

Science Fiction QUARTERLY

ALL
STORIES
NEW

Volume 3

May, 1955

Number 5

FEATURED NOVEL

- THE EYE IN THE WINDOW** Sam Merwin, Jr. 6
Senator Pearmain was sure that an alien plot was hatching in Nesi Wyndham's apartment building. He never dreamed how right he was, and how alien the aliens were!

SHORT STORIES

- THE SEDULOUS APES** Dennis Wiegand 37
All of a sudden, a famous saying came true . . .
- YOU RISK YOUR LIFE** Joseph Slotkin 49
This was the audience participation show that couldn't be topped!
- GLADSOME PLANET** Russ Winterbotham 60
The administration of justice depends upon what is considered a crime.
- THE GUZZLER** Robert Abernathy 68
What can be done about a licensed space pirate who hasn't broken any laws?
- THE RED AND THE GREEN** Joe L. Hensley 76
The human race was in constant retreat, and I for one was tired of it.

READERS' DEPARTMENTS

- LIMITATIONS OF SCIENCE FICTION** (*Editorial*) R. W. Lowndes 47
- READIN' AND WRITHIN'** (*Book Reviews*) Damon Knight 57
- INSIDE SCIENCE FICTION** Robert A. Madle 65
- IT SAYS HERE** (*Letters and Comment*) 83

ROBERT W. LOWNDES, *Editor*

DOROTHY B. SEADOR *Asso. Ed.*

MILTON LUROS, *Art Director*

MARIE A. PARK, *Asso. Ed.*

Cover by Ed Emsh

SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY, May, 1955, published February, May, August, and November, by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 211 Church Street, New York 12, New York. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Single copy 25¢; yearly subscription \$1.00. Entire contents copyright 1955 by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed envelopes to insure return if not accepted, and while reasonable care will be extended in handling them, it is understood that they are submitted at author's risk. Printed in U. S. A.

After all, Black Roger was an honest man — a properly-licensed space pirate, never even suspected of tax-evasion!



The creature's breath was sheer atomic fire...

THE GUZZLER

by Robert Abernathy

illustrated by LUTON

KRACHMEYER slumped spinelessly over his desk, propped his elbows on it and his head on his hands. "It isn't enough," he groaned, "that Black Roger the space pirate has to pick this asteroid to land on. On top of that, the very same day a guzzler turns up in the shaft!"

Dirk MacGregor looked sympathetically down at Krachmeyer's pink, be-

spectacled despair. To make his sympathy more evident, he too leaned heavily on the mine superintendent's desk, and that overburdened piece of furniture squawked painfully and subsided at one corner.

Krachmeyer jumped as if stabbed. "Don't do that!" he shouted.

Hastily Dirk straightened his six-foot-two frame, which towered imores-

sively in his green and gold Ranger's uniform. He gazed hurtly down at the damaged desk, and shook his head, muttering, "Under this light gravity—Whatever you paid for it, you were swindled."

"Don't change the subject!" flared Krachmeyer.

"Sorry," said Dirk. "About your guzzler—that's news to me; I came here, in re your call to the Park Commission, to serve a sojourn notice on Black Roger. That's as far as my orders go."

"What!" yelled the mine manager. "Do you mean to tell me you're going to let that skulking pirate roost here for two months, without making a move to throw him off?"

"It's the law. A space ship may land for repairs on any body in the public domain, and remain for sixty Earth days if necessary, before towing at the owner's expense becomes obligatory."

Krachmeyer tore what was left of his hair. "Law! Is there no law for honest men?"

Dirk shrugged. "Black Roger is an honest man, too. A properly-licensed space pirate, never even suspected of tax-evasion."

"There's nothing wrong with his ship!"

"If I went over it," sighed Dirk, "something would be adequately out of whack; Black Roger isn't feeble-minded."

Krachmeyer dropped his head in his hands again. After a time he said hollowly, "About that uranium guzzler. I don't suppose the Park Commission can see its way to do anything about that, either?"

"Well," said Dirk with a touch of embarrassment, "I guess it's my duty to remind you that uranium guzzlers are protected by the game-laws. It's a penitentiary offense to harm one—not so much because they're valuable, as because they're harmless ordinarily, but unpredictably dangerous when roused. That's another thing," he

added. "I wouldn't advise you to rouse it."

"Thanks," said Krachmeyer bitterly. "It won't rouse me, either; it'll just eat me out of house and home, or—" he glanced round with distaste at the windowless, lead-sheathed walls, "out of a good paying job, at any rate. Forty tons of ore in the last two days have gone down that beast's gullet!"

"If you like," said Dirk helpfully, "I can report your trouble to the Pest Control Bureau. They have guzzler-catching equipment, but they're about two years behind... On the other hand," he interrupted himself, staring past Krachmeyer, "I think maybe I'll stick around for a while and study your problem myself."

ON THE OTHER hand, a girl had appeared in the doorway behind Krachmeyer. Her lissome form was draped in a sexy negligee, and—Dirk noticed afterwards—she had chestnut hair and wide blue eyes that measured the Ranger's well-proportioned height with frank appreciation.

"Hello," she said warmly.

Krachmeyer swiveled round in his chair; his gaze flickered back and forth between the two young people as if caught in an oscillating magnetic field.

"Hello, Uncle Krach," added the girl negligently.

The addressee gulped. He said mechanically. "This is my niece, Miss Lorraine Farrar—Mr. MacGregor of the Park Service—Lorraine! What are you doing here?"

"I heard you were having trouble, Uncle Krach, so I hitched a ride on one of the ore boats."

"Hitched a— Don't you realize those ships are radioactively contaminated? Do you want your offspring to have two heads?"

The girl blushed delicately. "I wish you wouldn't talk about my offspring as if I spawned on alternate Tuesdays," she protested. "Anyway, I had a compartment shielded; and all the robots

were very nice." She looked back to Dirk, and drew her robe closer around her. "I was just getting freshed up after the trip. I didn't know anybody else was here; Uncle Krach was making all the noise."

"Don't call me Uncle Krach!" snorted Krachmeyer, but nobody paid attention to him. He returned to his favorite posture of despair, moaning, "It isn't enough, Black Roger and a guzzler; *she* has to come along."

Dirk said smoothly, "I was just telling your Uncle that I feel it my duty, as representative of the Park Service, to do everything in my power to solve his difficulties."

"They're my difficulties too," said Lorraine Farrar. "I'm the owner."

"Oh." Even Dirk was momentarily speechless.

"I inherited the lease from my father. Father passed on just after he'd acquired it, from a lifetime of overwork supporting a family of eleven—me and ten wolfhounds. I'm carrying on his work. Since the mines here are completely robot-operated, and ordinarily don't require any human attention, I hired Uncle Krach to manage them. But now things have gone wrong, I thought I'd better come out myself."

Dirk gave her a winning smile. "Don't worry, everything will shortly be under control; I'm thinking."

LORRAINE looked at him with a hint of suspicion, but didn't ask what he was thinking about. She perched herself cautiously on a corner of the sagging desk, and said, "I heard something about a guzzler. What's that—more trouble?"

"A uranium guzzler," explained Dirk, "is the System's only known animal with a nucleonic, rather than electronic, body chemistry. It's very rare; they think it's a survival from an earlier stage in planetary evolution, when radioactives were more plentiful than now."

"How could one get on an isolated asteroid?"

"That's hard to say. It may have been hibernating here the last billion years or so—since before the fifth planet broke up to form the Asteroid Belt—until finally it woke up and felt hungry. But a hungry guzzler will eat enormous quantities of uranium to stoke the atomic pile in its stomach. In one of its stomachs, I should say; it has a complex series of them, a lot like the Earthly ruminants', where the ore is transmuted to plutonium begun. Its power-pile is analogous to a cow's abomasum."

"A cow's abomination he talks about now," muttered Krachmeyer, shocked to the core.

Lorraine looked seriously worried. "So the mine's easy pickings for this thing with its peculiar appetite. And—working on a shoestring as we still are—we may be bankrupt before it's satisfied."

"For two days now it's eaten all the best ore." Krachmeyer stared morosely at a wall clock. "It'll be crawling into the shaft again any time now—it comes back every six hours."

"It comes and goes, eh?" Dirk brightened. "Why don't you just slam the door in its face?"

It was Lorraine who answered. "We're using stripped-down Mark VI robots, for economy. If we closed the shaft, there'd soon be enough radon accumulated to short-circuit their brains."

"And anyway, the guzzler can blast its way through solid rock," added Dirk. "That wasn't so hot—but wait a minute." He looked piercingly at Krachmeyer. "When did the animal first show up?"

"What does that matter?" shrugged the manager. But he leafed through a log book, most of whose pages were blank save for neurotic-looking doodles, and eventually found an entry. "Thirteen o'clock, July 8—day before yesterday."

"And according to your radiogram," remembered Dirk, "Black Roger landed his ship on the other side of the asteroid at 10:30. Ha!"

"What do you mean, 'Ha!'?"

"I've got a new idea," elaborated Dirk. He straightened his shoulders and his tunic. "First, I think I'd like to watch this guzzler at work; you must have an inspection runabout here. . ."

THE RUNABOUT was a bathyspheric, lead-armored vehicle with periscopic viewports. It used an anti-gravity motor, which meant that when it was turned on, the stars in their courses faltered—relative to it—the expanding universe ceased to expand, and the unity of the Cosmic All received a severe kick in the pants. It was quite comfortable for the two of them, though—Krachmeyer had stayed home, pleading heartburn.

Dirk piloted the sphere carefully down the wide shaft aimed at the asteroid's heart. As the bottom came nearer, they could see, by the dim blue glow of the great uranium vein that made this insignificant body a simmering mass of wealth, spidery robots floating to and fro, wielding drills, picks, and shovels in a radioactive atmosphere that would have killed an unprotected human in nothing flat.

The girl breathed in Dirk's ear: "It's already come! There—on the slag heap!"

The Ranger stiffened and glued his eyes closer to the periscope. Then he saw the guzzler, hitching its bloated, jointed length across the surface of a great pile of tailings, its magnetic tendrils mooring it to the rocks. It was a big one, a dozen segments long, with a new section budding at the rear end, seeming to indicate that it was thriving on its fat fare. Presently it would grow another head there, pinch in two in the middle, and be double trouble.

"What's it think it's up to now?" frowned Dirk. The guzzler had stopped atop the slag heap, and lowered its noz-

zle-shaped head. Suddenly flaming-hot gases belched from its snout; rock and gravel sprayed in a directions under the light gravity. Fragments rattled on the runabout's hull. Then, just as abruptly, the guzzler ceased to exhale and began to root and gulp contentedly. Beneath the surface layer of cast-off rock had appeared a solid heap of luminously pure uranium ore.

Krachmeyer had forlornly ordered the robots to disguise the high-grade stuff as a worthless dump.

Dirk shook his head sadly. "No good; the beast has a sort of Geiger counter in its head. It'll go straight to the biggest center of radioactivity within miles."

As they watched, the guzzler continued to guzzle, burrowing and munching happily and growing steadily more rotund. The robots, having no instructions with regard to it, went stolidly ahead with their work.

"Maybe," Dirk broke a brooding silence, "you have some idea why Black Roger would choose to land here."

Lorraine's smooth brow creased. "Well—obviously he must have designs on the mine. This lode will be one of the most profitable ever, once we get properly into production. Now you mention it—on Mars a couple of weeks ago I was approached by a lawyer who said he was acting as an agent for somebody he wouldn't name, and offered me a price for the lease—a ridiculously low price. Later I heard that he was a well-known shyster who'd successfully defended Black Roger, not long ago, in a case before the Piracy Board."

"Ha!" said Dirk again.

The guzzler finished its meal and, bulging, maneuvered its unwieldy bulk once more toward the top of the shaft. Dirk floated the runabout slowly upward before it until both ship and monster emerged onto the surface of the asteroid. Then he began to follow it as it ambled away across the rugged, meteor-pocked crust.

IT WAS a patience-trying pursuit. After some minutes Lorraine demanded restlessly, "What are you trying to do? Where's it going?"

"Ask it," advised Dirk enigmatically. "Or maybe Black Roger could tell you."

It took the full-fed guzzler most of two hours, traveling a great-circle route, to complete half a circuit of the little asteroid. But at last, dead ahead of its resolutely pointing snout, something loomed into view—a long, rakish, soot-colored space ship, resting in a little valley. It was Black Roger's vessel, the *Vulture*. If there had been any doubt of that, it would have been removed by the skull-and-crossbones painted flamboyantly on the ship's flank.

Lorraine's small fists clenched. "What a nerve!"

But Dirk smiled exultantly. "The ends are meeting," he observed as he lifted the runabout to where they could see everything that went on around the pirate ship.

The guzzler jogged steadily onward; when it was a hundred yards away, an airlock opened in the *Vulture's* side, and half a dozen members of its crew—lean, hardbitten Mark IX robots—scrambled out. One of them advanced directly to meet the uranium-eater, one metal hand invitingly extended.

It was too far to see what he held, but the guzzler lowered its snout and snuffled enthusiastically at the mechanical man's palm, for all the world like a horse receiving a lump of sugar.

"Radium salts, probably," judged Dirk. "Guzzlers are crazy about them."

The robot backed away to join his fellows where they stood at expectant attention. They, and the watchers above, had not long to wait. An odd shudder ran down the guzzler's segmented length. Another followed, and another; the huge beast lurched in a vast paroxysm, and the eruption came in a shower of radio-active sparks.

The pirate robots got going prompt-

ly; they produced big metal-fabric sacks, and—while the guzzler sat humped dejectedly, too sick to care—filled them with tons of almost-pure uranium. While the guzzler had been traveling between the mine and the space ship, its complicated stomachs had had time to sort and refine the ore it had wolfed.

AS THE laden robots trudged off to the *Vulture's* lock, Dirk swung the runabout back toward the mine. "Quite a system," he admired. "A good strong emetic with the radium bait—and presto! Black Roger has the uranium, and the guzzler has nothing to do but hike back and make more inroads into your production. It's a vicious cycle that keeps coming out in Black Roger's favor; and after a while he can buy the whole works for a song."

The girl's blue eyes shot sparks. "But we know his plot now. Can't you arrest him?"

"For what? Undoubtedly he caught the guzzler somewhere else, tamed it after a fashion, and brought it here. But how are you going to prove that in court? And until it's proved, the guzzler is an indigenous wild animal, and Black Roger is no more responsible for its actions than any other citizen. His legal position is like the South American ambassador's wife—impene-trable, impregnable and insurmountable."

But he whistled gaily as he piloted the runabout homeward. Lorraine stared frustratedly at him. Finally, as the vehicle sank into its concave cradle atop the mine headquarters, and its door opened automatically into the building, her expression changed, softened, and became helplessly, meltingly, irresistibly appealing. She brushed against Dirk in the doorway and her eyelids fluttered as her gaze met his. "Aren't you going to do *something* about that awful pirate?" she murmured.

"Do something?" Dirk grinned.

"Well, I've still got a sixty-day sojourn notice to serve on Black Roger; guess I'll deliver it to him now."

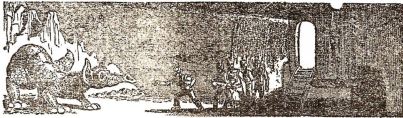
Then he bent and kissed the girl with a suddenness and violence that left her views in the matter wholly an academic question, turned and was gone with long strides toward the chamber where he had left his spacesuit.

As a matter of fact, Dirk did not start at once to serve the papers on Black Rogers. After he returned to his

he dropped heavily to the ground; but, nothing abashed, Dirk advanced and banged deafeningly on the outer lock.

It was opened promptly by a sour-looking robot. Dirk tapped the Ranger's badge on his chest, and the automaton moved grudgingly aside, and even more grudgingly answered Dirk's imperious question by pointing aft.

DIRK COULD have located Black Roger's living-quarters easily, any-



little Ranger's patrol boat, he spent a busy while in its engine-compartment before going up to the control cabin and pointing the ship's nose toward the *Vulture's* roosting place.

Even then he traveled slowly, following the route the guzzler had taken; about halfway along it, he paused to cruise in leisurely circles for ten minutes, dropping numerous small packages from the apparatus ordinarily used for firefighting bombs and miscellaneous missiles. . .

A couple of minutes after that, he nosed his ship down a short distance from the black pirate vessel. On the way he had glimpsed the guzzler below, billowing methodically back toward the mine, and had waved at it benevolently. He had no fear that it would overlook his presents for it; its special senses would lead it straight to every one.

Dirk thrust his official papers into a pouch, buckled his service whammy-gun around his waist outside his spacesuit, and shoved off in a long asteroid-leap for the *Vulture*. As he came within the artificial gravity field that both moored the ship and made it habitable,

way, by the noise of a loud phonograph playing "Hyperbolic Blues". Dirk pushed a door open without ceremony, and surprised the pirate in the midst of a litter of recording tapes, unwashed glasses and dogeared magazines with terrifying covers.

Black Roger himself was a large man, going soft around the middle, but with an upstanding, jetty mustache which lent him a look of ferocity. He was one of the last of the great space-pirates, whose breed had wrought havoc in the pioneer days of a generation before. Then, Earthly legal codes had proved inadequate to the vastnesses of interplanetary space, and bureau piled on bureau had failed to enforce what laws did apply—until someone had conceived the brilliant idea (so familiar to Queen Elizabeth I and her contemporaries) of setting a pirate to catch a pirate. The more promising freebooters had been licensed and given considerable immunities in return for keeping down the more unruly. Now, a pirate was a spaceship owner who lived by his wits without publicly breaking the law—a feat which Black Roger had found not too hard hitherto,

since his wits were excellent and interplanetary law still was scarcely out of diapers.

Dirk leaned close to the space rover, peered intently at his mustache, then recoiled with a shudder.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" asked Black Roger.

"It really is waxed," Dirk deplored. "Tsk, tsk."

Black Roger's eye lit on the badge. "Oh, a cop; sit down and take a load off your flat feet."

"I'm not a cop; I'm a Park Ranger," corrected Dirk. "I've brought you greetings from the Commission for Parks and Monuments." He produced the document. "*To Black Roger Wiescnpfennig, Pirate First Class notification of limitation of sojourn on a planetary body within the Commission's jurisdiction, according to Article V, Paragraph 3a of the Act of 2012, as amended—*"

Black Roger studied it a trifle nearsightedly, then grunted, "Oh, that." tore the paper to pieces and threw the pieces on the floor.

Dirk regarded him severely. "Maybe you think I don't know what you're up to here."

"Oh, was that you snooping around a while back? So what, says I. I don't care if you took pictures; you have no case, and you know it."

"Maybe so," conceded Dirk evenly. "But, legalities aside, I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Roger. A great big pirate like you, and look who you're picking on. A sweet, innocent, helpless little girl who owns the lease on this asteroid—"

"I've seen the babe." Black Roger leered. "Her and me might work up a deal—with you nowhere around, brother."

Dirk sighed. He hadn't expected much, though, from an appeal to the buccaneer's better nature. "One more thing," he said ominously. "Had you considered that the game you're playing might not be safe—for you?"

Black Roger laughed coarsely.

That put an end to any surviving hesitation on Dirk's part. Coolly he drew the whammy-gun, sighted at the other's amusement-convulsed solarplexus, and pulled the trigger.

"Urk!" gasped Black Roger, and lapsed into a rigid silence.

WITH SOME difficulty, Dirk hoisted the body onto his shoulder and went out. The crew-robots who saw this, had no instructions for this contingency. They would have known what to do had someone tried to murder their master, steal his liquor, or sabotage the ship's engines; but to their penetrating electronic gaze it was clear that the master was alive and in good health, though stiff as a board.

Dirk crammed Black Roger into a spacesuit, and once beyond the ship's gravity propelled him without trouble to the patrol boat.

Lorraine Farrar was gloomily going over the mine's books with her uncle. Krachmeyer was sweating; he looked up with marked relief at Dirk's entrance.

"Come on, folks," invited Dirk airily. "You don't want to miss the big show."

"What show?" Lorraine gave him a suspicious look.

"Satisfaction or your money back," Dirk guaranteed, waving them toward the door.

Puzzled, they allowed him to shepherd them into spacesuits and across a bare stretch of asteroid to the patrol-cruiser. Entering its cabin, they halted in stupefaction at the sight of the rigid body extended on the floor.

"This," Dirk introduced it, "is Black Roger."

Lorraine's face lit; she gazed at Dirk, thawing visibly. "Is he dead?" she asked eagerly.

"No," said Dirk. "Just whammied."

Krachmeyer's reaction was horror. "Have you gone crazy? No? Well, then I will. When he comes to, he'll not only

prosecute you for false arrest, but he'll probably sue us for abetting!"

"Buck up, Uncle Krach— I mean Mr. Krachmeyer." Dirk slapped him on the back, dislocating some internal organs which the mine manager, rightly or wrongly, valued. "I didn't arrest him, I just brought him along; and I don't think he'll sue."

He lifted the ship several miles into space and sent it on a great arc around the asteroid. Then, with a skillful use of braking jets, he brought it to a stop relative to that body and let it go into free fall—whose rate, under the gravitational circumstances, would take some time to become perceptible. Through the nose window they could see the valley where the *Vulture* lay.

"Watch," Dirk told his questioning audience. "You too, Roger."

Black Roger had recovered enough to move his eyes. They gave Dirk a dirty look or two, but after that spent most of their time following Lorraine, who, even in a spacesuit coverall, was worth the effort. Dirk considered putting blinders on him; but more humane counsels prevailed, and he propped the pirate up so that he, too, could see out the nose window.

A MINUTE later, the section of landscape they were watching vanished in a terrific flare of light and heat. Vapor puffed outward and diffused instantly into the vacuum. Except for the special glass of the rocket ship's window, designed to guard against the dangerous radiations of deep space, the sight of the explosion might have been permanently blinding.

As it was, they blinked at each other through a haze of dark after-images.

Strangely, it was Black Roger who got out the first words; the shock seemed to have restored his power of speech. "You dirty crook!" he characterized Dirk. "Kidnaper! Saboteur! I'll break you for this; you'll rot in jail—"

"Uh-uh," said Dirk. "All I did was

save your life by removing you from the scene of an impending accident."

"Accident, horse manure!" snarled the pirate.

"You can't prove differently," quoted Dirk. "What's sauce for the goose may be a bit of gravy for the gander, too."

Black Roger evidently understood all too well; he subsided unhappily.

"I trust," Dirk admonished him gently, "that this will be a lesson to you; go straight from now on, Roger!"

The pirate looked unenthusiastic, but he managed to move his head enough to bring Lorraine back into his field of view, and a little light returned to his eyes. "Maybe," he suggested, "the love of a good woman would—" Lorraine shook her head firmly, moving instinctively closer to Dirk. "I'd shave off my mustache," offered Black Roger wistfully.

"Nothing doing," Dirk told him, enfolding the girl protectively. Then he frowned. "Don't stare." He grasped Black Roger by the shoulders and turned him with his face to the wall.

Krachmeyer found his voice. "How," he inquired awedly, "did you do it?"

Dirk glanced fondly through the window at the still-glowing crater gouged out of the asteroid. "Simple. I abstracted some plutonium from this ship's fuel-stores, and scattered it in small packages where the guzzler would be sure to make a meal on it. Rich, concentrated food, calculated to give it acute indigestion. For a while, though, the plutonium was strung out through its multiple stomachs, slowly piling up in its abomasum. About the time it got back to the *Vulture*, the accumulation reached critical mass, and the guzzler burped.

"And now," Dirk regretfully slid the whammy-gun from his holster, "Lorraine and I would like to be alone."

He stacked the stiffened Krachmeyer up, face to the wall, beside Black Roger.