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(On the planet of a double star beyond the Horse Head Nebula, an alien spaceship)

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Back in the early days of F&SF we featured a Bureau of Imaginary Zoology, which brought to your attention such extraordinary creatures as the gnurr, the hurkle and the golen. Unfortunately the past couple of years have revealed few such strange beings; but now Gordon Dickson helps to fill the gap with the simultaneous discovery of two alien beasts: the pid and the illobar—a discovery related in one of the rarest and happiest forms of science fiction, a genuinely funny adventure story.

Rescue Mission

by GORDON R. DICKSON

"LOOK, ARCHIE," SAID JIM TIMBERLAKE, squinting through a gap between the heavy logs of the pen. "Here comes the medicine man now."

Archie Swenson looked. He was a dark, thin, gloomy sort of person at best and right now he looked even gloomier than usual.

"I don't like the expression on his face," he said, ominously.

Both men hurriedly adjusted their translators, microphone against the throat, earphones snugly in place on the ears, and watched as the burly, green-skinned guard hauled back on the gate to the pen and let the shaman in. He was a wiry old fellow, faded by age to a soft chartreuse. He carried a long dagger at his waist, an inflated animal bladder in one hand, and had several minor bones stuck through his frizzled gray

topknot. Aside from this, he was unadorned and, with his sagging potbelly, made an unlovely sight.

"Greetings, devils," he said cheerfully, the translators duly rendering sense from his language of grunts and clicks.

"I've told you," said Timberlake, his square sunburned countenance turning, if possible, even a little redder at this, "we're not devils, you idiot. We're human beings, just like you. We had the same common ancestors. Your people just happened to get forgotten here on this world long enough to adapt physically and—"

"My dear fellow, of course, of course," interrupted the shaman, waving his bladder gracefully. "I don't doubt you in the least. But what an upset there would be here if I agreed with you. After all, Rome wasn't built in a day."

"You admit knowing about Rome!" cried Timberlake.

"It's one of our most cherished legends," soothed the shaman. "Now, to get down to business—"

In desperation, Timberlake threw back his shoulders, wishing he had Swenson's height along with his own muscles, and turned the volume of the translator up to full.

"I DEMAND YOU RELEASE US IMMEDIATELY!"

"My, my," said the shaman, admiringly. "You must show me how to work that gadget one of these days—whichever one of you is still around."

"What do you mean—whichever one of us is still around?" quavered Swenson, apprehensively.

"Well, the council's finally come to a decision on you—"

"With your advice," growled Timberlake.

"I must admit my voice was not unheard in the matter . . . at any rate, the matter has been thrashed out, taking into due account that when you two devils landed here in your devilish spaceship, you stated that you were on a mission to rescue some other devils. Now, the problem that faced the council—a nice point, I can tell you—was whether to let you go, rather than risk the bad luck attendant on frustrating devils, or to boil you slowly in oil as a warning to other devils who might want to trespass."

Swenson gulped.

"The council, caught on the horns of a dilemma, as it were, finally has come up with a decision worthy of the legendary Solomon. To wit: one of you will be turned loose, and the other boiled, shortly, on the evening of the full moon."

This time Swenson did not manage to gulp. He seemed paralyzed. It was Timberlake who gulped.

"Which—one of us goes?" he managed to say.

The shaman gracefully circled his animal bladder through the air and pointed it at Swenson.

"Iggle—" he said.

Swenson sagged at the knees.

"Biggle—" he continued, switching the bladder to point at Timberlake, who was frantically juggling with the translator controls. The words must be nonsense syllables, for no meaning was coming through.

"—tiddle rawg—" the shaman was continuing, alternating the direction of his bladder with each word. "Jaby oogi siggle blawg. Ibber jobi naber sawg. Iggle, biggle, tiddle rawg. And out—go—you!" The bladder ended up pointing at Swenson, who turned white. "Congratulations," said the shaman to Timberlake. "You seem to have been chosen to accomplish your mission. The two devils you seek are about half a day's march away. Go straight down the valley and turn right at the red mountain."

Two guards came in through the door of the pen at the shaman's signal and began to hustle Swenson out.

"Wait!" he cried, thinking of the gun rack in the control room. "I've got to get something from my ship—"

"Ah, that . . . no," said the shaman, regretfully. "We may be somewhat provincial around here, but we have elementary common sense. You'll have to make out just as you are, devil. Now, it's no use fighting. Guards, maybe you'd better tap him on the head until you can carry him to the boundary line."

Timberlake sat nursing an aching head, some half an hour later, on a pleasant hillside from which he could look back along the green valley to the log palisade of the village he had just been thrown out of. He had carefully checked over the equipment in his helmet, but it seemed unharmed by the blow from the guard's club. Carefully, he set the controls on radio.

"Swenson? Archie?" he said, pressing the mike tight against his throat. "Archie, can you hear me?"

"I can hear you," replied a hollow voice that seemed to echo from the uttermost depths of despair.

"Cheer up—" began Timberlake—and snatched off the earphones. Holding them at arm's length until Swenson was through, he heard the voice die down and put them

on again. "Archie," he said, reproachfully, "I don't blame you for being upset, but—"

"Upset!" screamed the earphones. "They're going to eat me."

"Eat you?"

"After I'm french fried in that oil. Timberlake, you rat, it's your fault. You did it—"

"No, no," Timberlake shouted. "Archie, believe me, it was pure chance the way he counted us out. You know—eenie, meenie, miny—"

"You know what I'm talking about. I wanted to take the guns along when we landed. But not you. No, you said, the index showed they knew all about human history and galactic development—"

"Well, they do. They just don't believe it."

"—and besides, the whole thing was your idea in the first place. If we'd minded our own business and gone on straight to file our claim on Drachmae VII, nothing would've happened. But you had to answer a call for help. Call for help! I'll bet the whole thing was a decoy. What kind of an SOS is it that goes *'Help. Help! Have pity on two doomed mothers. Save our children?'*"

"Archie," said Timberlake, reproachfully. "Don't you have any human sympathy for people in distress?"

"I like that!" screeched the earphones. "Look who's talking. Here

I am about to be boiled in oil and there you are, free as a bird, planning on picking up those two infants, flying home in their ship, collecting some terrific reward and living to a rich old age—and talking about sympathy for people in distress. I like that—”

Gently and sorrowfully, Timberlake tuned his friend and partner out. Instead, he tuned in the SOS, which was still being broadcast. The needle of his direction finder jumped and steadied, pointing away down the valley. Evidently the old medicine man had been telling the truth. What had he said? Oh, yes, about half a day's march away.

Timberlake marched.

It was easy enough going as long as he continued in a straight line. The valley, cropped by timid herds of what looked like antelope, was as clear and open and greenly grassed as the front lawn of his home back on Earth. But when he came to the red mountain, a certain amount of uncertainty entered the picture. How does one turn right at a mountain? That is to say, you can turn right when you first come to the mountain, or you can turn right just after you pass the mountain . . . Timberlake slowed down in perplexity.

However, just as he came to the near flank of the mountain, he observed one of the green-skinned tribesmen leaning on a spear and

gazing off in the opposite direction. Timberlake halted, ready to run for it; but when the other did not move, he thought of the fact that the shaman had already given him what amounted to a safe-conduct by turning him loose, and carefully approached.

“Er—hello,” he said to the tribesman.

“Iggle protect mel” said the tribesman, coming abruptly to life, recognizing him and backing off a step. He turned a pale lemon-green. “I was daydreaming and didn’t see you sneak up on me. You better not try anything, Devil. I’ve got my grandfather’s left little finger-bone right here in my pouch.”

“I’m not going to hurt you,” said Timberlake, annoyed. “I just want to find the two young devils that live around here.”

“Are they young?” said the tribesman, doubtfully. “One’s little enough but the other’s as big as a council hut. You’re sure that’s all you want, Devil? Just directions?”

“That’s all,” said Timberlake.

“Of course—well, er, you just turn right here and follow up that little stream there. You’ll come to a sort of a glen. You can’t miss it. And now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ve got to spear some of these here xers for dinner. So long.” And the tribesman hastily took off.

Watching him go, Timberlake had a sudden impulse to pound himself on the head. Now that the man was gone, he had immediately

thought of a dozen reasons for holding on to the tribesman. Hold him as a hostage, trick him out of his spear—oh, well, it was too late now. Timberlake turned and began to ascend the gentle lower slope of the mountain alongside the streambed.

He revolved a number of plans in his mind as he climbed. The full moon . . . when would that be? He wished he'd looked at the sky the previous night, or the night before when they landed; but not expecting anything like this, it had never occurred to him to do so. He could remember that there had been a moon both nights. But what shape had it been? His cudgeled memory refused to tell him.

Well, even if it was only a few days away, things were far from hopeless. The SOS signal they had intercepted must mean that the ship—whatever it was—was not badly damaged. And a ship of any kind meant weapons of some kind. Give him the equivalent of one good flame rifle and he could go back, clean out the village and rescue Swenson. He thought of calling up his partner and telling him this, but Swenson's jumping to the conclusion that Timberlake was out to desert his partner had hurt Timberlake's feelings. Old Archie ought to know better than that. Let him sweat it out a bit if that was all the trust he had. Teach him to appreciate his buddy in the future.

Puffing a bit—for the slope was becoming steeper — Timberlake passed into a grove of trees and the sudden shadow reminded him of the fact that it had been noon when he had been freed and that the afternoon was now far advanced. He leaned against the rise of the ground and increased his pace. The streamside grew rockier and carpeted with something like pine needles from the trees overhead. Eventually, he came to a waterfall and a small cliff.

He climbed the cliff, with effort, and emerged at last into a little miniature valley with steep sides. In the center of it, the stream spread out into a tiny lake, and in the open meadow that surrounded it he saw, in that order, a small but very neat stone house, an enormous pile of young trees piled together to form a shaky sort of tall lean-to, and a spaceship of alien make.

The spaceship had hit the mountain. It was so much scrap.

Timberlake gulped and sat down on a handy boulder. A damaged ship he had expected, a wrecked ship he had foreseen as a possibility, but a ship in fragments had been beyond the scope of his imagination. If this was what had happened how had the children referred to in the message survived?

Getting shakily to his feet again, he hurried across the meadow to-

ward the little stone house, since that was the nearest of the two structures. It was a remarkable job of building, rocks cemented together with some sort of grayish-purple clay, and provided with curtained, if unglassed, windows. It possessed also what seemed to be a hand-carved door, and a small, square chimney from which a polite curl of smoke ascended.

A little hesitantly, Timberlake knocked at the door.

"Come in!" the translator reported a high-pitched voice as saying from beyond it. Timberlake opened it and, stooping his head, entered.

He found himself in a square, large, single room, furnished with mathematical precision and spartan simplicity. A square box mattress with dried grass clung to one of the walls. The other walls, where a window did not interrupt, were furnished with shelves, drawers, and filing cabinets, all handmade. The only exception was a somewhat bent and damaged sort of drawing table at which a small, meter-tall, gray-skinned creature with a large head and tarsier-like eyes sat with a bird quill, a pot of what looked like ink and a pile of large, white leaves, covered with inky marks.

"Though only a nine-month-old pid," squeaked this creature, "I can recognize you as a member of the human species. You will want to know my name. It is Agg. Perhaps

you will want to tell me your name."

"Er—Jim Timberlake," said Timberlake. "How do you do?"

"I do everything with the superb efficiency of a pid," squeaked Agg. "Though only nine months old as yet—as you can see. What can I do for you, Jim?"

"Well," said Timberlake, feeling somewhat foolish. "My partner and I came in answer to an SOS—"

"Extremely providential," squeaked the pid. It stroked its long nose, which Jim now noticed was extremely sharp at the tip, almost like the point of a spear or a horn. "I'll pack and be right with you."

"Well, the fact is," said Timberlake. "We won't be able to just take off like that—" and he explained the bad luck that had befallen Swenson and himself.

"Ah," said the pid. "In that case I won't pack since I won't be going after all. Thank you. Goodby."

"Hey, wait!" cried Timberlake as the pid picked up its quill again. "We can still make it. What we have to do is get Swenson away from those savages and our ship, too."

"How?" asked the pid.

"Well, I thought you'd probably have saved some guns from your ship—"

"What guns? Everything in the ship was destroyed, except what was in the deceleration chamber—our eggs and the library, of which

I have taken the technical texts into my own safekeeping." The pid pointed toward one of the shelves which was racked with bank on bank of microspools. "Our mothers sacrificed their own bodies as fuel to ensure that the ship would reach this planet. When I first broke out of the egg, after landing, prehatching conditioning had informed me what to do. I set up the secondary SOS beacon and began my education. It's nine months now and so far I've only covered through the general theory of galactic origins. You must excuse me. Good day."

"But my partner—"

"I can't do anything to help. Good day."

"Listen!" cried Timberlake. "We came all this way to rescue you. If it hadn't been for that, Swenson wouldn't be in trouble right now. Don't you have any conscience?"

"Certainly not. Consciences are based on emotion. They are ipso facto illogical," said the pid. "And we pids are supreme in the field of logic. Good day."

Too angry to argue further, Timberlake stamped out.

He emerged into the dwindling afternoon sunlight. Some thirty yards away was the enormous lean-to. So angry that he forgot all about being apprehensive as to what might require a shelter so large, Timberlake plowed across to it.

As he came close, he became

aware of a deep sort of humming that came from its shadowy interior. The humming swelled and erupted into a minor shriek and an exclamation which the translator rendered as "My goodness!"

"Hello in there!" said Timberlake, and walked in.

He found himself facing an enormous dragon-like being with a small, bumpy head somewhat resembling a kangaroo's and a microspool scanner strapped over its eyes. It sat with its huge armored tail curled around itself in a far corner of the hut, surrounded by microspools and general litter. As he watched, the dragon pushed the scanner up on its forehead and regarded him.

"Why—why—who're you?" The dragon tucked its relatively small forepaws into its enormous body and seemed to huddle away from Timberlake.

"Name's Timberlake," grunted Jim. "My partner and I came to rescue you. We—"

"Rescue!" cried the dragon, ecstatically, flinging its arms wide. "Oh, joy! Oh, triumph! How long in this deserted land have I suffered, but now the hour of my deliverance is at hand." He broke off. "What did you say your name was? Mine's Yloo."

"Jim Timberlake. I'm a human," said Timberlake, digging at one ear which seemed to have closed up entirely under the impact of the dragon's tremendous voice.

"Oh, *gallant* human! Come at last—but ah, too late, too late . . ." And the dragon burst into sobs.

"Too late?"

"My mommy . . ." choked the dragon, and could not go on. It cried heartbreakingly; and Timberlake, who was not a completely insensitive man, gave in to the impulse to go over and pat it comfortingly on the head. It shoved its barrel-like snout into his arms and snuffled.

"There, there," said Timberlake, awkwardly.

"Forgive me—forgive me. I can't help it. I'm sensitive, that's all there is to it. Just naturally sensitive, like my mommy."

"Who was your mommy?" asked Timberlake, to get its mind off its troubles.

"Why—" said the dragon, raising its head in surprise. "She was an illobar, like me. Oh, she was beautiful! Such great white fangs, such shining claws, such a magnificent huge tail! And yet, a heart as delicate as a flower. If a petal fell, a tear of hers fell with it."

"You remember her, do you?" said Timberlake, making a mental note of this fact that the illobar must be older than the pid, who had been in his egg at the time of the crash.

"Dear me, no! I have fabricated the memory of her beloved image from these romantic novels that she placed safely in the liquid deceleration chamber with my—" the

illobar hid its head and said in a small, embarrassed voice "—'egg'. A person who loved such things would just have to be the way I imagine her. Was it not her loving hand that set the educator also in the deceleration chamber to start my baby feet aright upon the path, when I should break out of my shell? Yes!" said the illobar with welling eyes. "Put it all together, it spells MOTHER!" It straightened up and blew its nose on one of the large white leaves that Timberlake had seen put to the use of writing paper at the pid's. "But enough of my painful past. You've come to rescue me. Let's go."

"Well, we can't just leave like that," said Timberlake. "You see, there's been a slight hitch—" He told the illobar about Swenson and the green-skinned tribesmen.

"What? Captive? And doomed?" trumpeted the illobar, rearing up with flashing eyes. "Shall such a thing be? No! To the rescue! Charge!"

He extended a forearm; and Timberlake, filled with joy at this martial response, charged out of the hut—only to find, as he emerged into the sunset, that the illobar had not followed him out.

He went back inside. The illobar avoided his gaze, breathed on its claws and polished them against the bony plate of its chest, humming embarrassedly.

"What happened?" demanded Timberlake.

"Oh well," said the illobar, weakly. "I just thought—they'll have spears and things. I can't bear the thought of being hurt."

Timberlake groaned and sat in despair.

"Oh, please don't feel bad!" cried the illobar. "I can't stand it when anything looks sad."

Timberlake snorted.

"You mustn't feel that way. Please cheer up. Listen," said the illobar. "Let me read you the beautiful lines spoken by Smgna in Gother's *Pxrion*, when she hears her cause is hopeless." Hastily, it fitted a fresh microspool into its scanner and commenced to read in a high-pitched, soulful voice: "*... so shall star-bought destiny be ever indicative of philoprogenitiveness. Were Gnruth a snug, a whole snug, and nothing but a snug, I should have signed his contract. Since he is nothing but a brxl, I shall carry his memory into the cave of death.... Here,*" said the illobar, interrupting itself to push the scanner up on its forehead and pour something from what appeared to be a small keg into something else like a large shell. "Would you care for a drop of my homemade wine?"

Listlessly, Timberlake took the shell. He sniffed at the contents. They had a faintly alcoholic odor, but looked rather heavy, colorless and oily. What the hell, he thought, and poured them down his throat.

Liquid fire strangled him.

Something dealt him a stunning blow on the back of the neck.

—And that was all he remembered.

Timberlake groaned and opened his eyes. Morning sunlight was creeping between the branches of the lean-to. His head had been turned into a gremlin's smithy and a camel would have felt at home in his mouth.

"What was in that?" he croaked. No one answered. The lean-to was empty. Timberlake staggered to his feet, tottered a dozen yards or so to the brim of the little lake and plunged in his head. The cold water was balm in Gilead.

Half an hour later, having sluiced himself well inside and out and bound a soaked handkerchief around his aching head, Timberlake, with a sudden attack of conscience, remembered Swenson.

Oh, no! thought Timberlake. Remorse for his imprisoned partner flooded through him. He had meant to call Swenson back as soon as he had time to calm himself down. Instead, he had let the unfortunate man dwell alone in his misery through the long night. The self-despising that accompanies a good hangover was gnawing at Timberlake's vitals. He pictured Swenson alone, helpless, facing a hideous death and feeling himself callously cut off from even a friendly word.

With guilty fingers, Timberlake

activated the radio and pressed the mike tight against his throat.

"Archie!" he called. "Archie! Come in, Archie! Answer me. Are you all right? Archie?"

A curious, rhythmic sound floated from the headphones into his ears.

"Archie!" said Timberlake, shocked. "My god, Archie, don't cry! Don't do that!"

"Who's crying?" retorted the slightly fuzzy-sounding voice of Swenson. "I'm laughing. Laugh and the universe laughs with you. Cry and you cry alone. Whoops! Tonight I will be boiled in oil, boiled in oil, boiled in oil. Tonight I will be boiled in oil, all on a full moon eeeevening!"

"Archie!" yelped Timberlake, forgetting his own misery in this astonishing response. "What's happened to you? What've they done to you?"

"Nothing!" returned Archie's voice, indignantly. "They've been wonderful to me. Wonderful! I've got this lovely pen all to myself, all the jubix I can chew—"

"The what?"

"The jubix. Jubix."

"What's that?"

"Damfino," said Swenson. "Good for the nerves, though. Jim, you wouldn't believe how relaxed I feel. Just relaxed, and relaxed—"

"Archie, you idiot!" cried Timberlake. "You've been drugged. Don't eat any more of that jubix stuff. It's a drug."

"Nonsense, That's just your suspicious nature. You always were a suspicious son of a gun. But I don't mind. I like you anyway. Good ol' Jimmy, good ol' medicine man, good ol' pot . . ." and the voice trailed off into a snore.

"Archie! Archie! Wake up—" Suddenly something Swenson had said struck home to Timberlake's hangover-fogged brain. "Did you say they were going to boil you *tonight*?"

"Zzz—huh? Certainly. Full moon tonight. Big party. Boil me, blow up ship—"

"Blow up the ship!" screeched Timberlake. "Archie, what're you talking about?"

"Well, I wanted to do something for them, too," said Swenson, in a defensive tone of voice. "It isn't as if we're going to be using it for anything ourselves, any more." He continued, anxiously, "You aren't mad at me, are you, Jimmy?"

With a cold and shaking hand, Timberlake snapped off the radio. The sweat stood out on his brow. The hammers pounded inside his skull. His brain raced.

This was no time for half measures. He considered the situation. If he wanted to get off this planet alive and save Swenson, something had to be done before the ceremony took place in that village tonight. What a situation! Here he was, weaponless, with nothing but a pair of idiotic alien children on his hands. . . .

Out of the machiavellian depths which a hangover will uncover in the mind of the otherwise mildest man came a sudden notion.

Of course, thought Timberlake! After all, that's what the pid and the illobar were. Only children. He had been misled by the sharpness of the pid's mind and the illobar's size. But an adult of any species does not (a) boast about how good he is for his age or (b) cry for his mommy.

Ha! thought Timberlake.

There was no hope of rescuing Swenson without a gun; and the guns were in their spaceship. And the spaceship—ceremony or no—would undoubtedly be guarded. And he, himself alone, could not hope to take on the customary pair of spear-carrying guardians.

On the other hand—

Why couldn't the sentries be decoyed away from the ship? Say, by something like a fight? To be specific, why not something like a fight between an illobar and a pid? Once the ship was unguarded, he, Timberlake, could slip in through the door, pick up a gun and immediately command the situation. As for the two young aliens, the illobar had all the size, but he was willing to bet that the pid had all the guts. They shouldn't harm each other too much.

Timberlake staggered to his feet. The illobar was nowhere in sight; but the pid's chimney exhibited its customary curl of smoke. Timber-

lake headed for the small stone building, turning over plans in his mind.

At the door he knocked.

"Come in," squeaked the pid.

He entered.

"I've just evolved my own theory of an expanding universe," said the pid, proudly. "Take a seat, Jim, and listen while I tell you about it. You'll be amazed."

"Just a minute," said Timberlake. "I wanted to ask you something about your friend."

"What friend?"

"The illobar."

"Friendship is illogical," said the pid. It produced something that looked like a long whetstone and began to rasp the sharp tip of its nose with it. "The illobar doesn't concern me. It is a creature of no logic."

"Then I won't be speaking out of turn if I say I'm pretty disappointed in him," said Timberlake cunningly. "He didn't have the mind to see how there's a perfect way to get our ship back and get off the planet."

"Of course not—what?" said the pid. "What perfect way is there for us to get off the planet?"

"Come now," said Timberlake. "You're kidding me. I know you've already thought of it for yourself."

"Er—well, yes," said the pid, twiddling its nose, uncertainly. "I suppose I . . . yes, to be sure."

"Of course. A pid would be the

first to see it. Well, shall we leave at once?"

"Of course," squeaked the pid, jumping down from his chair. "Let's be off—no, I should pack."

"I'm afraid there won't be room for your stuff on the ship. You can replace it, of course, when we get to civilization."

"Naturally," said the pid. It led the way out of the house.

They were crossing the meadow when the illobar reappeared from a belt of trees further up the mountainside. It came galloping up to them, shaking the earth, at something around forty or fifty miles an hour. In the morning sunlight, it towered over Timberlake awe-inspiringly.

"Where are you going?" it asked Timberlake.

"We're going to rescue my partner, get our ship back and get off the planet."

"Oh dear," said the illobar, clapping and unclapping its hands nervously. "Won't it be dangerous?"

"What of it?" said Timberlake.

"Well—I think I won't go. Goodby," said the illobar.

"Goodby," said Timberlake. "Come on, Agg," he added to the pid.

"Illobars," said the pid, as they moved off, "are useless creatures. I don't know why my mother bothered to go traveling around with one."

The illobar watched them go.

They reached the waterfall and climbed down the rocky slope down the mountain. Just as they reached the valley, there was a thumping of feet behind them and the illobar trotted up.

"Hello," it said, brightly.

"Hello," replied Timberlake. "I thought you weren't coming."

"Oh, I'm not," said the illobar, quickly. "I just thought I'd walk part way with you—seeing you don't have any real company, only that pid."

"Illobars," said the pid, confidently to Timberlake, "always think people are interested in them."

"Pids," said the illobar, in Timberlake's other ear, "are so self-centered, it's disgusting."

"Oh, well," said Timberlake, soothingly. And the party of three continued along the park-like valley.

The illobar could probably have made the trip in an hour, or less than that, if pushed. Four hours would have made a fast trip for Timberlake. The pid, because of his relatively short legs, considered it pretty much a day's journey. And since they were restricted to the speed of their slowest member, they all moved along at a pid's pace. And this was not exactly soothing to Timberlake's anxious spirit as the day wore on, particularly since the pid insisted on discouraging on the beauty of mathematics as they walked, while the

illobar, not to be outdone, quoted poetry in epic lengths. Finally, however, the village showed up over a little rise, about a mile or so distant; and, just beyond it, rosy in the light of the setting sun, was the silver upright shape of the spaceship.

"All right, boys," said Timberlake. "Now we circle and come up on the village from behind the ship."

"A straight line," objected the pid, "is the shortest distance between two points."

"Not at all," disagreed the illobar. "There's nothing like making a circle. A good, big circle," he added nervously.

Timberlake settled the discussion by moving off to his left. The other two followed him.

The shadows lengthened visibly as they moved across the valley, and by the time the three adventurers were opposite the village, the only thing visible in the sunlight was the gleaming top tip of the spaceship. Hastily, Timberlake began to swing back in; but before he was all the way back, the sun disappeared entirely and the sunset glow with it.

Timberlake cursed under his breath. There was such a thing as carrying caution too far. He continued by dead reckoning. After about twenty minutes or so of this, he felt his sleeve twitched by the illobar. He stopped and put out a hand to halt the pid.

"Oh, my goodness!" quavered the illobar. "There it is. See it?"

With difficulty, Timberlake made out Yloo's pointing forearm overhead. Squinting along in a line with it through the darkness, he managed to see, not the spaceship exactly, but a dark shape occulting a reddish fire-glow that was beginning to gleam upward from behind the palisade of the village.

"Shh," he cautioned.

He listened. He turned the translator up to full volume. A murmur from somewhere ahead whispered from his earphones.

"—so the next night he comes home and his wife is stewing the xer meat again. And he says, 'I thought I told you I didn't like my xer meat stewed,' and she says—"

"What's the reason for this delay?" demanded the pid. "I find it illogical and pointless."

"Shh," said Timberlake. But he had found out what he wanted to know. The fire inside the village was flickering above the palisade now; and he could make out not only the black bulk of the ship, but two lesser shadows, leaning on spears beside the open hatchway. Now for his plan.

"I'm going to circle around and take them from behind," he told the pid and illobar, and moved off without giving them time to answer. After a moment, when he judged he was far enough off for the darkness to swallow him up, he

turned about and hissed, "stay quiet. And no matter what stupid remarks he makes, don't get mad and argue with him."

Rapidly, Timberlake backed off a little further, but not out of earshot, and lay down on the soft turf to listen and await developments. For a moment there was no answer from either of the young aliens. And then the illobar quavered in a low voice:

"I won't!"

There was a muted snort from the pid and a whisper.

"What do you mean, *you* won't? The human was talking to me."

"Was not!" retorted the illobar in a restrained voice. "He was talking to me. How could he be talking to you? You don't have any emotions worth speaking about."

"But you're the only one that's stupid."

"Oh!" gasped the illobar. "I am not!"

"You are too. All illobars are stupid."

"You take that back!" retorted the illobar, beginning to rumble a bit ominously in the lower registers. "You're talking about the mommy I loved, you pipsqueak adding-machine addict."

"That's a lie!" squeaked the pid, furiously. "No pid ever used an adding machine in his life, you—"

Their voices were rising satisfactorily. Timberlake left them and began to crawl toward the spaceship. He was halfway there when

the two guards strolled past him, bound for the scene of the disturbance. Timberlake got up, dusted himself off, and proceeded to the ship. The guns were still lying as they had been left, in the rack. He took a flame rifle and headed for the village.

Behind him, a roaring, screaming, ground-shaking catfight seemed to have broken out. A twinge of conscience troubled Timberlake's mind. He had not expected to be quite so successful. He put the matter forcibly from his mind.

He came up on the village from the back. At the secondary entrance there was only one lackadaisical guard, and he, like the rest of the village, was busy staring off in the direction of the pid-and-illobar contest, which could be plainly heard on the night air. Timberlake conked him with his rifle butt, slipped inside and went hunting Swenson.

His earlier imprisonment had familiarized him with the general pattern of the village. He slipped between huts and came upon the pen without too much difficulty. Swenson was sitting on the ground outside it, completely unchained and unguarded, singing "Ja, Vi Elsker Dette Landet" with tears of emotion in his eyes. He was obviously in sad shape.

"Archie!" hissed Timberlake, shaking him by the shoulder. "Come on. Let's get out of here."

"Get out of here?" echoed Swenson, looking up at him. "Why, Jimmy, what do you take me for? Escape and disappoint all these nice people who've been heating a pot for me since noon? Nonsense. Here—" He extended something that looked like a stick of licorice. "Have some of this. You'll agree with me."

Timberlake recoiled from the stuff as if the snaky strip was alive.

"Archie!" he said, frantically. "Snap out of it. We've got to get to the ship and get out of here!"

Archie giggled helplessly. Timberlake frantically searched his mind for something in the line of guile to influence his doped partner.

Inspiration struck him.

"Wait, Archie," he said. "I've got an idea. We won't really leave. We'll just sneak off outside the village and pretend to hide. Then, when they come searching for us, we'll jump out at them and say—"

"Let me carry the gun," said Swenson, cautiously.

"As soon as we get outside the gate."

"No. Now!"

"No, Archie, you—"

"Now, or I won't go!"

Sadly, Timberlake handed over the weapon. Swenson took it and threw it up on top of one of the huts.

"Surprise! Surprise!" he yelled. "Come and get him. Surprise!"

There was a rush from the

shadows of the surrounding huts and Timberlake went down beneath a crowd of heavy bodies. They pulled him pinioned to his feet and he found himself facing the medicine man.

"How nice of you to join us," said that individual.

Timberlake fainted.

When he revived, both he and Swenson were lined up in front of the fire, before which a large pot was bubbling merrily with oil. Its peculiar fragrance reached Timberlake's nostrils and turned him white.

"You can't do this!" he cried to the shaman.

"Why not?" asked the shaman, who was standing beside him.

"Because—because if you touch us, hundreds of devils will come in hundreds of ships. They'll—they'll burn your village to the ground—uh—put you through psycho-reconditioning, reestablish your social structure—"

"Come now," said the shaman, "that's the sort of thing devils always say just before they're boiled. These idle threats don't frighten us."

"They aren't idle threats!" shrieked Timberlake. "Turn us loose at once or I'll put a curse on you. Impshi, bimpshi—"

"My dear Devil," protested the shaman, "please stop making a scene. It's painful for all of us. Here, have a chew of this—"

Timberlake frantically knocked the licorice-like strip of substance out of the medicine man's hand.

"Help, spirits!" Suddenly, Timberlake noticed that the sound of fighting in the distance had ceased. Was it possible . . . ? "Help, Ylool!" he cried at the top of his voice. "Help, Agg! Help! Help! *Heelllp!*

"Devil, stop that!" shouted the shaman.

A section of the palisade behind him abruptly bulged inward and split apart.

"Did someone call for help?" inquired the illobar, appearing in the opening.

"Avaunt, Devil!" cried the shaman, confidently, and threw a spear. It bounced harmlessly off the illobar's armor-plated chest.

"Poof!" said the illobar, confidently. "Those little things don't scare *me*." It advanced into the firelight; and Timberlake was astonished to see that the pid was still clinging to the dragon-like neck, its long, sharp needle-nose stuck into the back of the illobar's head.

"Are you all right, sir?" squeaked the pid, and blushed. "Excuse my earlier lack of manners."

"As for you," said the illobar, severely to the shaman. "Are you going to let these nice humans go? Or do I have to sit down on your huts, one by one—like this!" It sat down on one of the huts. The hut was effectively demolished.

"No—no—" said the shaman,

hastily. "Whatever you say, Devil. Just get out of here." He had turned so pale a green that he looked nearly white.

"I want to be boiled in oil!" spoke up Swenson, obstinately.

"Pay no attention," said Timberlake, hastily to the illobar. "He's not in his right mind. Just pick him up if you will—like that, that's just fine. Thank you."

Swenson, hanging limply in the crook of the illobar's right forearm, burst into tears of disappointment.

"Maybe you better carry me, too," said Timberlake, "—and fast."

He felt himself scooped up; there was a rapid jolting passage with the wind whistling about his ears; and he found himself set down in the lock of the spaceship.

Timberlake left the illobar struggling to squeeze through the lock and dashed to the control room. Eighteen seconds later the LOCK CLOSED; light blinked red on the panel; and the ship took off. The haven of deep space took it to its peaceful, empty arms.

There was a sound behind Timberlake in the control room. He set the automatic pilot and turned about. The illobar, with the pid still spiked to it, had just squeezed into the room.

"I put your friend in the cabin to sleep it off," said the illobar. "Was that right?"

"Perfect," said Timberlake. He got up and studied them.

"Let's see," he said. "If you'll just lie down, I'll get a crowbar—"

"A crowbar?" echoed the illobar.

"To—er, pry you loose," said Timberlake, slightly embarrassed. "You seem to be sort of stuck—"

"Oh, my!" squeaked the pid. "That's all right. You see, we belong together like this."

"Huh?" said Timberlake.

"Oh yes," put in the illobar. "It was just a matter of time before we engaged in ritual combat and came to this. Little pids and illobars like us have a natural hate for each other that is a precursor of their mature jointure and love."

"But Yloo—" stammered Timberlake.

"No, no, you don't understand," said the illobar. "I'm not really

Yloo, any more than he's Agg. Really, we were just two parts of the complete being: Aggyloo, a pidillobar."

"A symbiotic relationship, you see," squeaked the pid. "A welding of the mental and the emotional into a well-rounded, single ego."

"Oh," said Timberlake.

"Yes," said Aggyloo, pidillobar. It settled its enormous haunches on the floor, stroked the nasal connection between itself and continued in its squeaky upper voice. "If it hadn't been for the devotion of my mommies, we would never have survived to come to this. But my mommies knew what to do. They figured someone like you would come along. You see, my mommies . . ."
