

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

No. 42

April,

1959

35¢

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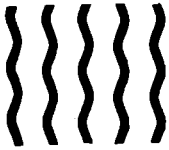
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FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION, Number 42, April, 1959. Published every other month by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 241 Church Street, New York 13, New York. Second-class mail privileges authorized at Holyoke, Mass. Single copies 35¢; yearly subscription \$2.10. Printed in U. S. A.



Novelet



THE RENEGADE

by Thomas N. Scortia

illustrated by ORBAN

The Teranu had had a high-culture civilization a thousand generations before the Great Wall of China was built on Earth. And it had remained stable all this time—until the Earthmen came. It was the thought of this being destroyed by greedy barbarians that had driven Bartok over to the natives. And Lieutenant Boudet was sickened at the way the major dealt with beings who had created the magnificent works of art he had seen ...

BOUDET was watching the native guides from the control deck of the command halftrack as they lined up on the desert outside for their daily inoculations. That was when it began to hail.

The hailstones were as big as golf balls. They fell from the dull red sky with a fantastic velocity, throwing up

spurts of dust and sand. For an instant, it seemed as if someone was firing a machine gun into the dead white sand before the half-track.

The native guides threw themselves to the ground and drew their soft arms and legs up under their bodies. The horny carapaces that covered their dorsal surfaces spit frag-



The Teranu hurled themselves to the ground, and drew their heads into their shells, while the Earthmen dashed for the protection of the shield.

ments of ice as the hail struck and splintered.

The five Earthmen in the medical party ran for the force umbrella, ten feet away. They made it easily—except for the last man, who staggered momentarily before they hauled him under the protective shield.

Boudet watched Doc Parente staunch the flow of blood from the man's head, those big hands of his—with the coarse growth of black bristles—suddenly gentle as he applied a pressure bandage. One of the men beside Parente pointed upward at the barrage of hail that pelted the force umbrella, his eyes wide in astonishment.

The permaglas canopy above Boudet's head cracked alarmingly under the impact of the pellets of ice. The sky through the canopy was a dirty brick red, laced with racing streaks of white. It seemed, as he looked up, as if all of the white lines of racing hail were converging on his position and he felt an irrational impulse to crouch before the assault. It was a dizzying sensation, star-

ing upward. . . like looking into the raging cone of a whirlpool that threatened momentarily to swallow you up.

And, as quickly as the storm had begun, it ended.

THE LINE of demarcation was so sharp that Boudet could see it rush downward upon him. On one side, there was the dazzling streaks of white; on the other, nothing but the faintest mist of evaporating rain.

He looked out over the sands below and watched the curtain of ice sweep away swiftly toward the low afternoon sun, the hail lashing the desert with its violence.

Then everything was quite still.

What was the Teranu poem? he wondered—the one that went:

How silent the night before
the fall-of-stones.
We wondered at the loss
Of our hour of quiet,
Awaiting its return.

Of course, that didn't come out right. There was the simple problem of translating a word like "alusan" as "quiet"

when it meant a great deal more: repose, introspection, a sort of thoughtful reverie. And how did you handle the more complex problem of the Teranu alliterative poetic forms. You couldn't use the same devices in the English translation. They sounded silly and...

The Teranu guides were lining up again as the medical party gathered its abandoned equipment and inactivated the force umbrella. He saw Par-ente gesture at the man with the bandaged head, and the man started walking toward one of the half-tracks to the rear of the command machine.

A HATCH clanged somewhere below, followed by the sound of boots on the metal ladder leading to the command deck. Major Kelvin's beefy red face appeared in the deck trap.

"D a m n e d unpredictable mudhole," the major snorted as he brushed damp sand from the knees of his red uniform trousers. "They can give the whole Carmody system back to the gooks as far as I'm concerned."

Boudet inspected the man with distaste from the corner of his eye.

"Start your engines, Lieutenant," the major ordered. "They'll be finished shooting the gooks in another minute."

Boudet pressed the starter button, and below the alcohol motors snarled, caught, and purred softly. He pressed the "to stations" signal and heard the faint beep below, followed by the scuffing of boot leather as the two turret gunners took their positions. A moment later, Sergeant Gorman pulled himself through the deck hatch and, at a nod from Boudet, took his station at the radar post.

"All right," Major Kelvin's crisp voice said—"give those babies outside a 'to stations'."

AS THE OUTSIDE signal sounded, Boudet watched the party dissolve toward the other half-tracks. The natives followed slowly, their oddly-articulated humanoid bodies swinging with a weird grace over the sand. The one assigned to the command vehicle paused at its base, found

hand-holds and climbed to the padded saddle next to the port turret. As soon as he had strapped himself to the saddle, he waved to Boudet.

Funny, Boudet thought, this racial claustrophobia of the Teranu. You could never get them under a solid roof. Even their own buildings were open to the sky, with only thin roofs of lacquered paper that rolled back each morning. Of course, the devastating hailstorms made any sort of roof except a very massive one impractical.

He waved back at the guide and the Teranu grinned awkwardly. The human expression seemed oddly out of place in the broad flat-nosed features.

The "all-clear" lights on the board glowed as the three half-tracks and the fueler to their rear reported in.

"Half speed ahead," the major said and grabbed for the support of the ladder where it protruded through the deck hatch.

Boudet released the brake, and the vehicle started with a jolt, swaying heavily across the sand. He could hear the hard gritty spray from the front

wheels strike the undercarriage far below as the alcohol motors took on a deeper note of effort. It was a pity, he thought, that they were restricted to internal combustion engines on Carmody II; but Earth maintained only two small stations on the planet, and cargo space was too limited for any sort of processed fuel from one of the other colonies. They were perforce reduced to fermenting native wood pulps for most of their fuel.

IT WAS ALMOST sunset when the murky overcast finally broke. Clear desert air suddenly glowed with the deep vermilion of the setting sun and, miles ahead, the mist that was the last reminder of the hail storm began to dissolve. Through the dissolving mists the distant blue forms of the mountains that were their destination appeared.

"You can see the range now," he told the major.

The man looked up from his position in the gimbaled chair where he had been sitting and then made his way to Boudet's side.

"We'll try to make it to the foothills by nightfall," he said.

"Do you think that's wise?" Boudet asked.

"Why not?"

"Well, sir," Boudet said after a pause. "We don't know what Bartok's been up to since he escaped from Meadowville. Out here we can bed down for the night without too much fear of attack."

"Lieutenant," the major said patiently, "the biggest problem that we colonials have is steering a course between the safe and the dignified. Most of the races we've met set a fantastic value on 'face.' Now we wouldn't want to look as if we were afraid of our shadows, would we?"

"No sir," Boudet said, coloring angrily at his tone.

"Besides," the major said, "we won't actually camp at the foot of the mountains. I don't relish any snipers or stone-rolling fanatics myself. We've got enough trouble on our hands, just bringing Bartok back alive, without starting a miniature war."

The question is, Boudet thought, *how well has Bartok*

succeeded? "Miniature" might be the wrong adjective for the trouble we're riding into.

II

THEY WERE still almost an hour's journey from the mountains when Major Kelvin gave the signal to stop for refueling. Early dusk was already upon them and Boudet, noticing that his fuel gauges still registered a quarter of a tank, wondered why they didn't continue to the camp site for the night.

"Refueling," the major answered his unspoken question, "is a dangerous operation when you're under direct enemy surveillance. Best you pick the time and place rather than wait until you need the fuel. We've good visibility still and we're in little danger of attack. We'll be nearly dry by the time we reach the mountains, and then we're in territory where we're more vulnerable."

Boudet dogged the tracks of the command vehicle and watched as the shadows of the other vehicles began to move up in the half-darkness, the

heavy fueler entering the circle formed by his vehicle and the other three combat half-tracks. After a moment, soft lights glowed on the side of the fueler and the dark shapes of men made ordered confusion in the space below its bulk.

BOUDET made his way down the ladder to the engine deck, nodding at the dark shape of one of the gunners who looked from his turret at the noise. Then he pulled his body through the side hatch and dropped lightly to the ground.

He had no duties as the major's executive officer during the refueling, but he felt he needed the air. The evening was cold and as he watched the men unreel the heavy fuel lines to the half-tracks, he saw that the dusk had already perceptibly deepened.

A dark shape approached his position, and he saw that it was Doc Parente. He gave the medical officer a casual salute and said, "Evening, Doc."

"Evening," came Parente's heavy rumbling voice. "Where's His Nibs?"

"Up on deck with the radar watch. Jumping at every shadow."

Parente leaned back against the metal side of the half-track, extracted his weathered pipe, and flamed it with a tiny jet lighter. Boudet's nose wrinkled at the pungent smoke.

"Look, youngster," Parente said softly, "don't undersell the Old Man. The last thing in the world you can call him is a coward."

"You know we've nothing to worry about from the Teranu. They're one of the most peaceful. . ."

PARENTE nodded. "By themselves, yes."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that we don't know what Bartok has filled their heads with."

"Uh, uh, you can't change a racial characteristic overnight," Boudet objected.

"You're that much of an expert on the Teranu?"

"No, but I've studied them."

"So has His Nibs," said Parente. "I told you, don't underestimate him."

"His Nibs is a little tin soldier with all the trappings."

"I suppose," Parente laughed—a deep rumble that faded into the night. "I should give you some sort of dressing-down about disrespect for a superior officer."

"But you won't, though," Boudet said.

"No—but not for the reason you think. The major has as much understanding, and appreciation of, and compassion for the natives as you claim to have. But that's something you'll have to realize in your own good time."

"Him and his Earthman supremacy? Don't make me laugh."

THEY STOOD for a moment in silence, Parente sucking noisily on his pipe. Once the flame of his lighter glowed briefly. "Can't keep the damned thing lighted in this dampness," he said. Then, "You went to school with him, I understand."

"Bartok? That's right. The Academy."

"What sort of a person was he?"

"Then?" Boudet frowned in

thought. "Oh, I don't know. Moody, sometimes. Sometimes wild and unpredictable. He'd have made a good combat officer. He took chances, you know, but he was careful about it."

"That doesn't sound like the man who shot the commissioner in Meadowville."

"That I don't know—he could have his crazy moments. I remember he got into a fight once, with one of the cadets who was bragging about how he cribbed on an exam. Funny sort of thing to fight about. I asked him later why he didn't report it, if he felt so strong about it. You know the honor system at the Academy. No one would have blamed him. But he said no, it was a personal thing with him—something he had to handle himself."

"Took the burdens of the world pretty seriously," Parente suggested. "Maybe he'll listen to reason, though."

"From the Old Man? I don't know. If it were just him alone, he'd come back. It's the sort of Quixotic gesture he'd make, giving himself up with a fanfare. Ordinarily I don't

think he'd have to run in the first place, but..."

"But what?"

"The Teranu. He spent lots of time out on the plains in their village. You know, he was writing a book? Translations of Teranu philosophy."

PARENTE said slowly, "That's strange. Funny when a Terran starts to go native. You get one hell of a mess. Like the shooting of the commissioner..."

"Well, we never did get the full tale of that."

The sharp beep of the "*to stations*" sounded suddenly.

"Damn," Parente said, and broke from the side of the half-track in a choppy run.

"Native force approaching from right front," Major Kelvin's voice blared from the external speakers. "All men to stations. Lieutenant Boudet up here on the double."

Boudet scrambled through the dark hatch and into the half-track. The men in the side gun turrets made shuffling sounds in the dark, and he heard the soft whine of electric motors as gun mounts turned

on oiled bearings to face the front.

He reached the base of the ladder to the command deck and saw the heavy bulk of a man descending. "That you, Boudet?" Major Kelvin's voice asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Cover me on deck. Looks like a parlay from the infra-red pickup. Keep a gun on me while I talk to them. If they try anything funny, shoot first and worry about me afterwards."

As he started up the ladder, the major yelled, "And keep an eye on those gook guides. They may get ideas."

BOUDET found Sergeant Gorman crouched over the double screens of the ground radar and the infra-red pickup. On the radar screen, he could see a small group of dots approaching the central larger pip that marked their position. The i-r screen showed a group of mounted Teranu approaching slowly, a flag waving above the head of the leading rider. As he watched, the flag fluttered for a moment and he saw the simple bold ideograph for "*peace*"

painted across the cloth.

He called the other half-tracks quickly and gave orders to keep the guides under surveillance with the i-r equipment. Then he turned his attention back to the screen as the mounted group drew closer.

There were four in the party and they were mounted on Koals—the lean dog-like beasts that were universally used on Carmody II for riding, and as beasts of burden. These animals, however, were thinner, with longer legs and abbreviated carapaces that told of a strain, bred for speed and endurance.

The riders drew up and the leader dismounted. The major, and one of the guides, suddenly appeared from the blind spot below the i-r pickup and approached to meet the Teranu. They stood for several seconds, eyeing each other silently.

Then the Teranu began to speak slowly, moving his hands expressively. The guide said something to the major, apparently translating. For seconds more nothing happened; then the major shook his head vigorously.

THE TERANU, his white robes swirling about his body in the night breeze, seemed to grow an inch taller. As the major started to turn, the Teranu sprang toward him, his hand upraised.

The native guide fell to the ground as flame spurted from the major's fist.

The riders were suddenly spurring their mounts forward.

Below Boudet, the machine guns were firing, their shrill chatter throwing a curtain of twenty caliber slugs across the space before them.

Boudet had time to see the major hit the ground beside the guide; then the sand in front of him churned into a marching spray that raced toward the charging riders and passed over them.

In its wake, the mounted Teranu became a tangled heap of thrashing animals and dying natives.

III

FOR AN INSANE instant Boudet thought he could hear the screams of the dying Teranu, even on the control deck. The ancient

poem, the one Bartok had been so fond of quoting, flashed crazily through his mind:

It is the vessel of my father-
before-me,
With his blood infused
And mine
And yet my sons
That I hold while the Ryal
Reeds whisper,
"Will we ever die?"

Then he was shouting into the communicator. "Captain Parente, the major's down. Can you get out to him? We'll cover you if any of them are faking."

He watched a group of three men, Parente in the lead, scurry across the sand to pause beside the major and the guide. After a moment he saw the major stagger to his feet and lean against the bear-like figure of the medical officer. A short while later, he heard the sounds of steps on the deck below and he hurried to help them up to the deck.

"Just winged, damn it," the major panted. "Don't look so green, Boudet. You'll see worse than this before your tour is over."

HE SAT DOWN on the floor and leaned his head forward between his legs as

Parente carefully ripped away his sleeve. A long slash down his left bicep was steadily oozing blood.

"Just a flesh wound," Parente grunted as he began to apply a dressing from the kit he carried. When he had finished, Major Kelvin sat up and said. "Did you get the bastards?"

His eyes were cold and emotionless.

"Yes sir," Boudet said, feeling sick, "every one of them."

"Good," the major said. He winced as he tried his bandaged arm. "Good thing the gooks don't know how to use a knife."

Then he was all business. "Get a burial party out," he ordered. "And tell the guides to forget about this."

Boudet felt his throat grow tight. For a moment he had thought the Old Man might be showing some sign of decency, but he realized that it was simply sound tactics to conceal the bodies. That would keep the mountain people wondering if their men had lost themselves in the desert.

Cold-blooded martinet, he thought.

BOUDET recruited a burial party from among the guides and did what had to be done while the vehicles finished their refueling in the dark. Twenty minutes later, he was again on the control bridge of the major's half-track, guiding the machine through the darkness toward the distant invisible mountains.

Captain Parente had stayed in the lead vehicle to talk to the major and give him a sedative.

"Were they from Bartok?" he asked the major.

"Uh, huh," the major nodded. "Wanted us to turn back."

"How did he know we were coming for him?"

"I guess he expected it. He offered to give himself up within three months if we'd turn back."

The major snorted. "Three months while he trained the gooks, taught them how to fight. Fat chance."

"I don't understand it," Parente said. "The Teranu are the most peace-loving people we've ever met."

"Any people will fight to

save their homes," Boudet said from the controls and then tensed, mentally kicking himself for the outburst.

PARENTE stepped into the breach quickly. "No," he said quickly, "they have a complete tradition of non-violence. Their whole philosophy is one of living with nature rather than fighting it. That sort of approach just doesn't breed fighters."

"Maybe you think those gooks back there wanted to play patty-cake?" the major asked drily.

They rode in silence for the rest of the hours, the major dozing on a pallet on the floor which Parente had spread for him, until Gorman at the radar post announced that the base of the mountains was a bare half mile away.

"We'll bed down here for the night," the major decided when Parente awakened him. "Lieutenant, I want a three shift radar and i-r watch. Better post two sentries outside in case something sneaks past our blind spot. Usual detector reinforcement pattern."

Boudet gave orders for the

four vehicles to draw in, the three combat craft encircling the fueler, noses outward and circles of detection overlapping. Then he secured his bedroll from a locker in the floor, and followed the major and Parente below.

He found that he couldn't sleep. The image of those three riders falling before the machine guns, like ripe wheat before a scythe, haunted him. He still imagined that he heard their cries of pain, although he told himself that this was foolish—that they were undoubtedly dead even before they had touched the ground.

FINALLY, he unzipped the bedroll and sat up. In the darkness, he could hear Parente's labored snores and near him the lighter breathing of the major. The gunners had unrolled their beds near the turret entrances, and he tried to avoid their sleeping forms as he undogged the hatch and climbed out into the night air. He stood for a long time, leaning against the cold metal wall of the half-track, smoking and thinking.

Occasionally, he heard the

soft scuff of leather on sand as one of the sentries made his rounds.

The thing, he realized, that bothered him most was that last image before the guns had fired. The upraised hand of the Teranu messenger. And then the blast from the major's side-arm. He realized that none of them had seen anything menacing beyond the upraised arm of the native. No knife, as the major had claimed; not even a gleam of metal.

And there had been no sign of a fallen weapon when he had supervised the burial detail. Of course, it had been dark, and the mounted men had carried the intricately etched ceremonial knives of the Teranu but...the native who had talked to the major had carried no knife and there had been no sign of a weapon near the body.

He felt a little sick then. Had the Old Man deliberately shot the native down, or had he misinterpreted the gesture of the upraised hand? No, the Old Man wasn't one to go off half-cocked. He usually knew what he was doing.

Which meant. . .

BUT WHY? It didn't make sense. Except for that open contempt of the major's for the natives. Perhaps to incite them into some organized show of violence. After all, careers and reputations had been made before in police actions on colonial planets.

At that moment, Boudet felt ashamed, horribly ashamed of being a man.

He turned and walked from the half-track, only dimly aware of his intentions. The two sentries were some distance from him. One turned and started toward him, but he said something reassuring, not even caring what his voice said.

After that he kept walking, feeling the hard grit of the desert sand under his feet.

He must have walked for an hour in the darkness before the character of the ground under his boots changed. He began to stumble occasionally on protruding rocks, but he was too tired to even notice. He realized that he was being quite foolish, going out this way

without any protection. A sudden hailstorm of the type they had encountered that day could easily leave him a bleeding, beaten thing with no one within call to aid him.

But the thought of the major, and what he had done, only made Boudet walk faster.

He didn't realize that there was anyone within miles until the last instant. Then arms encircled him from behind and a press of bodies bore him to the hard ground.

He felt the coldness of steel pressing into his throat.

IV

HE DIDN'T struggle as they tied his hands and pulled him to his feet. From a few soft words that he heard, Boudet knew that they were Teranu. They were quite silent as they pushed him ahead of them. He began to walk again, not speaking.

Their passage up the mountain slope was a dimly-remembered thing. He had a jumbled impression of rock walls towering on either side, but the road that they took was com-

paratively broad and not too rocky for his feet. He could tell that the pass was ascending steeply and that it was wide enough to allow perhaps a dozen men abreast to pass, but he lost all sense of direction.

When the ground again leveled, he was too tired to really care. It wasn't a physical tiredness, exactly. He felt rather emotionally drained—as if he had been crying or laughing for an endless period.

He knew from the occasional glint of light that they had entered a village area, but he couldn't make out the buildings except as dim squat shapes that occasionally occulted the stars on the horizon.

They led him to a small building and pushed him inside. He sank to the woven floor and waited, trying to work circulation back into his bound hands by wiggling the fingers. Quite without intending, he dozed.

HE WAS AWAKENED by a hand, shaking his shoulder. For a moment he thought he was still in the half-track and he sat up quickly, sleep

blearing his eyes as he tried to gain some semblance of alertness. Then his eyes focused on the native standing over him.

The Teranu wore a short kilted affair of bright scarlet with a thin black piping along the skirt hem. His short-cropped hair had been plastered to his oblong head with some shiny material, so that his face looked lacquered and even more inhuman than the usual Teranu face.

A beam of rusty light from the morning sun illuminated the severe interior of the room. Boudet saw that the varnished paper panels that normally divided a Teranu interior had been folded into their wall recesses but that the parchment roof was still in place. The room was typically Teranu to the woven rush mats that blanketed the floor.

His inspection was cut short by a heavy body blocking the light from the doorway. The red-kilted Teranu drew aside.

"Good morning, Howie," a thin voice said. "I hope you slept well."

He tried to sound as casual. "Morning, Bart," he told

Bartok. "The floor was a little hard but I was too pooped to notice."

BARTOK said something in Teranu, and the native produced a small, square-bladed knife and cut the fibers binding his wrists. He sat up and tried to rub circulation back into his hands.

"Sorry about that," Bartok said. "I'd have been here earlier if I had known. You know, you took a hell of a chance, coming up on us in the dark like that."

Boudet shrugged and got to his feet.

"It seemed the right thing to do at the time," he said.

He followed Bartok out into the cool morning air. The scarlet-clad Teranu brought up the rear.

"I'd have preferred meeting under more pleasant circumstances," Bartok said.

They walked down a tamped earth street that arrowed between the fragile houses of the village. At the far end of the street, Boudet saw the massive timbers of a Ryal wood shrine. A small plot of grass and a cir-

cle of clipped bushes surrounded it, setting it apart from the village street. Only it, of all the structures in sight, seemed at all permanent.

They passed several Teranu, but no one paid them any attention. Boudet had expected some sort of deference to Bartok but the man didn't seem to notice the omission.

"I suppose you were sent up here to bring me back," Bartok said.

BOUDET inspected him from the corner of his eye. He seemed thinner than the last time Boudet had seen him, almost emaciated. Of course, Bartok had always been the wiry type, lean and sinewy with the kind of nervous energy that would not allow him to remain still in one spot for very long. Still, he looked very tired and much older than his years.

"No," Boudet said. "No, I didn't come for that."

"As you wish. It wouldn't do you any good if you had."

Bartok paused and eyed him wearily. "Understand, Howie, I like you very much. I always

have, but even you couldn't do that."

Bartok waved his hand. "Oh, I'm not afraid about the commissioner affair. I'll face up to that when the time comes but..."

"But the time hasn't come yet?" Boudet asked.

"No, not yet."

"What *did* happen in Meadowville?"

"Probably pretty much what you heard. I killed him, if that's what you mean."

"Partly."

"The other part being why? The same thing you've seen time and again. The blustering colonial official, pushing native trash around. I was staying with one of the Teranu families. He came through with an inoculation team, said that the Teranu were being moved."

BARTOK'S voice became cold and tense. "Imagine. They'd lived in that spot for a thousand generations, for a time longer than Earth's whole recorded history."

"I understand that the move was dictated by the Colonial Health Office," Boudet said,

"to move them outside of the range of infection from the Earth settlement. After all, you can't inoculate a whole town for every one of the Earthman's diseases."

"That makes no matter," Bartok said. "We're the ones who should have moved."

"But the Commissioner?"

"I'm not sorry about that. It was an accident, a struggle with a gun. But I'm not sorry—the dirty little racial snob got just what he deserved."

They walked for some seconds in silence.

"Look, Howie," Bartok said. "Why did you come up here?"

"I'm not sure." Boudet shrugged. "Not to take you back, though." He told Bartok of the tribesmen who had been machine-gunned on the desert.

A tiny muscle clenched in Bartok's jaw as he heard the story. "I meant it, you know," Bartok said. "About giving myself up at the end of three months."

"It sounded like you."

"Thanks, Howie." Bartok placed a hand on Boudet's arm. "Thanks a lot."

BARTOK left him in a small area of trees and shrubs to the left of the shrine.

"I'll see you in an hour," he explained. "Your arrival brings up certain problems. I think you'll like it out here in the open better than in the place I found you."

As he walked away, Boudet marveled again at how thin and tired he seemed.

And somehow tragic.

The Teranu in the red tunic seated himself on his haunches behind Boudet. When Boudet turned and smiled uncertainly, the native eyed him coldly, without expression.

The tempo of activity in the village increased as the day grew older. There were dozens of small groups engaged in various activities down the length of the street, and occasionally several nobles in bright costumes passed within earshot. They paid him no notice, seeming deliberately to avoid admitting that he was there. Several, he saw, were wearing ceremonial daggers, such as he had seen in the museum in Meadowville. They were light, easily-broken pieces

with intricately lacquered and inlaid blades, designed more for beauty than utility.

When Bartok returned, he said, "Your major has pulled up at the base of our pass. He hasn't made a move since. Probably he'll try to starve us out."

"I don't think so," Boudet said. "His food and fuel supply is limited."

BARTOK said, "He may succeed anyway," and motioned Boudet to follow him. They took an angled course from the shrine, the Teranu in the red tunic following close behind.

"They don't exactly trust me where you're concerned," Bartok observed when he saw Boudet look at their shadow. "Blood and water, I suppose—or the Teranu equivalent."

They stopped by a long low structure of heavy timbers. The solidity of the structure contrasted oddly with the more fragile buildings on either side.

When Boudet started to enter, Bartok placed a restraining hand on his shoulder. "No—you can see what you want from here."

The interior of the single room was punctuated by the massive timbers that supported the heavy roof. Boudet had never seen a Teranu building before, except for a shrine, whose roof was designed to withstand the autumnal hails and for a moment he was so engrossed in the construction that he didn't realize the significance of the white pallets crowding the floor nor of the silent figures on them.

Then he realized what it was. A hospital.

"Measles," Bartok said. "Plain, ordinary measles. The sort of thing we call a kid's disease. But without antitoxin, it's killing us slowly but surely."

V

BARTOK SAID, "So you see we can't outwait your major."

"Look," Boudet suggested, "they have vaccine in the half-tracks. Kelvin wouldn't let the whole village die off."

"Wouldn't he? And what would he expect in return? Howie, it's not *my* life I'm wor-

rying about. If these people ever realize that I brought this with me when I came... well, I'd have to save face—and you know what that means."

"But you've got to do something."

"Something? Yes, we'll do something. We'll fight. For the first time in her fat, greedy history, Earth will have to fight to hold a colony. She won't be able to swallow us up and digest us at her leisure."

He was silent for a moment as if lost in thought. Then, "Did you ever see what we did on Virago?"

"I've been there," Boudet admitted.

"Whole native cities deserted, decaying. Others torn apart, the buildings converted to pressurized huts for the Earthmen to live in. But that's not the really bad part. The people of Virago had one of the most complex cultures we've ever seen, and an art that's irreplaceable. So, now they've sold all that for a mess of pottage—for the kind of pottage we specialize in. Shiny new tractors and cheap cloth and packaged foods and the

same sort of ulcer-breeding environment you'll find on a thousand planets between here and Sol.

"Sure, we brought measles and mumps and pneumonias of a dozen kinds—but we brought a contagion a lot more deadly, the rawness and the dirt of being men, all the blood lust and the complete contempt for the individual that has marked our whole history."

BARTOK'S face had become flushed and his eyes were narrow and intent as he talked. He laughed self-consciously.

"I'm sorry, Howie. It's just that I get pretty wound up on this. The Teranu have a recorded history stretching back ten thousand years before the Great Wall of China was built on Earth. You've studied their culture, their philosophy, their art. Nothing like that could ever originate on Earth. It's incomparably superior to anything of ours. It makes us look like the ragged barbarians we are. And, God willing, this is one people that won't be converted into another parrot species, trying to imitate the cheap

mechanical glamour of Earth."

"And, in the meantime," Boudet said, "Major Kelvin is camped below, waiting. What about him?"

"I told you, we'll fight."

"What with?"

"With our hands, if we have to. With those."

HE POINTED toward two Teranu who were bearing a device like a litter between them and motioned them closer. There was a light canvas thrown over the litter and Bartok pulled it up.

What was underneath was very crude, the sort of thing you'd make on a primitive forge. The barrels were quite smooth inside; they were obviously meant to be muzzle-loaded.

"And each day," Bartok said proudly, "we'll have more."

"You can't fight off half-tracks and machine-guns and tanks with muskets."

"How many Earthmen are there on Carmody?"

"Maybe ten thousand," Boudet said.

"And there are well over six-

ty million Teranu. If necessary, we can lose a hundred to each Earthman. But we will win. We'll smother Kelvin and the people like him under a sea of bodies."

He gestured for the two Teranu to continue on their way.

"And Kelvin?" Boudet insisted.

"He knows the value of saving face. I know how to get him out of his metal shell." Bartok laughed. "When I left you, I sent him a message. I told him I wanted to parlay. I accused him of being afraid, of hiding in his half-tracks. He'll come now. He has to or lose face."

"And," Boudet said, "the road isn't big enough for any vehicle. He'll have to come on foot."

"Which is exactly what I want."

VI

BARTOK spent the rest of the morning and the early afternoon in feverish preparation for the coming of Major Kelvin. He left

Boudet in charge of the same impassive Teranu in the red tunic. Several times Boudet tried to start a conversation with him, but the guard knew no English and Boudet could catch only a few words of the dialect that he spoke. He gathered that the native was not a person of little importance by the deference paid him by several of the villagers who at various times addressed him.

When Bartok appeared at noon with canned rations, Boudet asked him about it.

"Oh," Bartok said, "he's a sort of village magistrate, charged with carrying out punishment. You're a friend of mine and they couldn't assign just anyone to be with you without causing me to lose face."

During the course of the hurried meal, Boudet tried to pump Bartok on his plans but the man was evasive. Boudet finally decided that he had some plan in mind to hold Kelvin hostage. He wondered if Bartok really thought he could get away with it. Certainly the authorities in Mead-

owville wouldn't allow Kelvin to remain a prisoner for long. How they would react bothered him; and for the first time he recognized the anomaly of his position. Bartok had automatically assumed that he was in sympathy with the Teranu and Bartok's plans for them.

IN TRUTH, Boudet was not sure of where he stood. He had bolted after the evidence of the major's brutality, but the thought of siding with the Teranu in any revolt against colonial authority was equally distasteful. Not that he couldn't appreciate Bartok's motives—but he saw that, in spite of all his help, Bartok was still an outsider to the Teranu—as much so as Boudet himself. There was little left to him or Bartok, he realized, regardless of the outcome of today's plan. They would be disowned by their own people and still just barely tolerated by the Teranu.

He spent the early afternoon, after Bartok had left, in the house where he had awakened. He tried to catch a

nap but the roof had been rolled back and the dull light of the afternoon sun, while not warm, made it impossible to sleep.

He decided to find Bartok.

HE LEFT, followed by the silent guard. He found Bartok standing near the shrine at the head of the street.

"Getting restless, Howie?" Bartok greeted him.

"What about Kelvin?"

"He's coming. Come along with me."

Boudet followed him from the street, through a grassed plot, and out toward a cut in the rock table upon which the village was built. Without being told, he surmised that the cut marked the road that led up from the base of the mountain.

Bartok led the way along the rocky ground to a ledge that jutted out over the trail below. For the first time, Boudet realized how high they were, and how inaccessible the village was except by the one road.

"There's an interesting history behind this ledge," Bar-

tok said as he looked out over the edge and followed the road with his eyes until it was lost in the underbrush far down the mountain.

"The Teranu call this the Place of Honor. When a man has lost face before the whole village and there's no other way to regain honor, he walks to the edge and..."

He spread his hands.

"Of course, if he doesn't have the courage, the magistrate—in this case your guard—helps him."

Boudet turned and eyed the impassive Teranu. "It's not a pretty way to die."

"But it is. It's clean and it's one sure way of redeeming yourself."

"It's a rather ironic thought," Bartok added. "The Place of Honor gives a clear view of the trail below and..."

He pointed to the tiny dots that formed far below and began to mount the trail slowly.

"You see," Bartok laughed. "I knew he had to come."

THERE WAS no doubt of it. The group had to be Earthmen. The Teranu would never

have preserved that formation. Boudet could barely make out their figures, but he saw that several were carrying some sort of heavy equipment. Probably the force screen, he realized. It was getting late, and the hailstorms during this season usually came in the late afternoon.

They stood, watching the group ascend. The road was quite steep and, except for several ragged turns, essentially straight.

"They'll pass through the cut below," Bartok said.

Teranu were beginning to gather behind them, and Boudet noticed that they were all carrying muskets.

"This is the test, our test," Bartok laughed. "Look."

He pointed across the cut through which the trail knifed its last thousand yards. For a moment, Boudet thought that they were merely mounds of Earth, overgrown with coarse vegetation. Then he realized that there was something else. He saw a flash of color amid the branches.

"Rocks," Bartok hissed. "A whole mass of rock held by a

retaining frame. Knock out the props and the mass avalanches into the cut."

Boudet looked at him in horror.

"Bart," Boudet said, grabbing the man by the arm. "They're your own people."

Bartok shook off his hand. "These are my people," he said. "My God, Howie, how we've slaughtered in our rise to power. This is only turnabout."

THE MEN were approaching the area where the rock walls of the cut towered above them. In another five minutes they would be in the trap.

"Bart," he yelled. "What about the men you sent. They were supposed to kill the major, weren't they?"

"It was a stupid move, I know," Bartok said. "I couldn't think of anything else at the moment. He came before I was ready."

Boudet stared at him in disbelief. It was all there, he saw . . . completely in character. The exaggerated code of behavior that could justify any action, the whole sordid reaction pattern that a hundred

other high-minded champions had played out in the past. He must have been mad even to consider . . .

Boudet turned and lunged for one of the Teranu behind him. Before the native could recover, he had the clumsy musket in his hands.

He heard Bartok yell and then he fired.

Not at Bartok—it took all of his control to master that impulse—but into the air.

IN THE NEXT instant Bartok was upon him, his bony fists pounding into Boudet's face. "I'll kill you myself for that," Bartok yelled.

And then the Teranu were pulling him off, their faces cold and without emotion.

Bartok said something and hands grabbed Boudet, pulling him to his feet. Far below, the men had stopped and were looking upward. Boudet thought, *Pray God, Kelvin has his binoculars.*

The seconds lengthened and then the body of men started to move forward again. Boudet opened his mouth to shout and a rough hand slapped across his face.

The men were directly below now, trapped between the sheer rock walls. Bartok was raising his hand in signal.

"*Bartok!*" The noise was like thunder, echoing up from the train. Boudet realized that they must have brought an electric megaphone along.

"*Bartok,*" Major Kelvin's voice called again.

For a moment Bartok hesitated. The Teranu were looking at him...waiting. He stepped to the ledge in view of the men far below.

"*Bartok,*" the Major's voice thundered, "*I stop here. If you want your parlay, come down.*"

Bartok stood stiffly for a second. Then his eyes strayed back to the masses of stone, poised above the trail.

"*There's no reason to be afraid,*" the Major's voice said. Then he repeated the words in Teranu.

Suddenly Boudet was laughing. "What now, little man?" he demanded. "How do you save face now?"

BARTOK'S face was a study in shock.

"Honor, my fine-feathered friend," Boudet mocked him.

"You've got to go down and join him or you'll lose face. He'll die, but you'll die with him."

Bartok paused in indecision.

"You've lost," Boudet yelled. He felt like sobbing with relief.

"Have I?" Bartok asked, and raised his hand again. "They'll still obey. After that is time enough to worry."

He started to bring the hand down. Boudet saw a flash of color as Teranu appeared amid the branches camouflaging the rocks.

Then...

The sound of the shot was not very loud.

The Teranu, the one who had guarded Boudet through the day, stood holding the smoking musket.

A look of stark disbelief spread slowly over Bartok's face.

It seemed to hang in mid-air... Just like the Cheshire Cat's, Boudet thought insanely...long after Bartok had plunged over the ledge, long after his body had found its destiny on the sharp rocks below.

VII

BOUDET stood, watching the village Teranu line up for their inoculations. Major Kelvin had scarcely noticed him since the men had come through the cut. Now he walked across the street and motioned for Boudet to follow him out of earshot of the men.

"I suppose I'm under arrest," Boudet said.

"No," the major replied.

"I should be grateful, I suppose."

"You're a fool," the major said, bitterly. "Maybe you'll grow out of it."

He started to say something else when Parente approached.

"About finished, Major. We'll have to get more vaccine out here, though."

"All right," the major said absently. He looked once at Boudet and then stalked off without a word.

"What happened?" Parente wanted to know.

"Nothing. I expected blood and fire. But nothing."

"You know, he thought a lot of you."

"I bet. Just the way he thought of the natives. He'll be back to the 'dirty gook' routine before the day is out."

"You make me sick," Parente said, slowly and deliberately.

BOUDET looked at him, startled.

"You and everybody like you. The starry-eyed intellectual. You flirt with an alien culture and because it looks pretty to you—because it's strange and old, and it's being pushed aside by what you call crass materialism—it's automatically superior to the home-grown variety."

"Look, I . . ."

"For once, Lieutenant, shut up and listen. I'm sick of your intellectual snobs. You prate about the inhumanity of man, and treat a gesture like Kelvin's as a sign of weakness. Did you ever stop to think that, of all the races we've met in this universe, only man has space flight, only man has solved his problems of food, that only man has mastered the environment of his home planet?"

"The Teranu have solved all those. They live with nature."

"Yes, and so do a thousand other races. They bow their collective heads before nature and call it fate. That's what keeps them where they are. . . forever in balance, forever perfect. . . forever static.

"You talk about our bloody history, our killer instinct. My God, where would we be without it? Like the Teranu, like the thousand cow-like races we've met. But we're fighters. We fight each other, sure. But we fight nature. She's the one real implacable enemy we've always had. If it takes blood, if we destroy, that's part of it. But we build, we've become great in our own right—and we've come a hell of a long way in those years the Teranu were

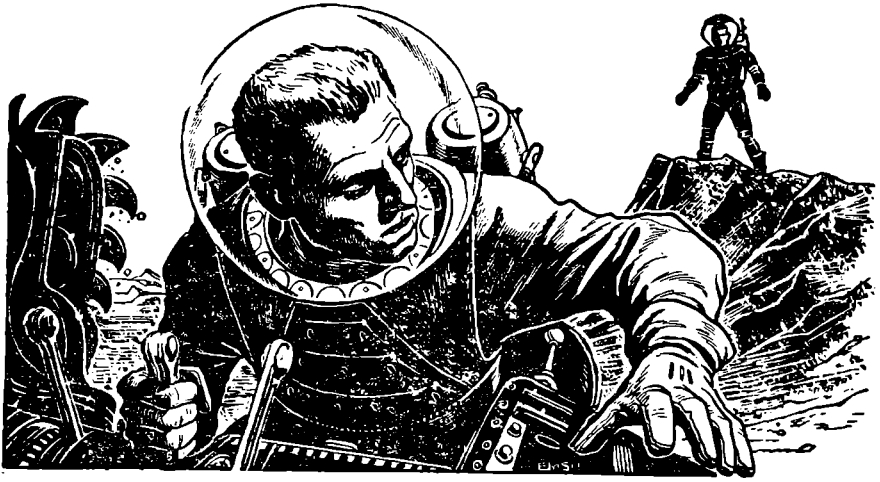
sipping their tea and looking at flower paintings."

PARENTE stopped, his eyes hard. He jabbed a heavy finger into Boudet's chest.

"So, I'm a savage! My culture isn't one that's pretty and nice and ordered. My race comes ready-made with a simple, direct code of ethics. So, I'm a man. I don't bow my head to anyone or anything. I'm a fighter and damned proud of it."

He turned on his heel and started to walk away. The men at the head of the inoculation line were suddenly shouting. For a moment, Boudet didn't understand what they were saying.

Then the light began to dim
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The Renegade

(continued from page 100)

before his eyes. His reaction was quite automatic. He started to run for the area staked off for the force field.

In seconds the area was crowded with a tight mass of men as the force canopy went up. The Teranu fell to the ground, pulling the soft parts of their bodies under the protection of their carapaces.

And the hail struck, great sheets of it pounding the prone natives, ripping through the houses along the street, the

houses that had no roofs because the hail would destroy them.

Boudet stood silently, watching the pellets of ice pound the street.

It came to him in that instant as he stood, looking out over the backs of the Teranu, cowering before the flail of an impersonal nature, that in the whole street, only the earthmen stood erect...

Erect and unafraid.