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THE SAVAGES

By

GEORGE H. SMITH

Man has always wanted to fly. He has always wanted to go to the stars. But now science has pushed the frontier back so far that the nearest star (they say) with a possibility of life like ours is Wolf 359 is many many light years away. No pilot would live to reach it. So, the urge to reach the stars has been dimmed, and as the lazy savages we are, we will not try very hard. We are being more and more discouraged. Where is the incentive we need? How can we supply it?

*Illustrated by
Joseph R. Eberle*

THE DAMAGED spaceship crashed out of control near the small New England town of Green Elms. It smashed into a farm house, killing an old farmer and his wife and destroying livestock belonging to other farmers. The ship burst into flames when it hit and of its crew only one white furred, long nosed little creature staggered out. It was lying nearby all but unconscious when a group of townspeople and farmers arrived on the scene.

In those days, I was research assistant to the great astrophysicist, Brooks Compton. We flew up from Washington that same night in a plane filled with FBI men and army officers. Dr. Compton had for many weeks been engaged in a bitter battle with the Air Force Command over the Interplanetary Research Unit which he headed. The channeling of government funds into anything as far away as possible interplanetary flight appealed to very few military and congressional minds. We had been facing failure in our battle for funds and a complete shutdown of the project until that night. Dr. Compton was excited as we drew near the wreck in an army jeep. The fire in his blue eyes belied the gray-streaked hair and stooped shoulders of his sixty years.

"Intelligence has reached out across space, Martin," he told me, his voice tight with emotion.

"Intelligence has reached out across the black immensity of space to meet intelligence! This is a great night, my boy! The greatest in the history of mankind."

"Where do you think the ship came from sir?" I asked.

"Well, that is hard to. . . ." began Dr. Compton.

"The General thinks its from Russia," interrupted the sergeant who was driving the jeep.

Dr. Compton favored the sergeant with a cold stare which included the absent general.

"The General?" I asked.

"General Edmunds. He's in command here," the soldier replied. "He told all of us to keep a sharp lookout, that maybe some spies got loose when the rocket crashed."

"Hmmpf!" remarked Dr. Compton.

"Wasn't there some sort of strange creature found near the wreckage?" I questioned.

"Oh, sure. The big brass say it's some sort of animal. "Maybe something from Siberia, or something."

The soldier brought the jeep to a screeching halt near a number of other cars. There was a cordon of troops and National Guardsmen around an area two or three miles square. The public strictly wasn't invited and we weren't any too welcome ourselves. General Edmunds we knew



of old. He was one of those young, aggressive and highly competent Air Force generals who came out of the last war. Some years back, like a number of other people, he had been interested in the Interplanetary Research Project. Back in those days, they had ideas of using the moon as a "fortress in the sky." Now, due to "the realities of international developments," the official Air Force attitude was cool and so was Major General Edmunds. Cool but polite. He greeted us with his and-how-are-you-private-smith smile. I think he would have liked to keep us out altogether but Dr. Compton still drew too much water in Washington for that so instead he tried to make sure we didn't see much.

To tell the truth, there wasn't much to see. The space ship was just a tangled mass of twisted and fused metal. It was hard to understand how anything had survived that crash. We picked our way through a rubble of house, trees and ship as best we might with a brace of eagle-eyed young lieutenants for company. There was so little to see that Dr. Compton, whose eyes were sharper than two eagles spent three hours seeing it. We weren't the only ones picking around under glaring army searchlights. There were FBI agents, Project Saucer men, and Navy Intelligence; almost everyone except the Russian secret

service.

It was almost morning by the time Dr. Compton, with a notebook full of facts and figures, was ready to leave. By that time, General Edmunds had lost some of his military polish, in fact he was beginning to look somewhat seedy. He yawned elaborately when Dr. Edmunds asked to see the creature from the ship.

"I'm really sorry, Compton," he said, "but it's been taken into Green Elms. The FBI people have taken over that end. They have him at the county jail there, I believe."

So we went into Green Elms which might have been a thriving town in the last century but had been withering on the vine for the last fifty years or so. That morning, however, it seemed to be thriving again. In a few short hours, it had become the newspaper, radio and television center of the nation. We pushed through the crowds around the county jail, which was a three room brick building, only to be informed that we couldn't see the FBI Special Agent in Charge until sometime in the afternoon.

Breakfast was my next thought and Dr. Compton agreed. That also required a wait. Green Elms' only restaurant was packed with newsmen, radio people and sightseers. We bought some Boston papers and read them while standing on the sidewalk in front of

the restaurant. The consensus seemed to be Mars and some of them got pretty lurid about it. There was, however, at least one dissenting opinion and a couple of the papers played it up big. Senator Sidney Brinks, chairman of the powerful Conduct of the Peace Investigating Committee, said he believed the ship came from a "foreign" country. He hinted darkly at an attempt to destroy Green Elms. The Senator then went on to laud the virtues of the farmer and his wife who were killed when the "rocket" landed. It seemed the farmer had been an Elk and an Oddfellow. Another member of the committee said something about posthumous medals. Senator Brinks was also quoted as saying that he and his committee were hurrying to Green Elms to squelch the crazy rumors about the ship having come from space.

We had our breakfast finally; a fellow I had known in Washington, a reporter for the *Express* there, was slightly acquainted with the editor of the *Green Elms Weekly Standard* and he inveigled an invitation for the three of us to a New England breakfast. A couple of hours later we were just finishing up when the FBI sent for Dr. Compton. I tagged along as far as the door of the jail. Neither the FBI nor the military had been able to make anything out of what the alien was trying

to say and it had struck someone that maybe the nation's leading scientist might do better. They didn't see any reason why I should go in and so I sat on the curb in front of the jail and stared at the crowd of curious who stared back. Dr. Compton spent four hours alone with the creature from the ship in one of the jail's two cells. By the time he was through his lack of sleep was beginning to catch up with him. He thought he was twenty-five but his body was convinced he was sixty. He brushed aside all questions from both officials and newsmen.

"I've got to have sleep now," he said. "I'll have something to say later. It was hard to communicate. I didn't get too much but I hope to learn more next time."

We imposed on the editor and his wife again this time for a couple of beds. Just before he dropped off to sleep, Brooks Compton told me a few things more.

"That's an interstellar ship out there Martin. I couldn't get too much. We used signs and mathematical symbols. It was slow going but I did learn that they're from the planet Wolfe 359. They ran into trouble out in our asteroid belt — hit something — that's what caused the crackup. What minds those people must have! What a tremendous undertaking! That fellow thinks he's fallen into the hands of savages,

he wanted me to help him find the civilized people of earth. Imagine the things that we could learn from . . ." His voice trailed off as he fell asleep.

Well, that night the alien tried to escape. Probably, Dr. Compton said later, he was trying to find the civilized people of earth. They said he hypnotized two guards and took the keys to his cell. He was almost in the clear when they spotted him. He started to run and then someone cut loose with a submachine gun. He was dead when they picked him up.

We slept right through the excitement and clear around to the next morning. When they woke us up and told us the news, we hurried down to the jail. People were milling about, coming and going, seemingly without purpose. Dr. Compton went in and had a last look at the little creature who had spanned space. By the time he came out, there was quite a crowd of officials on the scene including a number of senators headed by Senator Brinks. I guess you've all seen pictures of the Senator. He's a big florid man with an unhealthy look about him and an air of great importance. He doesn't wear the string tie and frock coat of the cartoon senators but he has most of the characteristics that go with them.

Brooks Compton was tight-lipped and grim when he faced

the assembled officials and newsmen. He completely ignored Senator Brinks who was loudly demanding to know what he had learned the day before.

"This is the statement I promised yesterday," began Dr. Compton. "The ship that crashed here was a space ship from Mars. The creature that lies back there in that cell was a member of a highly developed underground civilization on that planet. He and his companions were hoping to contact a civilized race on earth. They brought with them a number of scientific secrets as gifts to the people of earth. Among those gifts, gentlemen, were the secret of space flight and of longevity."

There was a moment of roaring silence then a bedlam that was comparatively silent broke loose.

"Longevity . . . that means long life, don't it?" asked one of the reporters.

"That's right," said the doctor, "the Martians live over . . . four hundred years!"

"Good Lord!" breathed Senator Brinks, looking more apoplectic than ever. "Four hundred years! And they were bringing us the secret!"

"And these fools killed the last one of them!" groaned another senator.

Everyone was trying to talk at once. The senators were arguing among themselves, someone was

loudly demanding an investigation and army and navy officers were beginning to ask Dr. Compton intelligent questions about the possible construction of the Martian ship. Finally Senator Brinks made himself heard above the uproar.

"I'm going to see the President at once," he told Dr. Compton. "We'll get some really big appropriations for your project. We'll study the design of that ship out there. We'll build a space ship if it takes all the resources of the country!"

Another senator was talking about a more complete search of the wreckage. "Maybe we'll find some clues," he said. "something to give our doctors a start."

The radio networks had set up their microphones outside the jail and Senator Brinks hurried off to make a statement. He was followed by the gentlemen of his committee and most of the other officials. The newsmen had all rushed off to find telephones and Dr. Compton and I were alone. We walked slowly out of the building.

"You didn't tell me anything last night about any secret of longevity," I said accusingly.

"Didn't I, Martin? Perhaps I didn't think it important at the time," he replied, wiping his glasses and replacing them on his nose.

"You said that it was an inter-

stellar ship. You said it was from the planet of Wolfe 359. Today, you say Mars!"

"Really! Did I say Mars? It must have been a slip of the tongue. I hope no one took me seriously."

"Dr. Compton, you lied! That ship didn't come from Mars; there wasn't any secret of longevity!"

We were walking down Green Elms' almost deserted main street. Things were beginning to get back to normal. Brooks Compton looked up as if he were seeing the stars although there were none visible in the bright New England sky.

"Yes, I lied," he said.

"Why?" I asked. although I was beginning to understand.

"Martin, I believe we'll go to the stars now. I had begun to doubt it during those long weeks in Washington. I believe our friends from Wolfe 359 have really brought us the secret of space travel. I think that the longevity story was just the spur man needed. Even a twisted soul like Senator Brinks' was stirred by the idea."

"But why Mars?"

"Wolfe 359 is a long way off across an inconceivable span of space, Martin. Even the gift of longevity might dim in their minds if it seemed to be so many light years away. Mars was just a little extra incentive. Yes, I think we'll go to the stars now!"