

SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION

Vol. 2 — No. 1

December, 1957

CONTENTS

SHORT STORIES

- THE GENTLE VULTURES** by *Isaac Asimov* 2
The Hurrians waited for Earth to have its atomic war
- BROOMSTICK RIDE** by *Robert Bloch* 22
Witches and warlocks on the new planet — impossible!
- GET RICH QUICK** by *Richard R. Smith* 68
You could make money on Delira, but it was dangerous
- QUARANTINED SPECIES** by *J. F. Bone* 80
The Venusian horgels were just too lovable!
- MISFIT** by *Robert Silverberg* 98
It's hard to exist on a high gravity planet
- THE WEEGIL** by *Ecelyn E. Smith* 113
Nobody knew what the weegil was made for

NOVELETTE

- THE HUNTERS OF CUTWOLD** by *Calvin M. Knox* 34
It was a thrill to shoot the man-like creatures

FEATURES

- NUCLEAR NEWS** by *Steven Roy* 21
- LOOK TO THE STARS** by *Scott Nevets* 33
- PYROPHORICITY** by *Wharton Pepper* 67
- LIFE SPAN OF EARTH** by *Eugene W. Potter* 79
- COSMIC RAYS & SHAPE OF OUR GALAXY**
by *Norris Little* 97
- SCIENCE SHORTS** by *Edgar P. Straus* 126

COVER by Kelly Freas

ILLUSTRATIONS by Emsch, Orban and Bowman

W. W. Scott — Editor

SUPER SCIENCE FICTION is published bi-monthly by Headline Publications Inc., at 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial office at 1790 Broadway, New York 19, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Holyoke, Mass., August 21, 1956, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Single copy, 35c. Subscription rates, \$1.00 for 12 issues. Not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts, and all such materials must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes. All stories printed in the magazine are fiction, and any similarity between the characters and actual persons is coincidental. Copyright 1957 by Headline Publications Inc. All rights, including translation, reserved under International Copyright Convention and Pan American Copyright Convention. Printed in the U.S.A.

THE WEEGIL

by EVELYN E. SMITH

Nobody knew where the weegil came from, why it came or what it was made for. It was just a piece of furniture in the room — until one day something unusual happened

THE phone rang. Ellie ran to answer it, as she always did, welcoming this break in the monotony of her day. She skidded a little on the polished floor and murmured a word which she hoped her small, sharp-eared daughter would not catch.

Finally she got her hands on the receiver. "Mrs. Kinnan?" a male voice asked pleasantly. Undoubtedly he was going to try to sell her something.

"That's right," she agreed.

"This is the Abermuddy Quiz Show," he said—or something like that; he spoke so rapidly she couldn't quite catch the name of the program. "If you can answer this question correctly, you will win a valuable prize: 'Where are the United States?'"

"Why—er—" she hesitated, feeling foolish— "why, in North America. The Western Hemisphere. Is that what you mean?"

"Con-gratulations, Mrs. Kinnan," he replied warmly. "That is the right answer. Tomorrow morning you will receive your weegil."

"...And then he hung up before I could say anything," Ellie concluded, hanging her husband's coat in the closet.

Nick smiled. "It's a gag, hon," he said, rumpling the blonde curls that had spent all day in pins awaiting release on his arrival. "Tomorrow somebody'll come to sell you some kind of an electrical appliance or maybe want to take your picture. Don't you give anybody a cent, chicken. Tell 'em

I pay all the bills." He kissed her on the tip of her nose.

"Yes, Nick," Ellie promised sadly. She'd been looking forward to her weegil. She hadn't been able to understand quite what the man said, but she'd hoped a weegil would prove to be a washing machine. Or maybe a television set.

Naturally, she knew enough not to show her disappointment to Nick, but Sugarplum was less discreet. "Yarr!" she shrieked. "I want a weegil. You *promised* we were going to have a weegil, Mom!"

Ellie could feel the hot redness rising in her face; she had always been bothered by a tendency to blush. Nick, she knew, thought it a charming, feminine trait. Now he looked at her with a tolerant grin. "You really fell for it, huh? You and the kid. Didn't it even occur to you that, if it was on the level, the question was too easy?"

Everyone knew, she thought, that they asked ridiculously easy questions on those quiz programs just to trap you. But she wasn't going to start an argument.

Nick made a clicking noise

with his tongue. "Women!" he said. "Suckers! . . . But they're such cute little critters you can't help loving 'em. C'mere and kiss me, chicken."

She obeyed. It was silly to make a scene; she probably *had* acted like a fool. Only . . . there was no point to making Swedish meatballs for Nick's dinner, even if he did like them so much. Hamburger was just as nutritious and a lot easier to prepare. Lucky she'd been so excited over the weegil she'd forgotten to start the meatballs.

A bit after ten the next morning, a truck drove up in front of the little white house flanked on either side by little white houses exactly like it, even to the amount of unpaid mortgage. Ellie and Sugarplum watched from behind the curtains, breathing heavily, as a large man lifted out a rectangular, obviously weighty, package. He carried it up the Kinnan walk. He deposited it on the Kinnan doorstep.

"Mommy!" Sugarplum shrieked, almost yanking off Ellie's skirt in an ecstasy of delight. All of Ellie's dresses had

a tendency to sag on one side as a result of her daughter's uncontrollable emotions. "It's the weegil! It's come!"

"Keep quiet, Sugar," Ellie said absently, her blue eyes rapt on the package. Wouldn't it be wonderful if Nick were wrong and the weegil were really hers... something she had won, earned for herself by herself? But Nick probably was right—he always was.

"They're most likely going to try to get me to buy whatever it is," she said aloud resolutely. "I must be firm."

The doorbell rang. Ellie took off her apron, smoothed her hair with the palms of her hands, and opened the door.

"Mrs. Kinnan?... Sign here, please."

"I'm not buying anything," she said stoutly. "Not a thing. So you can just take whatever it is away...."

"There's nothing to pay," protested the truckman. "You just sign to show you received it. It's yours free and clear."

"And then later it'll turn out I signed an agreement to pay ten dollars a month for the next twenty years," she retorted, the more vehemently because she

was longing to know what was in the package. "Oh, I know all about these rackets. Take that thing away or I'll call the police!"

"Oh, Mommy, Mommy!" Sugarplum wailed. "Don't!"

Ellie longed—not for the first time in the five years she had been a mother—to give the little one a good, unprogressive clout... but one didn't beat children; one reasoned with them—whether they understood you or not. "Don't call them!" Sugarplum yelled. "I'll hold my breath if you do!"

"Lady," the man sighed wearily, "this thing belongs to you. I'm just delivering it. There is absolutely no money due. All you do is sign this receipt that shows you got the package okay. That's all it says—see, no fine print." He thrust the slip of paper in front of her face.

She retreated a step. "What's in the package?" she asked warily.

"How should I know, Lady, I was just hired to deliver it to you. I'm a working man; if you make me late for my other calls I'll get fired, and my wife'll

have to go to work to support me."

He paused and waited. Ellie did not smile.

"Now," he went on sulkily, "you sign here and I'll carry the thing into the house. Then you can take off the wrapping paper and find out what it is for yourself."

She knew she was a sucker, but she signed. There didn't seem to be anything else to do. Again it would be pointless to make a scene.

The man carried the package laboriously into the living room and set it against the stair wall. It would probably stay there if it were a television set. Of course, if it turned out to be a washing machine, it would have to be moved out into the kitchen. She could put it in that space between. . . .

"Momma!" Sugarplum was jumping up and down with impatience. "Why don't you open it, huh, Mom? Hurry up!" She laid grimy hands on the package, ready to wrest forth its secrets herself.

"No, don't tear off the paper, dear," Ellie admonished, tearing the child away from the weegil. "It's very nice paper—

I've never seen anything like it; it'll come in handy at Christmas. You know Daddy likes us to save things."

She began to unwrap the object carefully. The paper was unusual in texture as well as appearance; in fact, it didn't feel like paper, but what else could it have been? Neatly printed by hand in block letters were the words: "FRAGILE. HANDLE WITH CARE. THIS SIDE UP." It might prove to be one of those new small refrigerators—it was about the right size. Not that she needed another refrigerator, but one would be worth a couple of hundred dollars, enough to take care of at least two payments on the house.

She pulled off the last layer of paper. And there it was.

Only. . . what was it?

Sugarplum had no doubts. "It's a weegil!" she squealed. "It's a beautiful, lovely weegil!"

It certainly wasn't like anything Ellie had ever seen before. *Oblong* would come closest to describing its shape, but it wasn't really oblong. In color it was a cross between blue and green with undercurrents of

gold and silver and . . . gold and silver. Obviously it wasn't made out of metal, and yet she'd never seen any plastic like that either. Still, she didn't have much chance to keep up with the latest developments in synthetics. Perhaps some new material was being tested . . . but, still, they wouldn't send just a *shape* to her. It must be *something*.

A panel of some close-woven mesh in a lighter shade of the same blue-green seemed to indicate that it might be a television set, or a radio, after all—but there were no knobs, no controls of any kind, or, indeed any apparent way of opening it. There wasn't even so much as a seam or a sign of welding. Except for the panel, the thing was an unbroken whole. It might have been a piece of abstract sculpture, but she had a definite feeling that it had some utilitarian purpose; besides, she was pretty sure that artists didn't contribute samples of their work to quiz shows in return for free advertising.

She tried to move the object, but it was so heavy she could only tip it slightly. As it

tipped, she thought she heard a faint gurgling inside, but she wasn't sure. When she tried to tip it again, it seemed to have grown heavier, for this time it refused to budge at all. Something about *leverage*, she thought vaguely.

But it was a pretty thing, very pretty indeed. It gave the very ordinary furniture an air of distinction.

"What does it do, Mom?" Sugarplum asked anxiously, running a sticky hand over the pleasingly smooth surface. Ellie fought the temptation to slap it off. "Well—I—it—you better ask your father when he comes home."

"Aaah, Daddy," Sugarplum pouted. "You know he doesn't know anything!"

"I wonder where she picked *that* up," Ellie thought, a little frightened.

NICK prodded the weegil with his forefinger. "I see they stuck you after all," he smiled. "I thought they would." He caught her lovingly in muscular arms; at college he had majored in football, and he still exercised every day, early in

the morning before he went to work, to retain his magnificent physique.

"But I understand, chicken; you can't be expected to cope with things like that. In a couple of days there'll be a guy around to show you how to work it and hand you a bill. Never mind, as long as we haven't used it, they can't charge us anything. You haven't plugged it in, have you hon?"

"Plugged *what* in?" Ellie demanded, with more asperity than the columnists recommend for girls who want to hold their husbands.

"You're right; there doesn't seem to be any connection," he admitted, after giving the weevil a closer inspection. "Funny thing. Guess it works on batteries. Or maybe they install it after the down payment. Oh, they're clever, those guys; I'll grant you that." he gave her the smile that had made her leave college in her junior year. "What's for dinner, hon?"

"Hamburgers," she said.

The weevil stayed in the Kinnan living room and nobody came to install it or service it or take it away. After a while,

Ellie began to accept it as part of the furnishings. It was good-looking; it didn't take up much room; and Sugarplum liked to play with it—although Ellie couldn't figure out what interest she found in it. It never did anything and it was too big and heavy for the child to involve in any of her intricate and violent pastimes. But it kept Sugarplum quiet for hours on end, crooning to it, and for that reason alone, even Nick agreed, it was well worth the space it occupied.

Ellie grew fond of the object herself, dusting it more often than any of the other pieces of furniture and more carefully—although she was always a scrupulous housekeeper, for Nick was finicky about such things. Sometimes she even found herself talking to it, although there was nothing out of the way in this; she had found that inanimate objects made the safest confidants. And she had no one else to talk to, for Sugarplum was only five.

Sugarplum talked to the weevil too, Ellie noticed, which was all right. What was faintly disturbing was Sugarplum's

legation that the weegil talked to her. But this was also harmless, Ellie convinced herself. Children were always doing things like that; literature was full of invisible playmates and such. "Only, don't tell your father, dear," she made the child promise. "He'd be angry. He hasn't much imag-much of a sense of whimsy."

"He hasn't much of a sense of anything," Sugarplum said precociously. Ellie was dismayed. Nick wouldn't like it if Sugarplum turned out to be a prodigy after all; he wanted them to be just a happy, healthy, average American family like everybody else on the block.

THE weegil remained with the Kinnans six months, becoming as much a part of the family as the stove and the couch and the vacuum cleaner. Ellie ceased to wonder what it was and came to accept it as part of the normal order of things. Then one day she entered the living room, duster in hand, to find tears were streaking the dirt on Sugarplum's face. "What's the matter,

honey?" she asked dutifully. "Tell Mommy."

Sugarplum looked up, her lower lip quivering. How ugly, Ellie thought, children—or adults, for that matter—looked when they cried. "The weegil," Sugarplum sobbed, "it says it's got to go home."

"Oh, *God!*" Ellie said to herself. "I should have put a stop to it at the beginning; that's what Nick's going to say." She stroked the child's tangled hair. "Now, darling," she said patiently, "you know the weegil can't *really* talk, so how could it tell you it wanted to go home?"

Wet eyes sizzled in a swollen red face. "Aah, you're just like Daddy!" Sugarplum snarled, so vehemently that Ellie jumped back.

She composed herself. After all, the child was smaller. "No, I'm not just like your Daddy." Sympathy first, and then—if that failed—the long-needed beating. "But I do understand what you mean. The weegil is a very pretty thing and sometimes when you're lonesome you *think* it talks to you. But it doesn't really. You see—"

"I beg your pardon," the

weegil interrupted apologetically, "but I'm afraid I do *talk*."

It had a slight foreign accent, but otherwise its English was perfectly idiomatic. The voice seemed to come from the mesh panel. That was it—an infernal machine! "You—you're a kind of radio, aren't you?" Ellie faltered. Which was silly, she realized the moment she'd said it.

"No," the weegil replied, "I am not a radio."

It paused. Ellie began to wonder hysterically whether this were going to turn into some kind of guessing game. Then it continued, "I'm an entity and I'm right here. Inside the weegil."

"You see, Mommy," Sugarplum said triumphantly, "next time you better believe what I say."

Ellie sank abruptly into an overstuffed chair. Wouldn't you know this would be just the day her hair was in an absolute mess? She fumbled with a curl. "What are you doing in the—weegil?"

"I live here. Temporarily, that is. I shouldn't care to take up residence permanently in

such cramped quarters."

"Y—you mean you've been in there all along? All six months. Who—what are you? A midget?"

"I'm what you'd call an anthropologist," the weegil said. It had a soothing, syrupy tone of voice, like an expensive doctor's. "I'm studying your culture on a research grant. The competition was extraordinarily keen, but I won out on the basis of my record."

"How nice," Ellie murmured, not forgetting her manners even under the shock of knowing she had gone mad. For there was no sane reason why an anthropologist—even a small one—should be studying her from a box in her living room.

"I'm sorry to have played a trick like this on you, but it was the only way I could manage," the voice went on. "You see, we're amphibians—have to live in a tank on this planet, so this is the only way we could study you Earthlings at ease in your native habitat. If you were aware of the fact that I was watching you, you wouldn't behave naturally—you *know* you wouldn't!"

"*Earthlings*," Ellie repeated weakly. A bobby pin fell to the floor unnoticed. "*Amphibians!* What do you mean? Where are you from? You mean you've been sitting inside that thing six months *taking notes on us?*"

"Oh, it wasn't too bad," the weegil's voice said bravely. "I've a good supply of food concentrates and atmosphere replenishers. I didn't suffer too much—amazing how efficient weegils really are. And you've been a most interesting study. I've begun to feel almost as if I know you, which I really do—if you don't mind my saying so."

"Not at all." Ellie giggled nervously. "I guess you do at that."

"As for where I come from," the weegil continued in smooth oratorical style, "it's the planet you call Venus. We've been studying Earth via your radio and television transmissions for some years, but finally we came to the point where we needed first-hand information to complete our accounts."

"Oh," Ellie said, "broadcasts. That's how you learned to speak such good English."

"It is rather good, isn't it?" the weegil agreed complacently. "They do say I have a flair for languages."

"And that's how you'd know about quiz shows..." Ellie murmured. Everything was fitting into place. She supposed the weegil, rather the—the person in the weegil, now wished to discuss his findings with her. It must have been pretty boring to spend six months in that tank with no one to talk to, but she understood—to have spoken to her before would have invalidated the experiment. Lucky the Venutian had selected someone who knew the importance of the scientific approach; anyone else might have been angry at being—used.

THERE was a sharp pull at her skirt. "Are you going to help, Mommy? Are you? Are you?"

"Shhhh," warned the Venutian, but it was too late.

"Then that's the only reason why you spoke to me!" Ellie exclaimed. "You found you needed help."

The voice seemed a trifle less self-confident. "Well..."

yes," it admitted. "And I hoped I could approach you. . . ."

"I'm afraid I'll have to consult my husband," Ellie said stiffly, "before I could—er—do anything for you, Mr.—ah—"

The voice sounded amused. "My name is Khardlan. And we don't use titles on Venus, but, if we did, it would be *Miss*. I am a female."

Ellie stopped tucking in stray wisps of hair and stared at the weevil. "But wasn't it an awfully dangerous trip for a woman—a female—to make? I wonder they let you."

Khardlan laughed. "My dear Mrs. Kinnan—or may I call you Ellie?—on Venus the females are the stronger sex. . . . As they are on Earth too, you know," she told the woman. "Muscular strength is of relatively little importance when weighed against survival value. However, on Venus we females are also physically the more forceful, which does help to keep the males constantly reminded of our importance in the survival of the species."

"I suppose," Ellie retorted defensively, "you don't have to bear children or you have them

in incubators or some thing. . . .?"

"We have them in very much the same manner as you do," Khardlan replied. "That is why we are logically the ruling sex; the future of our race is in our hands. . . . Oh, my dear," she went on, and her voice, inhuman and diluted through a tank as it was, throbbed with warm, womanly sympathy, "how can you stand it all?"

Ellie said nothing. "This'll cure me of talking to inanimate objects," she thought.

Khardlan didn't wait for an answer. "I do wish I could help you," she sighed, "but what could I do here, helpless in a tank, far away from my own world? Besides, I'm only a detached and impartial scientist, here to record and observe—nothing more. It would be violating scientific ethics to interfere."

"Of course," Ellie said, scientifically, and wondering at the same time just what it was Khardlan thought she could do, if her hands—that is, her tentacles—her appendages—were not tied.

"However, when I go back

and present my data, I'm sure our rulers will not let this situation continue to exist. After all, we may be Venutians and you Earthlings, but females should stick together!"

"Well, how do you intend to get back, then?" Ellie asked with brisk competence. "And what can I do?"

"There's a—you would call it a spaceship waiting for me," Khardlan explained. "However, I can't get to it alone; that's the one thing I couldn't arrange in advance, since I didn't know how long my studies would take. As a matter of fact, I did stay much longer than I had planned—you proved to be so much more complex than I had anticipated. Actually, my work is far from complete, but I got homesick—I'm sure you understand."

"Oh, I do," Ellie said. "How can I help you?"

"If you'd just telephone the trucking company and ask them to come pick me up, everything else has been worked out. I have a genius for detail."

"Will the truckman be able to pick you up?" Ellie asked, somewhat disappointed at the

smallness of her role. "That's one of the things that bothered me. The man who brought you seemed to carry you easily enough, but I couldn't even move you—and neither could Nick, although he's very strong."

"When the time comes, I'll lessen the weegil's gravity," Khardlan explained. "I increased it when I was delivered here so it would get so heavy you'd never be able to move it. It makes me—er—seasick when the weegil is pushed about, although I have to put up with a certain amount of visceral discomfort during installation and removal. A scientist's life is not an easy one."

"No, I imagine not," Ellie agreed.

"Now, if you'd be good enough to telephone this number...."

IT was so simple; even Nick would hardly object if he knew. Then a monstrous suspicion entered Ellie's mind. "But Sugarplum could have done that! How come....?"

"I *did* try, Mommy!" Sugarplum wailed. "But the man

wouldn't believe me. He said, 'Ask your Mommy to call us, little girl.' "

The weegil made a noise something like a human being clearing his—or her—throat. "Well...we must trust as few people as possible, you understand. Security reasons."

"I think I understand a lot more than you mean me to!" Ellie retorted indignantly. "You have other Earth contacts! You must have. The man who said he was from the quiz program—he must have been a human being. He couldn't have telephoned from inside a tank or he'd have sounded all gurgly and sloshy like you. Besides, how would he get at the receiver?"

"'Gurgly and sloshy,' eh?" Khardlan repeated. "I must do something about that. Oh, contacts—we do have a few Earth contacts," she admitted, "obtained by radio. We can transmit as well as receive, of course. And we should love to have more contacts, many more but...oh, my dear," she sobbed, "you don't know... what it's like...to be alone and helpless on an alien planet... confined to a t-tank...not

knowing whom you can trust..."

Ellie just managed to keep from bursting into tears of sympathy. "I'm sorry," she said in a broken voice. "I really am." She ran her hand along the top of the weegil, although that was silly; it was like petting an automobile in order to soothe the driver. "I—I think I can imagine a little of what you must feel. I'll call the truckers right away."

"Th-thank you," Khardlan said. "I—I'll never forget your kindness as long as I live, and that'll be a thousand of your Earth years. Even when I'm back home I'll think of you frequently, with gratitude."

"Won't I ever see you again, Khardlan?" howled Sugarplum, thrusting herself back into the discussion. Not never ever? Couldn't Momma and I visit you on Venus?"

"Then we'd have to live in weegils of our own," Ellie deduced. "Wouldn't we, Khardlan?" Something was bothering her, some question she knew she should put to the Venutian, but which she couldn't pin down.

"I'm afraid so," the extra-

terrestrial agreed. "You wouldn't like it on Venus, Sugarplum; you'd find it much too hot and damp.... But, don't worry, things are going to be much better on Earth for you—for both of you—very soon.... Now, Ellie, if you'll call this number...."

"**H**HEY, there's something missing!" Nick complained as he breezed into the house and gaily pinched his wife under the pretext of handing her his coat. "Aah, don't be a sorehead, baby!" he replied to her indignant shriek. He gave the room a comprehensive glance. "I know what's gone—it's the weegil! What happened to it?"

Ellie smiled, a secret smile. "They took it away," she said. "You were so right, dear. They thought they'd stimulate our curiosity and then show us how it worked if we bought it. But there was some kind of slip-up at the office and they left it here longer than they were supposed to.... But I told the salesman I wouldn't pay a pen-

ny, and so he took it away."

"Good for you, chick," he said, slapping her affectionately. "I'm glad you had that much sense. What did I tell you; you don't ever get something for nothing.... Didn't your mother ever warn you, you mustn't believe what strange men say?—even over the phone."

That was what had been nagging her, Ellie suddenly realized. The voice of Khardlan's contact on the telephone had been a man's. Yet Khardlan had secured Ellie's support on a basis of common femininity. How had the Venutian convinced the man? What had she told *him*?

Come to think of it, how did Ellie actually know Khardlan was female at all? The only evidence she had was the creature's word: she had never seen the Venutian and, even if she had, she probably wouldn't have been able to tell.

It was just the sort of dirty trick a man would play.

THE END