatic smash hits whenever they fought.

Magnus was putting two of them up against the beast from World Twelve—which might result in a collaborative effort that would bring the huge animal down, or which might turn into a tremendous free-for-all with no holds barred and all three beasts out for blood.

Magnus had the best public-relations men in the trade, and he succeeded in getting the public worked up about the contest to such an extent that

hardly anyone talked about anything else for the month between the time of our arrival and the day of the fight.

The Rose Bowl's 110,000 seats were booked solid; Magnus had peddled the seats at twenty bucks a throw, and word was getting around that some of the tickets had been changing hands privately for as much as three and four hundred dollars. He sold the world video rights for a sum way up in the millions. Oh, Magnus was getting a good return on his \$800,000 investment, that was for sure!

The day of the fight was typical Southern California weather: dry, sunny, beautiful. Pasadena and Los Angeles were mobbed. The special convoy of armored trucks had fetched the animals in from Magnus' Nevada ranch the night before. They weren't being fed at all the day of the fight, to sharpen their appetites.

Magnus provided me with a good seat, midway up the Bowl where I could get a good view of what was going on. I had been tempted to sell my

ticket, in view of the current going price for them, but decided against it. It would have looked bad.

Custom dictated that the promoter set aside a certain number of seats for the intrepid trappers who supplied him with his animals, and I knew I was supposed to be there to give the event a little extra twist, as if anything extra was needed.

McDonnell drove me out to the Bowl from his place in Santa Monica. We were all seated in the same section that afternoon, Crosley and Manners and Anderson and Delacorte and Webster and McDonnell and Abrams and me, the men who had brought the big beast back. Marty Beaumont was the hunter who had caught the killersaurs for Magnus. Marty and I shook hands for the benefit of the video camera before the show began, and exchanged a couple of insincere words about the production.

AT two o'clock the show got under way with the pre-lim. It was an encounter between a Martian sandbat and

a maneater cat from Venus, just something to whip up some excitement and put the smell of blood in the air. It lasted ten minutes. The maneater cat, which looked like a tiger with horns, did its best to claw the sandbat to shreds, but the bat managed to flutter out of harm's way—the heavier gravitation of Earth kept it from getting actually off the ground—and finally it opened its wings, folded them like a shroud around the cat, and made the kill.

When the arena was cleared, there was a fanfare and a gasp from the crowd, and the east gate was pulled open. A long moment of anxiety. Then one of the killersaurs came bounding out into the arena.

The audience shrieked with delight and horror. An invisible barrier of neutronic force surrounded the combat area to prevent any rambunctious beast from hopping into the audience—but because the barrier is invisible, the people down in the front rows often get qualms when they see something hopping around not very far from them and with

no apparent restraining wall.

The killersaur was a real horror. It was a thirty-footer, with a full set of claws, spines, horns, and other implements for cutting, rending, and tearing. It galloped around the empty arena, snorting, pawing dirt, and just about doing everything but breathing fire.

The audience watched it for a while. Magnus had timed it just right. As soon as the audience had decided that there couldn't be anything in the universe more terrifying than a killersaur, the west gate swung open and out came the monster of World Twelve.

God, it looked big in that arena! It stood up to its full ninety-foot height and roared in anger and hatred, and you could hear the hush of horror that passed through the 110,000 onlookers and the hundreds of millions around the world who were viewing this scene on their video screens.

It caught sight of the killersaur. The killersaur glared back. The killersaur was big and mean-looking, but it looked like a puppy-dog next to our boy.

Then the east gate opened. The second killersaur came prancing out. Someone in the crowd screamed. The trumpets went off like the last call of Gabriel, and the battle was on.

THE killersaurs didn't seem certain whether to make for each other or for the big fellow. The monster of World Twelve lit out for them both, though.

All three came together in the center of the arena. The killersaurs realized where their danger lay, and set about trying to slash the legs of the giant. For a moment I figured it would be all over in a few minutes: I saw the giant form of our monster towering up in the middle of the field, with the two killersaurs burrowing away at his legs with their tusks.

Then the monster reached down, picked up one of the killersaurs—picked up a beast weighing *five tons!*—and started to rip it into chunks.

It had to give up that idea when the other killersaur clamped its teeth on a huge leg and started gnawing. But I realized with some relief that

those killersaurs weren't going to last long.

It was all over in fifteen minutes. The monster from World Twelve was just too big and too smart for the killersaurs. It got its hands into their mouths and split their jaws open; then it lifted them and crashed them down a few times on the ground.

There was blood everywhere, and most of it was thick black killersaur blood. The crowd screamed in delight as the monster relentlessly massacred two of the fiercest beasts in the universe. They were really getting their money's worth.

And then they got something that they weren't expecting for the price of admission.

The monster got tired of kicking the pieces of killersaur around the arena. He had eaten all he wanted, and the show had degenerated into a bloodbath. I figured that any minute Magnus' attendants would come out with the force-field projectors and recapture the monster for use some other time.

But the monster picked up

and headed for the audience. It charged the far section, down near the end of the field. I watched, confident that the force-field barriers would bounce it back. Then I gasped as the monster went ploughing through the place where the force-field barrier was supposed to be, and plunged on over the embankment into the bleachers, climbing merrily toward the rim of the Rose Bowl and crushing half a dozen people underfoot with each stride!

I've never heard such a wail of horror as went up when that beast broke loose in the Bowl. I got up and started running for the exit, and a hundred thousand other people got the same idea. The band tried to play to calm people down, but it was no good. There was a mass exodus. I was swept out with all the others. Once I looked back and saw the monster poised at the edge of the Bowl, peering down into the parking lot.

Then the force-field projectors were wheeled out, and green flares of neutronic force burst over the field, and the beast was immobilized before it

could get out of the Rose Bowl. A plane standing by flew over and blasted the monster's head off. By that time I was outside the Rose Bowl, part of the swirling, hysterical mob that had fled when the creature broke loose.

The people sitting at home at their video sets saw a sight that afternoon that they won't ever forget. Two hundred people died before the monster was brought under control. Ten thousand suffered injuries in the mad rush of panic that followed.

It was quite a finale. What I couldn't understand was how the creature had gotten through the barriers in the first place.

A month later, when everything had calmed down and sanity had returned, I got another call from my agent, telling me to come to New York and talk contract with Magnus.

Magnus had survived the debacle of his Rose Bowl show. There had been loud talk of a Congressional investigation of the tragedy, but the promoters

got together and smeared enough money around to quiet things down. Word went forth that there had been a once-in-a-lifetime failure of the force-field just at the moment when our monster decided to go ram-paging through the crowd. It could never happen again, the public was told.

And the public listened. Two weeks after the Rose Bowl affair, another spectacular was staged at the Indianapolis Speedway by one of Magnus' competitors, and two hundred thousand people turned out to watch a couple of Arcturan centipedes fifty feet long slug it out.

I flew to Magnus' place and Magnus had a check waiting for me, all made out. He handed it to me. I looked at it. It was for \$1,500,000.

"What's this?" I asked.

He smiled smugly. "I want you to go back to World Twelve of Star System DA-7116, Barstow. I want you to bring me *two* of those beasts. I'm planning to match them against each other in the show of the century!"

"Two of them?"

"That's right." His eyes were gleaming with excitement. "It'll be fantastic. We've booked Soldier Field in Chicago already. Can you do it?"

"The price is right," I said. "I won't disappoint you."

So we outfitted another expedition, *two* ships this time, and trundled off to Star System DA-7116 once again. I couldn't argue with a million and a half bucks. We caught the two beasts after some minor complications. They were smaller than the first one—only about seventy-five feet high, though that was enough—and two of my men got killed in the hunt. But we stuck to our motto, and we brought 'em back alive.

Two of them.

I delivered them to Magnus amid much fanfare and hoopla, and he paid as agreed. The promotion got under way immediately. The show of shows, he proclaimed. A fight to the death by the biggest creatures of the galaxy!

There was one thing I wanted to know, though. I asked Magnus about it the week before the show.

I said, "These tickets you gave me—they're pretty close to the arena, Magnus."

"So? Are you afraid? Barstow, the intrepid hunter, afraid?"

"I was in the Rose Bowl when that other beast broke out," I told him. "I don't mind hunting down monsters on alien worlds. But I don't like fighting for my life in a panicky mob. If those force-fields happen to give way again—"

"Oh, they won't," Magnus assured me. "Not this time. We don't want that happening too often or it'll give the sport a bad name."

"What do you mean—not too often?"

He had made a slip, and he knew it. "Well—that is—"

"You mean to say, Magnus, that you can let something like that happen again?"

That was when he gave me the spiel. He told me all about it, the new concept in public entertainment that he had worked out.

It seemed, according to Magnus, that the public was losing its interest in great spectacles. That the novelty had

worn off, and within another couple of years or maybe less the entire kick would be gone.

So J. Franklin Magnus had thought up a new kick, all by himself.

Make the show risky. Scare the spectators. They won't be spectators any more; they'll sit in their seats wondering when the monsters are going to get tired of battering each other and decide to light out after the onlookers. It took the vicarious element out of the game. Now, every man took his life in his hands when he plunked down his money and bought a seat.

Yes, that's right. Magnus *deliberately* permitted the Monster of World Twelve to get out into the audience. The invisible force-barriers had been shut off the moment the killersaurs were dead.

"What do you think of it?" he finished up. "The spectators will never know whether they're protected or not. They experience constant anxiety. How's that for a kick? It's something the ancient Romans never thought of!"

I looked coldly at him. I realized it didn't make any

sense saying anything, screaming to the authorities, raising any fuss at all. Magnus knew what he was doing. The public wanted this kind of entertainment nowadays. They would pay and pay through the nose for the chance to sit in a stadium and possibly be trampled down or slashed by a runaway killersaur. Maybe eventually they would shut off the force-barriers all the time, and make no pretense about anything.

I shook my head and took the block of tickets Magnus had given me out of my pocket. I handed them back to him.

"Here," I said. "Take them."

"What's the matter? Don't you want them?"

"I'm not going to be there," I said.

"Now, hold on! I told you there wouldn't be any danger this time, and—"

I didn't listen. I got up and walked out, and I flew back across the country to Los An-

geles, and now I'm trying to sell my share in Barstow Expeditors and get the hell out of the monster-catching business while my soul is intact. I see the direction we're travelling in, and I don't like it. The next step is just to turn monsters loose in big cities, for kicks. For laughs.

So here I am. Next week they'll be holding the Big Show, the Spectacular of Spectaculars, out in Chicago. I won't be there. I'll be sitting in a little bar off Wilshire where video isn't allowed, and I'll be sipping synthoscotch and trying to forget. While halfway across the continent two seventy-five foot monsters will kill each other.

"I give the public what it wants," Magnus says. Maybe he's right. But I hope to hell that he's the first to get ripped apart, the next time a monster busts loose.

THE END
