

Fantasy and Science Fiction

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Unfortunately

by FREDRIC BROWN

RALPH NC-5 SIGHED WITH RELIEF as he caught sight of Planet Four of Arcturus in the spotter scope, just where his computer had told him it would be. Arcturus IV was the only inhabited or inhabitable planet of its primary and it was quite a few light-years to the next star system.

He needed food—his fuel and water supplies were okay but the commissary department on Pluto had made a mistake in stocking his scouter—and, according to the spacemanual, the natives were friendly. They'd give him anything he asked for.

The manual was very specific on that point; he reread the brief section on the Arcturians as soon as he had set the controls for automatic landing.

"The Arcturians," he read, "are inhuman, but very friendly. A pilot landing here need only ask for what he wants, and it is given to him freely, readily, and without argument.

"Communication with them, however, must be by paper and pencil as they have no vocal organs and no organs of hearing. However, they read and write English with considerable fluency."

Ralph NC-5's mouth watered as he tried to decide what he wanted

to eat first, after two days of complete abstinence from food, preceded by five days of short rations; a week ago he had discovered the commissary department's mistake in stocking his lockers.

Foods, wonderful foods, chased one another through his mind.

He landed, The Arcturians, a dozen of them and they were indeed inhuman—twelve feet tall, six-armed, bright magenta—approached him and their leader bowed and handed him paper and pencil.

Suddenly he knew exactly what he wanted; he wrote rapidly and handed back the pad. It passed from hand to hand among them.

Then abruptly he found himself grabbed, his arms pinioned. And then tied to a stake around which they were piling brushwood and sticks. One of them lighted it.

He screamed protests but they fell, not on deaf ears but on no ears at all. He screamed pain, and then stopped screaming.

The spacemanual had been quite correct in saying that the Arcturians read and write English with considerable fluency. But it had omitted to add that they were very poor at spelling; else the *last* thing Ralph NC-5 would have requested would have been a sizzling steak.