

**SPECIAL MONSTER ISSUE!**

# **SUPER-SCIENCE**

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**FICTION**



## **VAMPIRES**

**From Outer Space**

BY RICHARD F. WATSON

## **The Abominable Creature**

BY F. X. FALLON

## **MOURNFUL MONSTER**

By Dan Malcolm

# SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION

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## CONTENTS

### NOVELETTES

- MOURNFUL MONSTER** by *Dan Malcolm* ..... 2  
A thing of horror! Yet it could think—and feel
- VAMPIRES FROM OUTER SPACE** by *Richard F. Watson* .. 58  
The weird seven-foot bats spread fantastic terror

### SHORT STORIES

- THE ABOMINABLE CREATURE** by *F. X. Fallon* ..... 36  
It was loathsome, vile beyond all endurance!
- THE HUGE AND HIDEOUS BEASTS** by *James Rosenquest* 92  
They made men tremble with nightmare fear
- A CRY FOR HELP** by *Eric Rodman* ..... 113  
The strange beings could alter a man's brain

### FEATURES

- LOOK TO THE STARS** by *Scott Nevets* ..... 57
- NUCLEAR NEWS** by *Steven Rory* ..... 91

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**ILLUSTRATIONS** by Emsch.

W. W. Scott — Editor

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# VAMPIRES

## FROM OUTER SPACE

by RICHARD F. WATSON

NOVELETTE

*illustrated by* EMSH

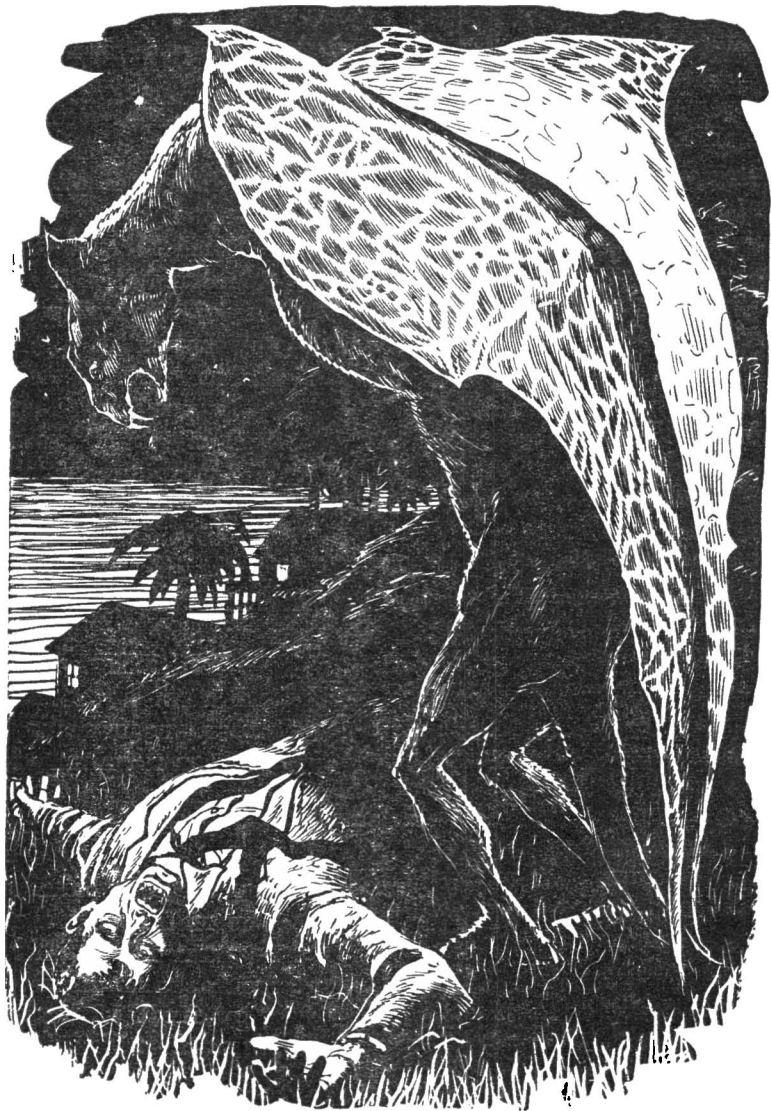
The weird seven-foot purple bats had come to Earth to stay. Terror ran wild over the land when rumors spread that they were vampires who killed to suck human blood

**T**HE first report of what was quickly to become known as the Vampire Menace reached the central office of the Terran Security Agency half an hour after the attack had taken place. The date was June 11, 2104. Agency Subchief Neil Harriman was busy with routine matters when the courier burst into his office, carrying a message pellet gaudy with the red-and-yellow wrapping that meant Top Level Emergency.

Harriman reached one big hand out for the message pellet. "Where's it from?"

"San Francisco. It just came in by simultaneous visitape. Marked special for your office, with all the emergency labels."

"Okay," Harriman said. He flipped the switch that darkened the office and brought the viewing screen down from its niche in the ceiling. As Harriman unwrapped the message pellet and began to slip it into the viewer, he glanced up at the courier, who was standing by with expectant curiosity. Harriman scowled darkly. No words were necessary. The courier gulped, moistened his lips, and backed out of the of-



fice, his curiosity about the emergency message doomed to be unsatisfied.

Alone, Harriman nudged the starter button and the tape started to unwind past the photon-cell eye of the viewer. An image formed in glowing natural colors at the far side of the room.

The voice of the speaker said, "This is Special Agent Michaels reporting from San Francisco, chief. There was a killing out here twenty minutes ago. The local police sent for me because it looked like Agency business."

The screen showed one of San Francisco's steep hills. Some twenty feet from the camera's eye a body lay grotesquely sprawled, face downward, head toward the foot of the hill. Gray fog swirled over the scene. It was nearly noon at Harriman's New York office, but it was still quite early in the morning across the continent in California. Transmission of the message-tape was virtually instantaneous, thanks to progress in communications science.

Harriman watched patiently,

wondering why it had been necessary to bring to his attention a routine West Coast murder. The image bounced as the man holding the camera walked toward the corpse.

Special Agent Michaels' voice said, "This is just the way he was found, twenty minutes ago."

A hand reached down and turned the cadaver over so its face was visible. An involuntary gasp broke from Harriman's lips. The dead man's face was the color of chalk. Harriman had never seen so pale a face before. The victim's eyes were open, and frozen in them was an image of pain, of shock, of horror beyond human comprehension.

There were two dark little holes an inch apart on the dead man's throat, just over the jugular.

"There isn't a drop of blood in him, chief," Michaels said quietly in commentary. "He's as dry as if he was pumped clean with a force-pump. We've identified him as Sam Barrett, a salesman in a used-car showroom. Unmarried, lived with his aged mother. He

worked around the corner on Van Ness Avenue. There were two eye-witnesses at the scene of the crime."

The camera's eye panned to a balding man in his forties who stood at the edge of the sidewalk, nervously twisting his hands together. He looked almost as pale as the ghastly body on the ground.

"Go on," prompted Michaels. "This is for the record. Tell us who you are and what you saw."

"My name is Mack Harkins," the balding man said in a thin, hesitant voice. "I live over on Austin Street, couple of blocks from here. Work at the Dynacar showroom around the corner. I was walking along and suddenly I looked up ahead and saw a man struggling with—well—some kind of *thing*."

"Describe it," Michaels prodded gently./

"Well—bigger than a man, purple-colored, with big bat-wings. You know, one of those bat-people, what do you call them?"

"Nirotrans?"

"Yeah. Yeah, that's it. One

of them Nirotrans, bending over the man's throat like he was sucking blood from him. Before I knew what was going on, the bat-thing saw me and bolted away into an alley." Harkins shuddered. "I went to look at the body. No blood at all, just like he is now. Drained."

"You're sure it was a Nirotan you saw?" Michaels asked.

"I ain't sure of anything. But there was this big purple thing with bat-wings wrestling with poor Barrett. If it wasn't one of them Nirotrans, I'd like to know what it was, then."

"Thank you, Mr. Harkins. I think the local authorities would like to ask you some questions now." The camera flashed toward the second witness.

The second witness was not human. He was a member of one of the half-dozen different species of alien beings that frequented Earth since the opening of the age of interstellar travel some three decades earlier.

The camera focussed on the short, stockily-built being whose only external physical

differences from humanity were the two tiny heat-sensitive antennae that sprouted just above each eye.

"You are from Drosk?" Michaels asked.

The alien nodded. "I am Blen Duworn, attache to the Drosk Trade Commission office in San Francisco," he said in smooth, faultless English. "I was out for a morning stroll when I came upon the scene this man has just described to you."

"Tell us what you saw."

"I saw a large winged entity vanishing into that alley. I saw a man falling toward the ground, and another man—Mr. Harkins—rushing toward him. That is all."

"And this large winged entity you saw—can you identify it more precisely?"

The alien frowned. "I am quite sure it was a Nirotan," he said after a brief pause.

"Thank you," Michaels said. The screen showed another view of the bloodless corpse. "That's where it stands as of now, chief. I'll keep in touch on further developments as

they break. Awaiting your instructions."

The screen went dead.

**I**N his darkened office, Neil Harriman sat quietly with folded hands while a chill of terror rippled quickly through him. He recovered self-control with an effort, and switched on the light.

His mind refused to accept what the message tape had just told him.

Harriman's particular job in the workings of the Terran Security Agency was to deal with crimes involving Earthmen and aliens. There was plenty of bad blood between the people of Earth and the strange-looking visitors from space. A planet which had not yet fully reconciled itself even to racial differences in its own species of intelligent life could not easily adjust to the presence of bizarre life-forms, some of them considerably superior to the best that Earth had.

Up till now, Harriman's job had largely been to protect the aliens from the hostility of Earthmen. The green-skinned

Qafliks, for example, had touched off demonstrations in those parts of the world where white skin was still thought to be in some way superior to all other colors of skin.

In other places, the peculiar sexual mores of the uninhibited Zadoorans had angered certain puritanical Terrestrials.

So Harriman's wing of the Agency had been given the task of protecting Earth's many alien visitors until the people of Earth were mature enough to realize that it was not necessary to hate that which was strange.

But now an entirely new and dangerous aspect had entered the picture. One of the aliens had murdered an Earthman. And, thought Harriman bleakly, it *would* have to be a Nirotan that had committed the crime.

The Nirotans were recent additions to the Terran scene. They had first landed on Earth less than a year previously, and no more than a few thousand were present at this time. They were not pretty. Descended from a primitive bat-like form, they were frighten-

ing in appearance—purple-hued creatures seven feet tall, their bodies covered with thick coarse fur, their eyes tiny and set deep in their skull, their faces weird and strange.

They had wings, bat-like membranes of skin stretched over vastly elongated fingerbones, while a small pair of well-equipped hands provided them with the manipulative abilities necessary for the development of a civilization.

They were traders, bringing with them curiously fashioned mechanical contrivances that were in great demand on Earth. But they had little contact with Earthmen. The Nirotans seemed to be a withdrawn, self-contained race, and few Earthmen cared for the company of such repellent-looking beings in any event.

So little was known about them. Dark rumors had arisen that they were vampire beings, thirsty for human blood. The ordinary people of Earth regarded the Nirotans with fear and loathing for this reason, and gave them a wide berth.

So far as anyone had known, the vampire story was nothing



but a terror-inspired myth.

The murder story, Harriman thought, would have to be hushed up somehow. At least until the investigation had definitely proven the guilt or innocence of the Nirotans. If the world ever learned of the "vampire" attack, there would be an hysterical uprising that might bring about the death of every Nirotan—or every alien of any kind—on Earth. Reprisal from the stars would be swift.

Harriman scowled tightly. This was too big for him to handle on his own. He restored the message tape to its container and picked up his phone.

"Harriman speaking. Let me talk to Director Russell. And fast."

His call went through rush channels, and a moment later the deep, resonant voice of the Director of the Terran Security Agency said, "Hello, Harriman. I was just about to call you anyway. I want to see you in a hurry. And I mean *hurry*."

**D**IRECTOR Russell was a short, rotund man who

normally wore an affable expression during even the most grave crisis. But there was nothing cheerful about his plump face now. He nodded curtly to Harriman as the Subchief entered. Harriman saw two message pellets lying on Russell's desk, both of them wrapped in the red-and-yellow emergency trimmings.

Russell said, "I've been reading some of your mail, Harriman. You know that I'm always notified when an emergency message arrives here. You got one about half an hour ago. Then another one showed up for you, and I figured I'd save some time by having a look at it myself. And no sooner did I finish scanning that one when another one showed up." Russell tapped the two message pellets on his desk. "One of these is from Warsaw. The other is from London. They're both about the same thing."

"The Nirotans?"

Russell nodded darkly. "Tell me about your tape."

"A man was murdered in San Francisco this morning. Body found completely

drained of blood, with puncture-holes over the jugular. Two witnesses—a Drosk and a man named Harkins. They saw the victim struggling with something that looked like a Nirotan.”

The Director’s eyebrows rose. “Witnesses? That’s more than we have on these other two.”

“What are they?”

“Murder reports. One in Poland last night, the other in London about two hours ago. An old man and a girl, both bloodless.”

“We’ll have to keep this quiet,” Harriman said. “If the people find out—”

“They have. There’s already been a vampire-hunt in Warsaw. Two Nirotans were flushed by the mob and just barely escaped with their lives. Londoners are talking vampire too. It looks damned bad for the Nirotans, Harriman. Especially with this eye-witness thing in San Francisco. Everyone called the Nirotans vampires all along—and now there’s something concrete to pin suspicions to.”

“But they’ve been here for

almost a year,” Harriman protested. “Why should they suddenly break out in a wave of blood-drinking the same night?”

“Are you defending them?” Russell asked.

“I’m just speculating. We have no definite proof that they’re guilty.”

“Maybe,” Russell said, “they just couldn’t hold out any longer with all that nice fresh blood tempting them.”

Harriman eyed his chief strangely. He knew Russell did not have much liking for the alien beings on Earth. The Director was, in many respects, an old-fashioned man.

“You aren’t pre-judging the Nirotans, are you?” Harriman asked.

“Of course not. But it certainly looks bad for them. I’ve ordered all Nirotans taken into protective custody until things cool down a little.”

“Good idea,” Harriman agreed. “If some of them got lynched by the mobs we might find ourselves at war with Nirotan tomorrow.”

“I’m aware of that,” Russell said. “Also, I’m having the

three bodies flown here for examination. And I want to get a live Nirotan to examine, too."

"That won't be so easy," Harriman said. "They don't like Eathmen peering at them up close."

"They'd *better* like it," Russell said. "Take a trip over to the Nirotan Consulate downtown and talk to the head man."

Harriman nodded. "Right. But I don't think they're going to cooperate."

**T**HE news sheets picked up the story with almost supernatural speed. **THREE VAMPIRE VICTIMS**, screamed the headlines of the afternoon editions. **BLOODLESS BODIES FOUND IN FRISCO, LONDON, WARSAW. NIROTANS SUSPECTED.**

Harriman made an appointment to see the ranking member of the Nirotan Consulate at half past two that afternoon. Until that time, he busied himself with keeping up on news reports.

Angry mobs were beginning

to form. A country-wide movement was under way in Poland, the object to hunt down any Nirotans that could be found and destroy them. Ancient superstitious legends had been reawakened in Central Europe. There was talk of silver bullets, of wooden stakes through the heart.

"Dracula-men from the stars," shouted a West Coast newspaper. In Los Angeles, crowds surrounded the Nirotan headquarters, climbing towering palms to hurl bricks at the windows. A major incident was brewing as news of the triple killings swept the world. Fear and hatred were turned against alien beings of all sorts. Harriman sent out a world-wide order instructing authorities everywhere to give sanctuary to aliens of any kind, in case the mob generalized its hate and struck out against all non-humans.

At two that afternoon the first body arrived—from London, flown over by transatlantic rocket. Harriman had a moment to view the corpse before heading downtown to the Nirotan Consulate.

The victim was a girl of about seventeen, with plain but pleasant features. The sheet was lifted from her body and Harriman saw its paper-whiteness, and the two dark little holes at her throat. Horror crept down his back. It was a ghastly sight, this bloodless body. The girl's mouth was locked in the configurations of a terrified scream. She looked like a waxen image, not like a creature of flesh and blood.

Harriman's special car was waiting for him outside the Agency building. He rode downtown in deep silence, his mind still gripped by the sight of those chalky young breasts, those dead white thighs. Despite himself he could picture the huge revolting form of the Nirotan huddling around her, its wings half unfolding as the gleaming teeth plunged through the soft flesh of the protesting girl's throat—

Harriman shook his head. He was an officer of the law, he reminded himself. An impartial investigator dedicated to justice. He had to keep from letting his emotions enter into

the case. Maybe the Nirotans *were* hideous; maybe they *did* look like the Devil's own nightmares. It made no difference. His job was simply to determine guilt or innocence.

If the Nirotans were guilty, if three of their number had committed the crimes, then there would be grave interstellar repercussions. Probably the Nirotans would be asked to leave Earth permanently.

But if they were innocent—somehow—then it was his job to protect them from the wrath of the mobs, and find the real culprits.

The Nirotan Consulate was a sturdy four-story building on Fifth Avenue—an old building, dating back nearly two centuries. Just now it was surrounded by a boiling, screaming mob. Eight armed men in the gray uniforms of the Security Corps held the rioters back. The door, Harriman saw, was barred. One of the Security men had a cut over his left eye; the result, probably, of a thrown missile.

The crowd melted to one side as Harriman's official Security Corps car came to a

halt outside the building. Escorted by three armed Corpsmen, Harriman made his way up the steps of the building. He waited outside the door while a scanner beam examined him. There was the sound of relays groaning as the heavy protective bars were electronically drawn back.

The door opened. A Nirotan stood in the shadows within, looming high above Harriman.

"Enter," the alien said in its strange, hoarse, voice.

Harriman stepped inside and the great door clanged shut behind him, obliterating the raucous screams of the mob outside. Three Nirotans faced Harriman, the smallest of them better than a foot taller than he. They conducted him silently through the building to the office of the Nirotan consul.

There was a faintly musty odor about the place. Despite himself, Harriman felt a twinge of revulsion as he was ushered into the presence of Trinnin Nirot, ranking Nirotan diplomat in North America.

THE Nirotan was standing in one corner of the office—Nirotans never sat. His small, muscular arms were folded in a surprisingly human posture. The great sleek wings lay huddled on his shoulders. On Earth the atmosphere was too thin, the gravitational pull too strong, to make it possible for the Nirotans to fly. Their home world had a thicker atmosphere and lighter gravity, and there they soared on wings that measured fifteen feet from tip to tip.

Harriman tried to hide the irrational fear he experienced at the sight of the huge bat-like creature. He stared at the face, covered, like the rest of the Nirotan's body, with fine purplish fur. He could see the dog-like snout, the tiny yellow eyes, the enormous fan-like ears, and, gleaming behind the Nirotan's thin lips, the teeth. Teeth that might, perhaps, be able to drain blood from an Earthman's throat.

Harriman said, "You understand why I am here, of course."

"I understand that there are rioters outside this building,

and that my people on this planet must take cover for fear of their lives," said the Nirotan crisply. Like most aliens on Earth, his command of the language was flawless. "More than that I do not understand. I am waiting for an explanation."

Harriman's jaws tightened. He felt awkward standing halfway across the room from the Nirotan; but there was no place to sit down, and the alien did not offer any sort of hospitality. Harriman fidgeted, crossing and uncrossing his arms. After a brief pause he said—quietly, since the Nirotans were extraordinarily sensitive to sound—"Last night and this morning three Earthmen were found dead in widely separated places, their bodies drained of blood. Many people believe that they were killed by members of your race."

The alien's facial expression was unreadable. "Why should they believe this? Why choose us as the killers, and not the Qafliks or the Zadoorans or some other race? There are many alien beings on this planet."

"There are two reasons for suspecting Nirotans," Harriman said. "The first is an ancient superstitious belief in vampires. Bats who drink human blood. The people of Nirota are closest in physical appearance to the popular image of the vampire."

"And the other reason?"

"The other reason," said Harriman, "is more pertinent. Two eye-witnesses in San Francisco said they saw a Nirotan in the process of attacking one of the victims."

The alien was silent for a long moment. Finally he said, "Tell me, Mr. Harriman: if you could, would you kill and eat me?"

Harriman was stunned. "Would I—kill and *eat* you?" he repeated slowly.

"Yes. Do you feel any inclination to feast on a roasted Nirotan?"

"Why—of course not. The idea's monstrous!"

"Exactly so," the Nirotan said calmly. "Let me assure you that a member of my race would no sooner drink the blood of an Earthman than an Earthman would dine on Niro-

tan flesh. Pardon me when I say that we find your physical appearance as repugnant as you seem to find ours. The whole concept of this crime is beyond our belief. We are not vampires. We do not feed on animal matter of any sort. The crime we are accused of could not possibly have been committed by a Nirotan."

Harriman silently regarded the alien, staring at the flashing teeth; needle-sharp, at the vicious little claws, at the folded, leathery, infinitely terrifying wings. Appearance seemed to belie the calm denial of guilt that Harriman had just heard.

The Earthman said, "It might be possible to determine guilt or innocence quickly. If you would lend us a member of your staff for examination—"

"No," came the curt, immediate response.

"But our physicians might be able to establish beyond doubt the impossibility of any—ah—vampirism. I can assure you that no harm would come—"

"No."

"But—"

"We do not tolerate any handling of our bodies by alien beings," said the Nirotan haughtily. "If you persist in accusing us of this incredible crime, we will be forced to withdraw from your planet. But we cannot and will not submit to any sort of examination of the sort you suggest, Mr. Harriman."

"Don't you see, though, it might clear your people at once, and—"

"You have heard my reply," the Nirotan said. He rustled his wings in an unfriendly gesture. "We have stated our innocence. I must take your refusal to believe my statement as a deeply wounding insult."

There was crackling silence in the room. This was an alien, Harriman reflected. On Nirotan, perhaps, the idea of lying was not known. Or perhaps the Nirotan was a very subtle devil indeed. In any event, the interview was rapidly getting nowhere.

"Very well," Harriman said. "If your refusal is final—"

"It is."

"We'll have to proceed with our investigation as best we

can. For your own sake, I must ask you not to let any of your people venture out unprotected. We can't be responsible for the actions of hysterical mobs. And, naturally, we'll do everything in our power to discover the guilty parties. Your cooperation might have made things a little easier all around, of course."

"Good day, Mr. Harriman."

Harriman scowled. "For the sake of good relations between Earth and Nirot, I hope none of your people is responsible for this crime. But you can be sure that when we do find the murderers, they'll be fully punished under the laws of Earth. Good day, Trinnin Nirot."

**H**ARRIMAN was shaking with repressed disgust as he made his way down the consulate steps, and into his car. The Nirotan stench seemed to cling to him, to hover in a cloud about him. And he knew the Nirotan's hideous face would plague his dreams for weeks to come.

He rode uptown, back to the skyscraper that housed the

headquarters of the Terran Security Agency, in a bleak and bitter mood. For the ten years that he had held his job, he had devoted himself to protecting the alien beings on Earth, guarding them from the outcroppings of superstitious hatred that sometimes rose up to threaten them. And now, he could no longer defend the extra-terrestrials. Three vicious crimes had been committed. And Trinnin Nirot's cold refusal to permit investigation made it that much harder to believe in the innocence of the Nirotans. The vampire image was ingrained too deeply.

When he returned to his office, Harriman found a message instructing him to report to Director Russell at once. He found Russell in conference. In the Director's office were four men—George Zachary, Secretary-General of the United Nations; Henri Lamar-tine, Commissioner of Extra-terrestrial Relationships; Dr. David van Dyne, chief medical examiner of the Security Agency; and Paul Hennessey, Commissioner of Justice and Russell's immediate superior.



Director Russell said, "Well, Harriman? Did you see the Nirotans?"

"I saw Trinnin Nirot himself," Harriman said. "And I got nowhere."

"What do you mean, nowhere?"

"Trinnin Nirot categorically denies the possibility that any Nirotan might have committed the crimes. He says that Nirotans are vegetarians, and that the whole idea of their being vampires is beyond belief. But he won't let us have a look at any of his men to confirm it."

"We expected the denial," muttered Commissioner Hennessey. "But where do we go from here?"

"Isn't there any evidence on the bodies?" Harriman asked.

Dr. van Dyne said, "All three bodies are here, and I've examined them. All that can be definitely determined was that two needle-like instruments penetrated the jugular veins of the victims and rapidly withdrew their blood. The withdrawal might have been done with teeth, or it could have been done mechanically. Of course, if we could get hold

of a Nirotan and examine his teeth, we could probably find out readily enough whether one of them actually committed the crime or not. If they're really vegetarians, they probably don't have the equipment for doing it."

"Are we trying to decide whether a Nirotan actually did it?" Director Russell asked in some surprise. "I thought that was all settled. There were witnesses, after all, for the San Francisco murder."

Commissioner Lamartine said, "Before we can start to take legal action against the Nirotans, we'll have to rule out all possibility that any other race might have done it—or that the crimes were committed by Earthmen."

Russell blinked. "Earthmen? Are you suggesting—"

The bearded little commissioner shook his head stubbornly. "We're dealing with a proud and stubborn race here, as Mr. Harriman can confirm. We can't simply accuse them of a crime like this without proof."

"Eyewitnesses consti-

tute some beginning of proof," Russell snapped.

Commissioner Hennessey held up a hand to cut short the dispute. "Please, gentlemen. I think Trininn Nirot's refusal to permit examination of any Nirotans speaks for itself in the matter of guilt or innocence."

"I'm not so sure," Harriman put in. "They seem to have some kind of taboo against letting other species get too close to them."

"But certainly they'd be willing to let the taboo go by the boards for the sake of clearing themselves," Russell objected.

"Not necessarily," said Larmartine. "We're dealing with alien beings, remember. They don't see things the way we do."

"In any event," said Secretary-General Zachary, "we'll have to reach some solution in a hurry. There's rioting going on in every city where Nirotans are located. And the bitterness is starting to spread to take in other aliens, too. If we don't restore order in a hurry, we're going to find all the ex-

tra-terrestrials pulling out—and turning Earth into a backwater world considered not fit for civilized beings to visit."

Harriman stared at the five grim faces. These men, like himself, were shaken to the core by the notion that the beings from the stars might be blood-drinkers in fact as well as in appearance. And it was hard to believe in the innocence of the Nirotans.

The phone rang. Director Russell reached out with a plump hand and snatched the telephone nervously from its cradle. He listened for a moment, snapped some sort of reply, and slammed the instrument down again.

"Bad news," he said, his face becoming grimmer. "A mob broke into the building where the Nirotans were taking sanctuary in Budapest. Dragged three Nirotans out and killed them. Drove wooden stakes through their hearts."

Harriman felt chilled. Legends weighted with medieval dust were erupting into the neat, ordered world of the twenty-second century. Wood-

en stakes in Budapest! Ominous mutterings against the winged people—and three bloodless bodies lying in the morgue ten floors below.

“Heaven help us if the Niro-tans are innocent,” Secretary-General Zachary said tonelessly. “They’ll never forgive us for today.”

“I’ll order triple protection,” Russell said. “We don’t want a massacre.”

**H**YSTERIA was the order of the day on Earth in the next six hours. Three murders in themselves were not of any great importance; round the world each day, hundreds of human beings met violent deaths without causing a stir. But it was the manner of the deaths that dug deep into humanity. The killings struck subconscious fears, and brought to the surface the old myths.

It was dread of the unknown, dread of the people from the stars, that touched off the rioting round the world. The relative handful of Niro-tans waited behind the walls of their shelters, waiting for the

mobs to come bursting in.

The United Nations General Assembly, which had become the world government in fact as well as in name during the past seventy-five years, met in an extraordinary session that evening at U. N. Headquarters.

The purpose of the meeting was simply to vote additional appropriations for the protection of extra-terrestrial beings against mob violence—but during the session a delegate from the United States rose in wrath to demand the immediate withdrawal of what he termed the “Nirotan vampires” from Earth.

The resolution was declared out of order, and did not come to a vote. But it represented the sentiments of a great majority of Earth’s nine billion people on that evening.

Harriman flew to San Francisco that evening aboard a midnight jetliner that made the journey in four hours. A waiting taxi took him to the downtown San Francisco offices of the Nirotan Trade Delegation, in the heart of the city on Market Street. The

summer fog shrouded everything in gloom.

Special Agent Michaels was waiting for him outside the heavily protected building. The agent's face was set tightly. Fifty or sixty people were parading wearily around the building, despite the lateness of the hour. They no longer seemed violent, but they carried hastily constructed placards which bore slogans like VAMPIRES MUST DIE! and NIROTANS GO HOME!

"Been any trouble with the pickets?" Harriman asked, indicating the mob.

"Not as much as earlier," Michaels said. "There were about five hundred people out here around nine o'clock, but they've all gone home except the diehards. They were parading the mother of the murdered man around the building and screaming for justice, but they didn't try to do any damage, at least."

Harriman nodded. "Good. Let's go in."

There were fifteen Nirotans standing inside. Michaels assured Harriman that the group included every Nirotan who

had been in the San Francisco area in the past three days. If a Nirotan had been the murderer of Sam Barrett, then the murderer was in this room.

Harriman stared at the group. As always the facial expressions of the aliens defied interpretation. They seemed to be waiting for the disturbance to die down, so they could resume their normal way of life.

Conscious of their dread appearance, of his own insignificance, of the nauseous odor of fifteen Nirotans in one room, Harriman moistened his lips. A mental image came to him unexpectedly—the fifteen bat-like creatures surrounding him, throwing themselves on him with one accord, fastening their fangs in his throat and sucking away his life-blood. He winced involuntarily at the vividness of the picture.

Then he remembered that he was an officer of the law, and that these beings facing him were simply suspects in a murder case.

He said, "Ear'y yesterday morning a man was killed in this city. I'm sure you all know *how* he was killed. I've

come here from New York to talk to you about the murder of Sam Barrett."

None of the aliens spoke. In the solemn silence Harriman continued. "Two witnesses claim they saw a Nirotan struggling with the murdered man in the street. If the witnesses are telling the truth, one of you in this room committed that crime."

"The witnesses are saying that which is not so," declared an immense Nirotan booming-ly. "We have committed no crimes. The offense you charge us with is unthinkable in Nirotan eyes."

"I haven't charged you with anything," Harriman said. "The evidence implies that a Nirotan was responsible. For your sake and the sake of interstellar relations, I hope it isn't so. But my job is to find out who is responsible for the killings."

"We wish you luck. But you must look elsewhere."

Harriman shook his head. "My first step has to be to establish guilt or innocence in this room. As a beginning, suppose I ask each of you to ac-

count for your whereabouts at the time of the murder?"

"We will give no information," rumbled the Nirotan who seemed to be the spokesman

A stone wall again, Harriman thought gloomily. He said, "Don't you see that by refusing to answer questions or permit an examination, you naturally make yourselves look suspicious in humanity's eyes?"

"We have no concern with appearances. We did not commit the crime."

"On Earth we need proof of that. Your word isn't enough here."

"We will not submit to interrogation. We demand the right to leave this planet at once, in order to return to Nirotia."

Harriman's eyes narrowed. "The Interstellar Trade Agreements prevent any suspected criminals from leaving Earth for their home world. You'll have to stay here until something definite is settled, one way or the other, on the murder."

"We will answer no questions," came the flat, positive, unshakeable reply.

Anger glimmered in Harriman's eyes. "All right, then. But you'll rot here until we decide to let you go! See how you like that!"

He turned and spun out of the room.

HE slept fitfully and uneasily on the return journey to New York. It was mid-morning when the jetliner touched down at New York Jet Skyport, and it was noon by the time Harriman returned to his office at the Terran Security Agency. He felt deep frustration. There was no way for the investigation to proceed—not when the only suspects refused to defend themselves.

Earth couldn't accuse members of an alien species of murder on the basis of two early-morning eyewitnesses and a lot of circumstantial evidence rising out of old hysterical legends. It was always a risky business when one planet tried people of another world for crime—and in this case, the evidence was simply too thin for a solid indictment.

On the other hand, Earth clamored for a trial. The over-

whelming mass of the people, utterly convinced that the Nirotans were vampires, stood ready to enforce justice themselves if the authorities lingered. Already, three Nirotans had died at the hands of the jeering mobs—an incident which would have serious consequences once the hysteria died down.

Director Russell growled a greeting at Harriman as the Agency subchief entered the office. It was obvious from Russell's harried expression and from the overflowing ashtrays that the Director had been up all night, keeping in touch with the crisis as it unfolded and as new complications developed.

"Well?" Russell demanded. "What's the word from San Francisco?"

"The word is nothing, chief," Harriman said tiredly. "The Nirotans clammed up completely. They insist that they're innocent, but beyond that they refuse to say anything. And they're demanding to be allowed to return to their home world now."

"I know. Trinnin Nirot

petitioned Secretary-General Zachary late last night to permit all Nirotons on Earth to withdraw."

"What did Zachary say?"

"He didn't—not yet. But he doesn't want to let the Nirotons go until we get to the bottom of this vampire business."

"Any word from anyplace else?"

"Not much that's hopeful," Russell said wearily with a tired shrug. "There are thirty Nirotons under surveillance in London, but they're not talking. And we have twenty cooped up in Warsaw. Zero there too. Right now we're busy protecting a couple of thousand of the bats. But how long can this keep up?"

"Couldn't we seize a Nirotan forcibly and examine him?" Harriman asked.

"I've thought of that. But the high brass says no. If we happen to be wrong, we'll have committed what the Nirotons are perfectly free to consider as an open act of war. And if we're right—if the Nirotons were lying—then we still have the problem of finding out *which* Nirotons did the actual killing."

"Maybe," Harriman said, "we ought to just let the bats clear off Earth, as they want to do. That'll solve all our problems."

"And bring up a million new ones. I would mean that any alien could come down here and commit crimes, and go away untouched if he simply denied his guilt. I wouldn't like to see a precedent like that get set. Uh-uh, Harriman. We have to find the killers, and we have to do it legally. Only I'm damned if I know how we're going to go about doing it."

**WE** *have to find the killers,* Harriman thought half an hour later, in the solitude of his own office. *And we have to do it legally.* Well, the first part of that was reasonable enough.

But how about the second, Harriman thought?

Legally they were powerless to continue the investigation. The forces of law and order were hopelessly stalled, while fear-crazy rioters demanded Nirotan blood in exchange for Terran.

The main problem, he thought, was whether or not a Nirotan—any Nirotan—had actually committed the atrocities. According to the Nirotans, such crimes were beyond their capacities even to imagine. Yet the heavy weight of popular belief—as well as the damning fact of the two San Francisco witnesses—lent validity to the notion of the Nirotans as blood-sucking vampires.

Medical examination of a Nirotan might settle the thing in one direction or another. If it could be proven that the Nirotans might possibly have committed such a crime, it would be reasonable to assume that they had. But, on the other hand, if the Nirotans had definitely not done it, Harriman would have to begin looking elsewhere for the authors of the atrocities.

If only the Nirotans would cooperate, he thought!

But some alien quirk, some incomprehensible pride of theirs, kept them from lowering themselves to take part in anything so humiliating to them as an official inquest.

The Security Agency was stymied—officially. They were at an impasse which could not be surmounted.

How about unofficially, though?

Harriman moistened his lips. He had an idea. It was a gamble, that would be worth his job and his career if he lost. But it was worth taking, he decided firmly. Someone had to risk it.

Picking up the phone, he ordered his special car to be ready for him outside the building. Then, without leaving word with anyone of his intended destination or purpose, he quietly departed.

There were several dozen Nirotans cooped up at the consulate on Fifth Avenue. Any one of those Nirotans would do, for his purposes. The thing he had to remember was that he was in this on his own. He did not dare risk taking on an accomplice. His plan was too risky to share with another person.

The consulate was guarded by armed Security Corpsmen. And, unless there had been a slackening of public animosity, the building was probably



still surrounded by a howling mob.

It was. More than a thousand shouting New Yorkers clustered around the building, pressing close to the steps but not daring to approach for fear of the guns of the Security men. The mob, frustrated, kept up a low animal-like murmur beneath the hysteria of the shouts and curses it hurled forth.

Harriman ordered his driver to park his car several blocks north of the scene of the disturbance. The Agency subchief proceeded cautiously, on foot, making his way between the packed rows of angry demonstrators toward the consulate. He felt a dryness in his throat. He was gambling everything, now.

He needed a Nirotan—dead or alive, preferably alive. And there was only one way for him to get one, he knew.

He made his way up the steps of the consulate. The guards, recognizing him, gave way. Harriman called them together.

"I've got orders to bring a Nirotan out," he whispered.

"Just one. They want him down at Headquarters. When I get him out, I want an armed convoy through this crowd—eight of you on each side of me, with drawn guns, in case anyone in the crowd tries to make trouble. All that understood?"

They nodded. Tension pounded in Harriman's chest. He was taking a tremendous risk, putting a Nirotan in front of the crowd in broad daylight. But there was no help for it. If he came at dead of night, when the mob had diminished, he would get no response from within. Nirotans slept the sleep of the dead at night—this much had been definitely established.

Harriman waited in the scanner beam while the Nirotans within examined him. At last, he heard the heavy door begin to clank open. Beady yellow Nirotan eyes stared at him from within.

"Yes? What do you want?"

"To talk," Harriman said. "Something new has come up that you must be told about."

The door widened a little to admit Harriman. But, instead

of stepping inside, he extended a hand and seized the wrist of the Nirotan. Harriman tugged. The Nirotan, for all his great height, had the light bones of a flying creature; besides, surprise was on Harriman's side. The astonished Nirotan came tumbling through the half open door before he knew what was happening.

A great shout went up from the mob at the sight of the bat-creature. Harriman felt a twinge of fear at the raucous roar of the crowd. The Nirotan was squirming, struggling to break Harriman's grasp. His wings riffled impotently.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded the bat-creature indignantly.

"Just come with me, and don't struggle, and everything will be all right," Harriman said soothingly. He let the alien catch a glimpse of the tiny needle-blaster he held in his free hand. "We want to talk to you at headquarters. The crowd won't hurt you if you cooperate with me."

For an uneasy moment Harriman wondered if the alien might not prefer suicide to

cooperation. But evidently the Nirotans' pride did not extend that far. Eyes blazing with fury but otherwise meek, the Nirotan allowed himself to be led down the consulate steps by Harriman.

"Keep back!" the Security Corpsmen shouted, gesturing with their weapons, as they formed an enflankment to protect Harriman and his captive. An ugly menacing buzz rose from the crowd; some began to jostle forward, evidently impelled by hotter heads behind them. But they gave way as the little convoy proceeded past.

The trip to the car seemed to take hours. Harriman was limp and sweat-soaked by the time he finally reached the vehicle and thrust the Nirotan in. There had not been a single overt act of violence on the part of the crowd. It was as if the actual sight of a Nirotan walking safely through their very midst had left them too stunned to react.

"This is an outrage," the Nirotan started to say, as the car pulled away. "I will protest this kidnapping and I—"

Smiling in relief, Harriman

took from his pocket the anesthetic capsule he had prepared, and crushed it under the Nirotan's snout. The bat-creature slumped instantly into unconsciousness and said no more.

SOME fifteen minutes later, a stretcher was borne into the headquarters of the Terran Security Agency. The form on the stretcher was totally swathed in wrappings, and it was impossible to detect what lay beneath. Harriman supervised delivery of the stretcher to the inner office of Security Corps Medical Examiner van Dyne.

Dr. van Dyne looked puzzled and more than a little irritated. "Would you mind telling me what all this mystery is about, Harriman?"

Harriman nodded agreeably. "Is your office absolutely security-tight?"

"Of course. What do you think—"

"Okay, then. I've brought you someone to examine. He's currently out with a double dose of anesthetrin, and I'll guarantee his complete cooper-

ation for the next couple of hours, at least. Don't ask any questions about where or how I got him, Doc. Just examine him, and get in touch with me the instant you're finished."

Harriman reached forward and yanked the coverings off the figure on the stretcher. Even in sleep, the face of the Nirotan was hideous. Dr. van Dyne's jaw sagged in disbelief.

"My God! A Nirotan! Harriman, how did you—"

"I told you, Doc, don't ask any questions. He's here, that's all, and until the anesthetrin wears off he won't say a word. Look him over. Find out whether or not a Nirotan can be a vampire. Let me know the outcome—and don't breathe a syllable of this to anybody else, *anybody*, or it'll be worth your head and mine. Clear?"

The pudgy medico looked troubled by the obvious irregularity of the situation. But he remained silent for a moment, eyeing the slumbering Nirotan on the stretcher. Finally van Dyne said, "Okay. I've always wanted to have a close look at one of these fellows. And we

can get a lot of things settled this way."

Harriman smiled. "Thanks, Doc. Remember, you don't know anything. If there's any blame to be taken, let me be the one to take it. How soon will you have any information to give me?"

"That's hard to say. Suppose you stick around the building for a while. I'll phone you in—oh, say, an hour and a half."

"Right. I'll be waiting."

As Harriman walked toward the door of van Dyne's office, the medical examiner had already begun to select the equipment he planned to use in the examination.

**B**ACK in his own office, Harriman dropped down wearily at his desk and ran tensely quivering hands through his hair. In ninety minutes, he would have the answers to some of the questions that were plaguing him about the Nirotans.

He had kidnapped a Nirotan in front of a raging mob. It had been bold, foolhardy—but necessary. Without a close

look at one of the bat-creatures, it was impossible to take even the first steps toward solving the vampire mysteries.

Now, he needed information. He rang up the library circuit and requested everything they had on Nirotan—immediately.

The tapes started arriving a few minutes later. Harriman sorted through them. The first ones were dry statistics on Terran-Nirotan trade over the past ten months. But at length Harriman came up with something that was more useful to him—a tape about Nirotan itself.

*The Nirotans are a proud, aloof people, Harriman read. They do not welcome contact with other races except for the purpose of trade.*

*Their historical records stretch back for nearly fifteen thousand Terran years. They have had space travel for ten thousand of those years. The Nirotan Federation extends over some thirteen worlds, all of them settled by Nirotan colonists many centuries previously.*

*The Nirotans are superb mechanical craftsmen and their*

*wares are prized throughout the galaxy. In general they do not take part in galactic disputes, preferring to remain above politics. However, the Nirotans have been engaged in fierce economic competition with the artisans of Drosk for the past thousand years, and several times during this period the rivalry has become so intense that it has erupted into brief but savage wars between Drosk and Nirotan—*

Harriman's reading was suddenly interrupted by the strident sound of the telephone. As he answered, his eye fell on the wall-clock, and he discovered with some surprise that he had been immersed in Nirotan history for rather more than an hour. Perhaps, he thought hopefully, van Dyne had completed his examination and was reporting on his findings!

"Harriman speaking."

"van Dyne here, Neil. I've just finished giving our specimens a good checkdown."

"Well?" Harriman demanded eagerly.

In a quiet voice said, "If a Nirotan committed those murders, Neil, then I should

have been a streetcleaner instead of a medic."

"What do you mean?"

"Item one, the Nirotan's two big front incisor teeth are wedge-shaped—triangular. The holes in the victims' throats were round. Item two is that the Nirotan's jaws aren't designed for biting—he'd have to be a contortionist or better, in order to get his teeth onto a human throat. And item three is that metabolically the Nirotans are as vegetarian as can be. Their bodies don't have any way of digesting animal matter, blood or meat. Human blood would be pure poison to them if they tried to swallow any. It would go down their gullet like a shot of acid."

"So they were telling the truth after all," Harriman said quietly. "And all they had to do was let us examine one of them for ten minutes, and we'd be able to issue a full exoneration!"

"They're aliens, Neil," said van Dyne. "They have their own ideas about pride. They just couldn't bring themselves to let an Earthman go poking around their bodies with instruments."

"You haven't done any harm to your patient, have you?"

"Lord, no!" van Dyne said. "I ran a complete external diagnosis on him. When he wakes up he won't even know I've touched him. By the way, what am I supposed to do with him when he wakes up?"

"Does he show any signs of coming out from under the anesthetic yet?"

"He's beginning to show signs of coming around."

"Give him another jolt and put him back under," Harriman said. "Keep him hidden down at your place for a while, until I can figure out where to go next."

"You have any ideas? Now that we know definitely that the Nirotans didn't pull the vampire stunt, how are we going to find out who did?"

Harriman said, "That's a damned good question. I wish I had an equally good answer for it."

Then his eye fell to the tape of Nirotan history, still open at the place where he had been reading when interrupted by the telephone call.

He read: *However, the Niro-*

*tans have been engaged in fierce economic competition with the artisans of Drosk for the past thousand years, and several times during this period the rivalry has become so intense that it has erupted into brief but savage wars between Drosk and Nirotan—*

"I've got a hunch," Harriman said. "It's pretty wild, but it's worth a try. Keep that Nirotan out of sight for the rest of the day. I'm going to make another trip to San Francisco."

THE San Francisco Security Corpsmen knew exactly where to find Blen Duworn, attache to the Drosk Trade Commission office. For one thing, all non-human beings were kept under informal surveillance during the emergency, for their own protection. For another, Blen Duworn was a material witness in the killing of Sam Barrett, and therefore was watched closely so he could be on hand in case authorities cared to question him again.

Which they did. Early in the day, after his night flight to

the West Coast, Neil Harriman was shown into a room with the Drosk and left alone. Blen Duworn was short, about five feet three, but sturdily built, with thick hips and immensely broad shoulders, indicating the higher gravitational pull of his home world.

The Drosk was, at least externally, human in every way except for the half-inch stubs above each eye that provided a sixth sense, that of sensitivity to heat-waves. Internally, of course, the Drosk was probably totally alien—but non-terrestrial beings were not in the habit of letting Terrans examine their interiors.

Harriman said affably, "I know you must be tired of it by now, Blen Duworn, but would you mind telling me just what you saw that morning?"

The Drosk's smile was equally affable. "To put it briefly, I saw a Nirotan killing an Earthman. The Nirotan had his fangs to the Earthman's throat and seemed to be drawing blood out of him."

Nodding, Harriman pretended to jot down notes. "You were not the first one on the scene?"

"No. The Earthman named Harkins was there first."

Harriman nodded again. "We of Earth know so little about the Nirotans, of course. We have some of their history, but none of their biology at all. They claim to be vegetarians, you know."

"They're lying. On their native worlds they raise animals simply to drink their blood."

Harriman lifted an eyebrow. "You mean they have a long history of—ah—vampirism?"

"They've been blood-drinkers for thousands of years. Luckily for us, Drosk blood doesn't attract them. Evidently Terran blood does."

"Evidently," Harriman agreed. In the same level, unexcited tone of voice he went on, "Would you mind telling me, now, just how you managed to convince Harkins that he saw a Nirotan draining blood from Barrett—when it was really you he saw?"

The antennae above Blen Duworn's cold eyes quivered. "On my world, Earthman, a statement like that is a mortal

insult that can be wiped out only by your death."

"We're not on your world now. We're on Earth. And I say that *you* killed Sam Barrett, not a Nirotan, and that you deluded Harkins into thinking it was a Nirotan he saw."

Duworn laughed contemptuously. "How preposterous! The Nirotans are known for their blood-drinking, while we of Drosk are civilized people. And you can yet accuse me of—"

"The Nirotans are vegetarians. Human blood is poison to them."

"You believe their lies?" Duworn asked bitterly.

Harriman shook his head. "It isn't a matter of belief. We've examined a Nirotan. We *know* they couldn't possibly have committed those murders."

"Examined a Nirotan?" Duworn repeated, amused. "How fantastic! A Nirotan wouldn't let himself be touched by Earthmen!"

"This one had no choice," Harriman said softly. "He was unconscious at the time. We gave him a thorough going-over

and found out beyond question that the Nirotans have to be innocent."

"I don't believe it."

"Believe as you wish. But who might be interested in seeing the Nirotans blamed for such crimes? For thousands of years Drosk and Nirotan have been rivals in the galaxy, trying to cut each other out of juicy trading spots. Here on Earth we've allowed both of you to come peddle your wares, in direct competition with each other.

"But Drosk didn't like that, did it? So an enterprising Drosk did some research into Terran folklore, and found out about the vampire legend—about the dreaded giant bats who drink human blood, and who happen to resemble the people of Nirotan.

"And someone cooked up the idea of murdering a few Earthmen by draining out their blood, and letting us draw our own conclusions about who did it—knowing damned well that there would be an immediate public outcry against the Nirotans, and also knowing that the Nirotans were culturally



oriented against defending themselves.

"You figured we'd never find out that the Nirotans couldn't possibly have done it. But you didn't count on the chance that we might violate Nirotan privacy, drag one of them off to a medical laboratory, and see for ourselves."

Blen Duworn's muscular face remained impassive, but his tiny antennae were stiff and agitated. "You forget that there was an Earthman who saw the Nirotan drinking blood."

"We know the Nirotans can't drink human blood," returned Harriman sharply. "Therefore, Harkins was either lying, bribed, or not responsible for what he was saying. I rather think it was the last, Blen Duworn. That you manipulated his mind in such a way as to have him think he saw a Nirotan. And then that you gilded the lily by coming forth as a witness yourself—never dreaming that we'd be uncivilized enough to look at a Nirotan despite his wishes, and find out the truth."

Blen Duworn's eyes sudden-

ly gleamed strangely, and the antennae above his eyes rose rigidly. "You're very clever, Earthman. You seem to have figured everything out quite neatly.

"Only—we of Drosk are not blood-drinkers ourselves; medical tests could easily prove that we are just as innocent as the Nirotans are. Why try to fix the blame on us? I've never been positive that I saw a Nirotan that morning; ~~it~~ was dark and foggy. If I was the vampire, how did I do the killing?"

"Drosk is noted for its mechanical skill," Harriman said. "It isn't hard to devise an instrument that can tap the jugular, pump out a few liters of blood, and immediately turn the blood to vapor and discharge it into the atmosphere. I'm sure you could create such a device the size of a signet ring, with Drosk's microminiaturizing techniques. Plunge it into the jugular, draw out the blood, dispose of it—who would be the wiser?"

"The Nirotans are equally clever at such contrivances," retorted the Drosk.

"Yes, they are. But what motive would they have for confirming the popular stereotype of themselves as vampires? No, Blen Duworn, you've exhausted all your arguments. I say that the so-called Vampire Menace was cooked up by Drosk conspirators, with an eye toward driving your Nirotan competition off Earth. And—"

The gleam in Blen Duworn's eyes grew more intense. Harriman tried to avert the alien's gaze, but the Drosk snapped, "Look at me, Earthman! At my eyes! You've been very clever! But you haven't counted on one thing, the Drosk hypnotic power, the power with which I persuaded Harkins that he had seen a Nirotan, the power which I will use now to obtain my freedom—"

Harriman rose, reeling dizzily, as the alien's mind lashed out at his own. It was impossible to look away, impossible to break the alien's hold—

Harriman began to sag. Suddenly the doors opened. Three Security Corpsmen rushed in, seizing Blen Duworn.

Harriman shook his head to

clear it, and smiled faintly. "Thanks," he muttered. "If you'd waited another minute he would have had me. I hope you got every word down on tape."

AFTER that, the rest was simple. "Duworn cracked and gave us the name of his conspirators," Harriman reported the next day to Director Russell. "Half a dozen Drosk were in on it. The idea was to make it look as if the Nirotans were going vampire all over Terra."

"And if you hadn't illegally examined that bat-creature," Russell said, "We'd still be going-around in circles. You ought to hear the apologies Secretary-General Zachary's been making to the Nirotans."

"Couldn't be helped, chief. Duworn and the others were banking on our lack of knowledge about the Nirotans. And they came close to succeeding. But what kind of an investigation can you conduct if you don't know anything about the suspects, even?"

Russell nodded. "You'll have to take a reprimand, Neil.

That's just for the record. But there'll be a promotion coming along right afterward, to take the sting out of it."

"Thanks, chief."

Secretary-General Zachary managed to convey Earth's apologies to the Nirotans for the recent indignities they had suffered, and the bat-beings decided to remain on Earth. Drosk, on the other hand, felt compelled to withdraw; it was decided that the six guilty conspirators would be taken back to their home world for punishment according to Drosk law, and all members of the

species departed from Earth at once.

Neil Harriman received his promotion, and once again it was safe for the Nirotans to walk the streets of Earth. But, despite the well-publicized findings that the Nirotans were harmless vegetarians, and despite the confession of the Drosk, few Earthmen passed one of the hulking bat-like beings without a slight shiver of revulsion, and a thought for the ancient legends of the era of superstition, which had so shockingly come alive for a few days during the so-called Vampire Menace of 2104.

THE END

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