

OUT OF THE BLUE

THE WHISTLERS

Interplanetary invaders dropping out of the skies of Grautier from its neighbour world to menace the 8000 men and women exiled from Earth and struggling to create a new life far from the interstellar routes of space traffic... and far from any outside help.

Grautier, a grey beast of a world whose inhabitants have so far been found to include a semi-intelligent race of monkeys—the Mungos—and strange Blue Dwarfs endowed with amazing parapsychological and paramechanical powers.

It's an unsettling time for the settlers as they focused to defend themselves against the...Whistlers.

A mysterious young man from Earth—Chellish—has strict orders from Perry Rhodan himself regarding the Grautierians. Learn his role as one of—

THE GUARDIANS

1/ KHEK-KHEK-KHEK!

THE LAST MISTAKE he would make in his life: it could easily result from the slightest error made at this time. The situation was that ticklish, Mullon realized. He couldn't afford to run any risks. So he kept Chellish's pistol even though Chellish had been quite friendly and even-tempered for the past few days, seemingly anxious to be helpful, so that Mullon was tempted to believe that Chellish's presence might even be a valuable addition to the little expedition.

They had moved into the tents again, the ones they had once abandoned when the blue dwarfs had transported them across the jungle to the vicinity of Greenwich. Chellish had taken Pashen's place. They had picked him up a few hours after Mullon, Freddy and Milligan had been brought from the river to their dwelling mound in the jungle.

Mullon presently spent a portion of his time trying to improve the possibilities of communication with the dwarfs. He held daily conversations—if that was the right word for it—with a few of the dwarfs and tried for hours to comprehend the meaning of their play of colours, to get an inkling of the purport of the sibilant sounds they produced. He realized, much to his regret, he would never be able to employ that 3rd method of communication: telepathy.

Nevertheless, bit by bit, he made small progress in learning the significance of the colour combinations

and the distinctive sounds. He was proud of a major accomplishment when one of the dwarfs touched the ground with his plastic body and wrote the word YES in the sand while making an equivalent noise and displaying the corresponding colour tone expressing the word in his language.

In time Mullon managed to establish a common strategy with the dwarfs against Hollander's machinations although the existence of such a plan was no guarantee that the creatures would abide by it when the situation became critical. There were far too many sources of misunderstanding between man and dwarf to do more than plot the general outline of a plan. Mullon considered it a considerable accomplishment that both sides at least knew what they were talking about.

Mullon was racking his brains trying to anticipate Hollander's intentions. He knew from Milligan, who had interrogated one of Hollander's guards, that he first waited for Freddy's and Milligan's return from the jungle. Now that he knew that at least Milligan had reached the vicinity of Greenwich, Hollander would presumably try to capture Milligan and Freddy. Mullon didn't believe Hollander could succeed but, in view of Hollander's perseverance, he expected him to show up at their retreat one of these days. The blue dwarfs constituted too much of a problem to Hollander for them to be ignored indefinitely.

Hollander was most likely to send an investigating team first to their compound in an effort to make contact with the dwarfs. If he were encouraged by the result of his initial feelers, he would probably take the next step and dispatch as many helicopters as possible to the dwarfs in order to impose his will on them. He was not averse to the use of force.

In Mullon's opinion this would be the most logical way for Hollander to proceed. His own defence plan was conceived with the assumption in mind that Hollander would act according to Mullon's expectations and Mullon considered this to be taking a calculated risk.

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"Do you hear it?" Chellish asked.

"Yes," Mullon confirmed. "A copter."

Chellish got up. "I guess we better go to our bunkers."

As Chellish was leaving, Mullon called him back. "Wait a minute, Chellish!"

Chellish stopped and turned around. The buzzing noise of the helicopter grew louder. Mullon put his hand in his pocket and offered Chellish the pistol which he had taken away from him at the bank of the river. "Take it," he said. "It might come in handy in case something goes wrong."

Chellish raised his eyebrows and hesitated for a moment. Then he took the weapon and stuck it under his wide belt. "Thank you," he replied simply. "You're a green grape (Newly evolved slang replacing "Good Egg"), Mullon."

Freddy and Milligan came out of their tents when they heard the noise of the helicopter.

"They're at it again," Mullon warned.

Milligan trudged up the mound and entered the highest of the entrances which led down to the living quarters and workrooms of the dwarfs. Through a passage he went a little farther in the knoll till he reached a small excavation on the slope of the hill which was covered by brush. The hole was shielded from the outside by a plastic sheet and a wall of soil so that only a narrow eye-slit was left open. A ladder made of rough wood provided access to the hole from the passageway.

4 such hide-outs with separate entrances had been built in the past few days with the assistance of the dwarfs. Mullon had arranged them in a pattern that would enable them to keep the helicopter in view by at least one of the secret observers at any one time.

Only 5 minutes after Chellish had noticed the sound of the helicopter for the first time Mullon and his 3 people had disappeared and there was no sign left to indicate that humans had lived there just now.

The whirl of the helicopter came closer. Mullon saw the shadow of the big machine flit across the sunlit knoll, disappear to the left and return again. For the next 15 minutes the din of the flying machine swelled tip and down. Then it abated almost totally, only to whine again a few seconds later.

They came from the north, Mullon observed. The shadow touched the slope again. But this time it didn't disappear. After awhile the noise of the little jets rotating the blades died down and somebody shouted: "Keep your eyes open, Dwight, and come back immediately if something looks off-kelcer (Fishy)."

Mullon perked up his ears. He recognized the voice. It was Pashen—the man who had shot him. He heard steps in the grass and saw a pair of boots close to his eye-slot. The man whom Pashen had called Dwight paused a few seconds as if undecided. Then he shouted upward: "Nobody here! I'm going to take a look at the tents."

He walked down the slope and Mullon got a good look at him. He watched him going into Chellish's tent. After investigating it he came out again and made a reassuring gesture in Pashen's direction.

He searched the other tents one by one but seemed to find nothing to arouse his suspicion. Finally he walked to one of the entrances to the hill.

Mullon became a little nervous. This was the moment when, according to his plan, the dwarfs were supposed to appear on the scene. Dwight was not allowed to pass through the entrance.

After a few tense moments about 30 dwarfs emerged from one of the other shafts and rushed toward the intruder. They surrounded him and began their strange floating dance.

Dwight was obviously taken by surprise and frightened. He drew his gun and aimed it at the dwarfs. Mullon saw to his horror that it was a small disintegrator which Hollander had taken away from the crew of the *Adventurous*.

However at this moment Pashen shouted from above: "Lay off, Dwight! They're not going to do anything to you."

Reluctantly, Dwight put back his weapon. He bent down and tried to grab one of the dwarfs. The dwarf first eluded him, then came closer again and danced over Dwight's hand without being caught.

"Wait!" Pashen called. "I'm coming down."

Mullon knew what he had in mind. The dwarfs already had met Pashen and he surmised that they had knowledge of his cowardly attack on Mullon. He wanted to try out how the dwarfs reacted toward him.

Pashen passed close in front of his hideout. Through his slot he could see Pashen appear gradually. First his boots, then his legs, his arms and shoulders, his head—

Suddenly Mullon shuddered. Pashen carried something on his arm. Mullon could see only a little bit of the light, grey-white fur. As Pashen walked down the hill, the fur began to move and climb up on Pashen's arm. A small hairy face peered over Pashen's shoulder in the direction of Mullon's eye-slot. "Khek... khek... khek..." the little creature squealed excitedly.

But Pashen paid no attention.

A mungo, Mullon realized with dismay. He brought a mungo with him and if he weren't so dumb, he would already know that we're in the neighbourhood.

The mungos, a semi-intelligent race of monkeys living in the high mountains, had a 6th sense that warned them of dangers. The word 'khek' signified 'enemy' or 'bad' or 'danger'.

But Pashen didn't seem to be familiar with the language of the mungos. He finally took notice of the little monkey's excitement and rapped him sharply on the back with the flat of his hand. The monkey uttered a wailing sound and hid in his elbow.

Mullon sighed in relief. The momentary danger had passed. Pashen continued down the hill without heeding the mungo's warning. He stopped outside the circle of dwarfs weaving around Dwight and waited.

The group of dwarfs divided and a 2nd dancing circle formed around Pashen. Pashen was apparently pleased. He knew the dwarfs since the day they had captured Mullon's entire expedition, including himself, and he realized that the dance was a friendly gesture.

For awhile he remained still. Then he called to Dwight: "Let's fly back! This is all we wanted to know."

Dwight stepped out of the swirling ring of dancers and marched up the hill again together with Pashen. For a 2nd time they passed Mullon's den and the mungo showed once more signs of anxiety. He crept up on Pashen's arm and screeched: "Khek-khek-khek..." till Pashen slapped him once more on the back, making him wince in pain.

Soon the jets of the gyrocopter started up again. Mullon heard the machine lift off and fly away with whirling blades. Pashen seemed to be in a hurry. The noise faded away in less than a minute.

Mullon climbed down the ladder. When he reached the exit of the shaft, Chellish was already waiting for him. He greeted him with the question: "Seems we've overlooked something, doesn't it?"

Mullon nodded. "Yes, the mungos. We didn't expect Hollander to make use of them."

Milligan and Freddy joined them. "What next?" Freddy inquired.

Mullon shrugged his shoulders. "There isn't much we can do. We'll have to go far enough away that the monkeys can't detect us when Hollander comes with his men."

"Why?" Milligan asked. "Pashen didn't notice a thing."

"Do you think everybody is as stupid as Pashen?" Mullon countered. "If I know Hollander he'll pay close attention to the behaviour of the mungos and if he notices a suspicious sign we can start all over again."

Freddy was disappointed. She was the one who had first discovered the mungos. She had spent considerable time with them and tried to learn their language.

Mullon consoled her. "The monkeys are not like humans, if that's what you believe. They can't differentiate between good and evil in our sense. They protect those with whom they happen to be. The mungo sensed that I was a danger to Pashen and he attempted to warn him. We're lucky that Pashen ignored the monkey."

Mullon began to explain to the blue dwarfs that he had to change his plan and he managed to get the idea across with amazing speed, judging by their quick reactions. He got the impression that the mungos were not unknown to the dwarfs and they seemed to grasp the fact that the presence of the monkeys jeopardized Mullon's and his friends' safety and that this was the reason they were unable to remain near the mound when the jetcopter returned.

The dwarfs transported Mullon and his companions 20 kilometres farther west in the jungle. This was done by the usual method. As many dwarfs as were required to create an antigrav field of sufficient magnitude by the radiation from their bodies floated down from the hill and carried the 4 Earthlings on the waves of their field, so to speak, high over the treetops of the jungle.

The place they had picked for the landing was a clearing between the trees. There was a dense growth of bushes and shrubs but no trees.

Mullon was prepared to wait a few hours.

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They heard the helicopter come and go 8 times. If one figured that the machine carried 5 men at the most, Hollander's strike force consisted of no more than 40 men.

Shortly after noon the helicopter returned for the 9th time and this time it didn't fly back.

"In the worst case we'll have 45 men against us," Mullon commented. "That's a lot."

Chellish waved his hand. "The 45 men don't worry me as much as Hollander himself. He's the only important man. When we capture him we won't have to be afraid of the others."

"Maybe you're right," Mullon replied, "but we better not count on it."

One hour later the first group of dwarfs dropped in. They abandoned their dwellings in the mound, following the agreed on scheme. Waiting in the clearance, they were joined within the next 2 hours by about 900 of the 1,000 dwarfs who inhabited the mound.

After awhile they could hear the gyrocopter take off again. Instead of flying west as it had done before, it began to circle over the jungle. No doubt Hollander had noticed the departure of the dwarfs and had begun to search for them.

Mullon gave the blue dwarfs the pre-arranged signal. A group of them rose from the bushes and floated above the treetops, radiating an iridescent blue in the bright sun.

The helicopter responded at once. Mullon heard the noise of the rotating blades whipping the air as it came closer. The dwarfs sailed west across the jungle and the helicopter followed them without paying attention to the small clearance from which the dwarfs had emerged.

A bit later the helicopter pilot seemed to have determined to his satisfaction in which direction the dwarfs travelled. He made a tight turn and flew eastward toward the mound of dwellings.

Mullon was pleased. "They'll have to make a decision," he predicted. "I think Hollander considers the dwarfs important enough to pursue them."

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Hollander was so absorbed in inspecting the interesting details of the mound, with its numerous entrances, subterranean rooms with unusual lighting and odd utensils that he failed to notice that several groups of the blue dwarfs had stolen away.

The guards posted on the summit of the hill near the helicopter had noticed the blue dwarfs heading for the jungle but had attached no importance to their flight.

Their attitude was changed quickly the moment Hollander emerged again in the broad daylight. He had wondered why there were hardly any dwarfs present in the rooms under the ground and assumed that they had assembled on the slope of the hill. When he didn't find them there either, he became suspicious. He lambasted the sentries with some harsh epithets after they reported their observation. Then he ordered Pashen and Dwight to take the helicopter and find the dwarfs. After they had picked up their trail as Mullon had hoped, they returned to the mound.

"They're moving in a westerly direction, sir," Pashen reported.

"All of them?"

"We saw only about 100 of them. They normally travel along the ground but we couldn't see them through the foliage."

"How fast did they move?"

"Fairly slow, sir. No more than 10 kilometres per hour.

"This is too fast to catch up with them on foot," Hollander snapped. "We've got to chase them by helicopter."

"I beg your pardon, sir," Pashen demurred. "*Wouldn't* it be better to wait here till they come back to their mound?"

"No, it wouldn't be better," Hollander replied gruffly. "They're going west and therefore must be heading for Greenwich. Milligan is somewhere in the vicinity of Greenwich and he had ample time to befriend the dwarfs. Perhaps he has already persuaded them to launch an attack against our men in Greenwich while we're standing around here doing nothing. No, we must go after them immediately. Put the few who still are in the mound under arrest at once. You'll be in charge here while I'm gone. Is that clear?"

A few minutes later Hollander took off in the helicopter. He had picked 2 men to accompany him and he took one of the mungos along. One man piloted the machine while he and the other kept a sharp lookout. At the same time he carefully observed the reactions of the scared little monkey.

They passed the clearance in the forest, which had been accurately described by Pashen, and continued to fly west. Soon they detected some scintillating colour patches and overtook a bevy of dwarfs gliding with moderate speed over the roof of leaves in the same direction. They seemed to take no notice of the vrooming whirlybird.

"We must stop them," Hollander muttered. "Pashen was right. Most of them seem to make their way down there between the trees." Turning to his pilot, he added: "Try to find another place where we can land. There ought to be another open space somewhere."

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Mullon watched the helicopter cross the clearance for the 2nd time. It disappeared going west. The noise of the engine didn't fade away in the distance, instead it ceased abruptly. Hollander had landed. Mullon's scheme was completed step by step.

Freddy, Chellish and Milligan took off with a team of 150 dwarfs. They glided over the trees, following the path of Hollander's helicopter. Mullon waited a little while longer in the clearance before he had 70 dwarfs transport him in a southwesterly direction.

Before long Mullon discovered a wide clearance northwest of his position. As far as he could see it was the only opening in the dense roof of the jungle other than the one where he and his companions had waited. Undoubtedly the helicopter had landed at the place which was about 3 kilometres from him.

Mullon asked the dwarfs to put him down and he began to wait again.

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Hollander instructed the pilot to set the machine down near the southern rim of the clearance.

He estimated that at the slow speed with which the dwarfs advanced it would take them at least half an hour or perhaps 45 minutes before they reached the clearance. Thus he had plenty of time to station his 2 men at a spot where they could overlook the entire open space. He hid himself with the mungo in a bush which he believed to be located directly in the path of the approaching dwarfs.

Time dragged on.

Hollander perked up when the mungo he had in his arm became restless. Until now he had hardly given a sign of life but he suddenly was alert and stared at the wall of the jungle bordering the clearance in the east. "Khek..." he whimpered softly.

Hollander knew the meaning of the word and he listened intently. The monkey grew more agitated. He uttered his warning sound in quick succession and pointed his arm in the direction where the threat came from. Hollander didn't quite know what to make of it. He was unable to hear any suspicious noise although the monkey behaved as if an entire army of enemies was on the march.

Hollander worried about Milligan. Had Milligan returned to the jungle after questioning Suttney and learning what had happened in Greenwich? Could Milligan have succeeded in enlisting the help of the dwarfs and were they on the way to capture him?

It began to dawn on him that he might have exposed himself to a greater danger than he could cope with alone. Yet he hesitated. It was not his custom to run away from a danger whose existence could not even be proved.

The anxiety of the mungo increased more and more. He kept pointing to the east while chattering continuously. Hollander called his companions back and told them to hide near the helicopter. He stayed with the mungo near the stepladder leading to the cockpit and hid in the high grass. If Milligan really was with the dwarfs, he could wait to see what he would do when he saw the helicopter.

The mungo could hardly be kept under control any longer. He had given up his chattering and uttered a fearful wailing as he stared across the clearance and sometimes looked back south where the dark wall of the jungle rose behind the helicopter.

Hollander no longer paid attention to the monkey. He had sounded an alarm and this was all he needed him for.

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Milligan wished he had a little walkie-talkie to consult with Mullon when to begin the attack. Since he didn't have a radio, he had to depend on his watch. Mullon had tried to estimate how long it would take him to get in back of Hollander and had stressed that Milligan was not to jump the gun prematurely.

Milligan, Chellish and Freddy waited with the group of dwarfs who had brought them in about 200 meters east of the clearance where Hollander's helicopter had landed. They had to wait 20 more minutes to the set time.

Milligan had his team advance slowly. The dwarfs assisted the clumsy movements of the Terranians,

lifted them over the hanging roots and made them circumvent the treacherous swampy puddles. They were at the eastern edge of the clearance 10 minutes before the arranged time. Nothing could be seen of Hollander and his men but the helicopter was in plain view at the end of the jungle.

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Mullon caught sight of the helicopter at about the same time and then he also discovered 2 men at both sides of it. They crouched in the bushes and anxiously peered at the eastern border of the clearance.

Mullon followed their eyes. Had Milligan been careless?

No, all was calm and he couldn't catch a glimpse of Milligan and his dwarfs. Finally Mullon detected something else: next to the helicopter's access ladder a man lay stretched out in the grass, holding a wiggly grey-white animal that was trying to free itself while squealing pitifully.

Hollander! Mullon watched him for awhile. He was observing the other side of the clearance just like his comrades.

His plan had worked and Hollander had fallen into the trap. The mungo had sensed the danger coming from the east and had drawn Hollander's attention to it. There were 3 men approaching from that direction and they had been near the clearance for some time whereas only one man had sneaked in from the south at the last moment.

Although the mungo must have noticed that something was dangerously wrong at their back, Hollander disregarded him now that he concentrated himself on the threat which originated in the east.

Mullon crawled closer, trying to avoid the slightest noise. He had only 4 minutes left to spring into action.

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Milligan gave the dwarfs a sign. They eagerly swarmed out from behind the trees onto the clearance, dancing and fluttering as if they had been moving in this fashion all along.

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"Look out, here they come!" Hollander cried. "Hold it!"

The 2 men obeyed. Hollander looked over the grass and watched how the blue dwarfs glittered and flitted across the clearance and moved into the shadow on the other side of the jungle.

It all appeared to be completely harmless so that Hollander began to doubt his own suspicions. Had Milligan really joined the dwarfs? Why didn't he show up with them?

Hollander had to make a quick decision. If he waited any longer the dwarfs would be gone again. "Go ahead!" he ordered. "Block their way and if they don't stop, show 'em what a thermo-beamer can do."

The men jumped up from behind their cover and run across the clearance.

This was the moment Mullon had waited for. 3 men would have been too much for him to tackle but now Hollander was alone.

Mullon got up. Hollander's attention was so taken up with what his companions were doing that he failed to hear the noise in his back.

"The jig is up!" Mullon said in a sharp tone. "Drop your weapon and get up!"

Hollander twitched violently. He lost his grip on the snarling monkey. Hollander rose without putting down his weapon but Mullon was ready for him. He jumped forward, fast as lightning, and struck Hollander's wrist so hard that the small disintegrator whirled through the air in a high arc.

Hollander screamed in pain. Then he got back on his legs and turned around

Mullon had never seen such a horrified face. Hollander stared at him with bulging eyes. He stretched his arms out as if in a trance and tried to touch Mullon. "Mullon... you...?" he moaned.

Mullon took one step back and nodded. "Yes, it's not my ghost."

Hollander's arms sank down. "It's all over," he murmured.

"Yes, Hollander. It's over for good."

Hollander turned around as if he expected to be saved by his comrades. But these men had caused Milligan, Chellish and Freddy very little trouble. As they blocked the way of the dwarfs to determine how they would react to their challenge, Milligan and his companions had sneaked up behind them. Hollander's men were scared to death and offered no resistance.

"You won't get any help from them," Mullon said. He waited patiently till Milligan had tied up his 2 prisoners so that they couldn't escape. Then Chellish and Freddy came over and brought him a rope which he used to tie up Hollander, who kept his eyes closed and didn't utter a word.

"We ought to shoot him on the spot," Chellish growled. "If he gets away again, he'll start his funny business all over."

Mullon objected. "We better leave this to the People's Assembly. It's up to them."

Chellish quickly agreed. "Of course. I only said it because I'm so terribly mad."

Actually he was a little apprehensive because he had told Mullon when he met him at the river that he had been one of Hollander's collaborators and he feared that a wrong word might reveal that he had lied at the time.

2/ THE SIEGE OF GREENWICH

The rest was simpler than Mullon had supposed. Of course he didn't try immediately to take prisoner the 40 men under Pashen's command who had occupied the mound of dwellings.

Instead he loaded Hollander in the helicopter and flew with Chellish, Milligan and Freddy to Greenwich. They landed near the wreck of the spaceship and freed O'Bannon, Wolley and a number of other prisoners before anyone in the town noticed that something was awry.

Then Mullon sent Chellish in as negotiator and declared that Hollander would be summarily shot unless the entire so-called Defence Troop would put down their arms and surrender outside the town in 30 minutes.

Chellish returned after a suspenseful wait and reported that Mullon's conditions had been accepted.

Half an hour later Greenwich was liberated. The last of the Defence Troopers who had left the town with their guns to give themselves up as ordered were driven out by the unarmed townspeople without regard to their own safety.

The following day Pashen and his men, who were already perturbed and vexed by Hollander's prolonged absence, were also taken prisoners. Pashen was the only one who put up a defence and he was wounded in the process.

Mullon had captured their position on the hill with only 10 men. Most of the work was done by the dwarfs who had returned to the foot of the hill and caused the weapons of the defenders to levitate and float away at the decisive moment so that they were almost helpless.

The prisoners were transported in batches to Greenwich by helicopter.

On his last flight Mullon brought back the mungo who had been frightened away when Hollander was apprehended. Hours later he finally returned.

Meanwhile the People's Assembly had been convened and debated the punishment of the conspirators.

At the trial the opinions clashed sharply on the question of what to do with Hollander. Nobody had any desire to ease his lot but a considerable number of the jury's members were opposed to the death penalty which had been abolished on Earth a long time ago. Now they rejected it as a barbaric regression.

However O'Bannon raised some grave arguments. "Why," he asked heatedly, "did they abolish the death penalty on Terra? Because from the beginning of civilization capital punishment only served to protect society against criminals. Such protection has been accomplished on Earth long ago by other means. Criminals are now banished to keep them from harming the citizens and convicts can be kept for life in modern penitentiaries behind bars without taking the slightest risk. But what are we to do here? I ask you. We can't banish him nor do we have a prison which is secure enough to hold him forever. For

us the old argument is valid again. Those who are bent on destroying our society by heinous crimes must be punished by death unless we know a way of detaining them indefinitely. I'm in favour of putting Hollander to death for his evil deeds."

After O'Bannon's short and simple appeal a vote was taken and 2/3rds of the jurors supported his demand. Hollander was given the opportunity to defend himself but he didn't make use of his rights. He remained silent and so the sentence was executed.

The number of his followers was too large to lock them all up in the wreck of the *Adventurous*. The loss of so much manpower had to be weighed against the gain in safety. Therefore it was decided to form a labour gang where Hollander's misguided accomplices were put to work under the supervision of armed guards for 2 years.

By this method they had disposed of 'Case Hollander.' It was an important episode in the history of the Grautier colony. It had brought home the fact that collective banishment was not sufficient to make decent citizens of all people. Freedom was something which had to be carefully nourished or it would get lost.

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During the following weeks the People's Assembly discussed the relations of the colonists to the blue dwarfs and the mungos.

Mullon proposed an expression of gratitude for the effective support they had received from the dwarfs and to reward the mungos for the harsh treatment they had suffered at the hands of Hollander. The Assembly resolved to present one of the extra generators of the *Adventurous* to the dwarfs to replace their old-fashioned induction machines for a more efficient production of electricity.

The mungos were given a choice to pick anything they liked from a pile of colourful surplus stuff. Their enthusiasm over the offer was unmistakable. They descended on the spread of wares and grabbed what they could carry.

The generator was loaded into the helicopter and flown by Mullon and Freddy to the den of the dwarfs. Mullon installed the machine and explained to the best of his ability the purpose and the operation of the generator. Thanks to the telepathic abilities of the dwarfs they mastered the task quickly and Mullon gained the impression that the dwarfs appreciated the gift.

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After having taken care of all the diplomatic niceties Mullon began to work on the solution of several projects which he had pondered for some time.

For instance there was the problem of calibrating time. Up to now everybody tried to keep his watch

running since it had been set on Terra for the last time The hour hand went around the dial more than 3 times in a day on Grautier and sometimes the watches showed 12 o'clock when the sun rose. Nevertheless the days were counted consecutively as 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th of May although it was already August on Terra instead of May. Mullon was the only one who had kept an exact record of the passage of time.

Mullon figured out that 200 years on Grautier corresponded to 172.33 years on Terra and that each Grautier year had 188.8 Grautier days. He rounded this figure off to 189 days and therefore had to eliminate a day every 5 years. A Grautier day was the equivalent of 39.67 hours on Earth and Mullon set it at exactly 40 hours so that a Grautier hour was approximately half a minute shorter than a Terra hour. The Grautier year was divided in 12 months as on Earth but 9 months had 16 days and 3 months 15 Grautier days. Thus he could retain the same names for the months to which they were accustomed.

Furthermore he retained the division of every hour into 60 minutes and a minute into 60 seconds.

The day the People's Assembly adopted his recommendation was called the 1st of January. The day was unusually hot and the only thing it had in common with the date on Earth, at least in the northern hemisphere, was its name. However the year was not changed so that it was the same as on Terra's calendar. Everybody was satisfied with the new system. In fact they were quite proud to have their own chronology.

Mullon had many more projects on the fire. He wanted to study the habits of the gigantic grey-skinned animals they called giraffants. It wouldn't make much sense to build vast plantations in the vicinity of Greenwich if the town happened to be on the migrating trail of the huge beasts so that everything in their way was trampled down.

There were a few people among the settlers who had studied biology and some others who had acquired considerable knowledge of the fauna in other ways. They convinced Mullon that the only way to study the giraffants properly was to stay close to them in their natural habitat. However it would be extremely dangerous to get too close to a herd of giraffants: these monstrous animals moved with great speed and their thick skins could not be penetrated by conventional weapons but only by modern thermo-beamers and disintegrators of which the pioneers had only a limited number. One possibility of carrying out Mullon's plan was by using the helicopter for an extended time. Mullon was willing to do it since it was only seldom needed in Greenwich. However the People's Assembly didn't consider his expedition important enough to put the valuable machine at his disposal for an indefinite time.

Mullon was ready to go to bat for it in a good argument because he considered the rejection of his proposal shortsighted and had no intention of being responsible for such neglect for reasons of apathy or carelessness.

Consequently he made the rounds in town to talk privately with those people who had opposed his plan most in an effort to convince them; and since his arguments were valid and those of his opponents none too sound, he felt after 5 days that he could bring up his proposal for another vote and be more successful.

But he didn't get his chance. In the night between the 15th and 16th of January a new disaster struck the little colony.

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Mullon was awakened by a noise at the door. Sleepily he raised himself up in bed and listened. Somebody knocked at the door rather violently.

Freddy became alarmed. "What's the matter?" she cried.

Mullon got up and opened the door. It was Milligan. Freddy turned on the light. They noticed that Milligan's face looked dazed and scared.

"What's wrong?" Mullon asked.

Milligan shrugged his shoulders. "I've heard some cries and then I saw a strange thin figure sneak through the street. I followed it but it suddenly disappeared. So I decided to run to you and tell you about it."

Mullon began to put on his clothes. "Take the rifle out of the box," he instructed Milligan. "Freddy, lock the door after we leave."

But Freddy, who meanwhile had gone into the adjacent room, called back: "I can't do that because I'm going with you."

Mullon didn't object. 10 minutes after Milligan had come in, they were ready to leave. Freddy had stuck a handy pistol under her waistband.

"Do you have any notion what's going on?" Mullon inquired as he locked the door.

"None at all," Milligan replied, "but something's unkosh (Off Kelter; Fishy)."

The night was so dark that they couldn't see one step ahead. The sky was overcast. It was shortly before midnight, 39½ o'clock, the time when most of the people slept deeply.

So far Mullon was not too much alarmed about Milligan's observation—a shadowy figure and some cries didn't necessarily amount to a peril—but as President of the People's Assembly he had the duty to look out for the security of the pioneers.

"Perhaps we should check with the guards first," Milligan suggested. "Maybe they've noticed something."

Mullon agreed. Greenwich was ringed by guards because they were afraid that the giraffants might suddenly stampede through the town and crush everything in their path. If any danger was brewing it must have been fomented outside and the guards should have noticed it before anyone else. Mullon's little house stood in the northern third of the town and the prairie began not far behind it. A guard was posted about 200 or 300 meters to the east and Mullon headed in that direction.

Suddenly Freddy stood still. "Milligan is right," she murmured. "Something weird is going on here."

"Feminine intuition?" Mullon asked teasingly. "Or do you really see something?"

"Intuition," Freddy replied. "But you can bet on it!"

Mullon did no such thing. He continued on his way and kept his eyes and ears wide open. However he was unable to detect any signs that the night was different from any others on Grautier.

A few minutes later he began to call the sentry. If he was in the vicinity he should have heard and answered his call. When he failed to get a response, Mullon became concerned. "We've got to look for him," he proposed. "We better separate."

Milligan went left and Mullon right while Freddy remained in the middle to coordinate their orientation. Mullon swore in disgust because he had forgotten to bring a flashlight. He had walked less than 100 meters when he heard Freddy's voice calling him from the rear. "Come back! Milligan found something."

He went back, following the calls Freddy sent at regular intervals. When he reached her, she was silent and they could hear that Milligan was also calling from the north.

They located him and after he saw them emerge from the darkness, Milligan said: "He must've stood right here. The grass is still depressed."

"Well," Mullon said, on edge, "where is he?"

"I don't have any idea. The grass is damp."

"Dew," Mullon commented.

"There's no dew before midnight," Freddy pointed out.

"Let's take a closer look," Mullon said. He pulled a lighter out of his pocket and the flickering light revealed that the grass was trampled down and dark drops were clinging to the blades. He wiped the grass with his hand and held it up to the light.

"Oh!" Freddy exclaimed. "Blood!"

"Quiet!" Mullon whispered.

The sentry had apparently been wounded and Mullon hoped to hear a sign of life such as a groan. However the only thing that could be heard was a soft breeze.

Somebody had attacked the guard. It could have been a wild animal although the only wild animals they had so far observed in the vicinity of the town were the giraffants. On the other hand there was the thin figure Milligan had seen and the cry he had heard. Was it an accident that all this had happened in the same night?

Mullon was undecided whether to look for another sentry or return to the city. Before he had made up his mind, Freddy put her hand on his arm and whispered, "Look over there! What kind of a light is that?"

He looked in the direction where she pointed. At first he saw nothing but then he detected a point of light among the clouds south of the town. It could have been a star if the colour hadn't been bright red.

Milligan saw it too after they showed him where it was. He thought it looked like a light on top of a high tower but he couldn't guess how far distant it was. Mullon was of the opinion that it should be inspected closer. Therefore they walked around the town and saw that the light shone from the southeast direction

where the wreck of the *Adventurous* was located.

The wreck loomed like a dark gigantic mass in front of them. They passed it and turned south. Only once did they hear a noise besides the wind. A whizzing sound went through the air and seemed to fade away in the direction of the town. Yet there was nothing they could see.

Mullon's apprehension grew. There was something uncanny afoot and he began to fear the mystery. He concluded that it didn't make much sense to grope in the darkness; unable to see one's hand in front of one's face, as it were; and expect to nab the unknown. It would be smarter, he thought, to return to the town and get a searchlight so that they could see what they were doing.

However the odd red light exerted a hypnotic attraction. Mullon's curiosity gained the upper hand and he felt he would not be satisfied unless he discovered as quickly as possible where the light originated.

They now proceeded much more cautiously. The whooshing sound in the air had increased their suspicion. After the wreck of the *Adventurous* had submerged again in the darkness, they suddenly heard a rustling noise at their side. Mullon hit the ground and held his rifle ready to shoot. The rustling sound came closer and finally a crouching figure appeared from the darkness.

"Hands up!" Mullon snapped.

The figure flinched and spun around. "Who's there?" came the whispered question. "Mullon...?"

Mullon recognized the voice despite the whisper. "For heaven's sake—Chellish! What are *you* doing out here?"

Chellish didn't reveal that he had received a warning from Capt. Bailey who was standing by with his Gazelle high in the mountains. He simply replied: I took a walk because I couldn't sleep. Then I saw the red light up there and wanted to find out what it is. And you?"

"We did the same. Did you find out anything yet?"

"No. But it seems to me that a big tower was built under our noses in the middle of the night. Do you see the shadow?"

Mullon was unable to verify it. Chellish joined the little group and together they went forward through the high grass to the spot where the light was suspended.

After awhile they could see that Chellish was right. Something like a pillar which was darker than the night stood before them. The closer they came the more it looked like a tower with a diameter of at least 20 meters and a red light at the tip. It was difficult to guess how high it was.

"Let's go around it so we can get a look at it from all sides," Chellish whispered.

Mullon wanted to follow his suggestion but as he was about to move he heard a metallic knock from above. A light flared up and a rectangular hatch opened in the tower at a height of about 15 meters. Mullon saw something emerge which looked like a flat motorboat. It left the opening with a sudden leap and shot into the darkness. It made the same whooshing noise they had noticed before. Then the hatch closed again.

Chellish seemed to be unruffled as he remarked: "If you ask me, this is a spaceship."

Mullon had already thought of it but he rejected the impression because he considered it ridiculous that a spaceship of such dimensions could have landed only a few kilometres from Greenwich—even in the middle of the night—without anybody noticing it. However he was at a loss to explain how the tower happened to get there and he expressed his doubts to Chellish.

"Nothing to it," Chellish replied. "If they use a propulsion-field engine you can hear nothing except the sound of displaced air and that isn't much if the ship moves slowly."

"But who in blazes would want to come to Grautier of all places in such a big ship?"

"That's exactly what we came to find out," Chellish answered.

At this moment the scene changed. A pale flash sparked across the plain and shed a bluish light for half a second on the tower which was indeed a spaceship as could now be clearly seen. The ground began to shake and soon the thunder of a big explosion rolled over them.

They turned around and saw that the sky had turned red. The wreck of the *Adventurous* stood out like a dark colossus against the light background. Behind it a huge flame shot up and a few seconds later they heard the rumble of a 2nd explosion.

"The town!" Mullon shouted, forgetting all caution. "They're bombarding the town! We've got to go back at once!"

Chellish could have thought of several good reasons to oppose the move but he preferred to say nothing. Since nothing stirred in the strange spaceship and nobody seemed to watch them, they stopped crawling through the grass and ran without cover as fast as possible toward the town.

Chellish managed just in time to prevent Mullon and his companions from running headlong into a disaster. "Don't go straight in!" he panted when he saw Mullon dashing straight ahead toward Greenwich. "First we must learn what's going on."

Mullon gladly took his advice. He stopped for a moment to catch his breath and realized that he had come close to losing his head. They were close enough to observe that a few houses at the southern edge of the town were blazing fiercely. The aliens—whoever in the world they might be—had probably thrown a bomb on the houses which could not easily be set on fire under normal conditions since they were made of prefabricated fire-retardant plastic segments. But here were also a few wooden structures and the power station.

They walked around the town and approached it from northwest. The burning houses at the southern rim cast a weak light over the prairie, making it easy for them to find their way. They saw people running through the streets and among them several tall thin strangers.

"They're like the ones I've seen," Milligan exclaimed. "They probably came in the spaceship."

"What do they want here, for Pete's sake?" Mullon groaned. "Do they want to loot the town? Why us?"

Meanwhile Chellish had tried to assess the situation. "They didn't seem to get to the northern section as yet," he stated. "It would be best if we were to go over there. Maybe we can help some of the people. I believe they need somebody to organize the defence."

They darted across the prairie without fear of detection since it was much darker than in town where the fire illuminated the streets.

The first house they reached belonged to O'Bannon. The pioneer stood behind a window which he had raised a little to put the barrel of his rifle through the slot. When Mullon called him, the barrel swung in his direction and he was in danger of his life until O'Bannon recognized him. "Horace! Come in or they'll get you!"

He put down his gun and opened the door. "What's the matter?" O'Bannon gasped after letting them in,

"That's what I was going to ask you," Mullon retorted. "We were outside to investigate the death of a sentry who was slain in cold blood and we discovered a huge spaceship which had landed behind the *Adventurous*."

"So that's what it is," O'Bannon murmured. "I was wondering all the time where these vandals came from. They're 2 meters tall and thin as sticks. Their voices are extremely high and when they call something to each other they sound like rats whistling. They seem to have sneaked into town and dragged the people out of their beds. When they had seized all they wanted, they exploded 2 bombs at the other end of town and finished the rest off. Our people are out of their mind. They're hunting them down by the dozens."

"But why?" Mullon gnashed his teeth. "Does anyone know why they're doing this to us?"

"Don't ask me, Horace," O'Bannon said dejectedly. "I don't have the faintest notion. They didn't come here yet nor to Wolley next door. We'll make it hot for them when they get here."

They posted themselves at the windows of O'Bannon's house. On Mullon's suggestion Wolley and his wife joined them too. There was no point in spreading their forces too thin.

And then they waited under cover of the walls by the windows.

* * * *

Chellish used a rather ordinary excuse to leave his place at the window. O'Bannon wanted to show him the way but Chellish declined, saying that the bathroom is always located in the same spot in these look-alike homes.

Chellish locked the door and with a suspicious glance at the thin walls turned over his wristwatch. In a low voice he spoke the code words "Lion of Baghdad" into the little transmitter.

Blailey answered and Chellish described their situation. "Nobody knows what the intentions of the aliens are but they're busy cleaning out the city. I don't believe the colonists stand a chance. Even if they attacked them in broad daylight, they probably couldn't have saved themselves. I don't know if we should do something about it."

Blailey growled: "I can't tell you if you don't know. I've got orders to intervene when the lives of the settlers are in danger but as of now all they have done is abduct the people. Right?"

"Up to now," Chellish replied with emphasis.

"I'll ask for further instructions," Blailey promised. "Call me again if anything happens. Take care of yourself, you Lion of Baghdad!"

Chellish put the watch back after the conversation was ended and returned to the others.

O'Bannon glanced at him a little sceptically. "Do you always talk to yourself when you're... there?" he inquired.

"I sing," Chellish assured him with a straight face. "Like other people in the shower."

* * * *

The time passed slowly. It was already almost 3 o'clock, Grautier time. Once in awhile they heard the whistling, squeaking noises in the street which O'Bannon claimed to be the method of conversing among the aliens. However they didn't come into their view again.

The houses on the opposite side of the street stood empty. The windows were open and the doors dangled from their hinges. O'Bannon told them that the intruders had smashed them.

"They seem to have overlooked us," he murmured half an hour later. "I wouldn't mind but I still would like to know what their racket is."

Suddenly a line of thin tall figures appeared at the end of the street. They came closer and closer and their number seemed to grow with each step. The houses in the south were burned out and the visibility was greatly diminished.

O'Bannon kneeled down and aimed his rifle.

"I think we better get out of here," Chellish said suddenly.

O'Bannon looked up. "Are you afraid, young man?"

Chellish shook his head. "No more than you. But count them! There must be at least 100."

"So what?" O'Bannon growled. But he had lost already some of his confidence.

"I think we should climb out at the rear of the house," Chellish suggested, ignoring O'Bannon. "Perhaps we can pick off a few if they get lost between the trees."

O'Bannon was against it. He wanted to hold the fort but Mullon sided with Chellish. "We'll wait till they reach Wolley's house," he decided. "Then we'll beat it."

Mrs. Wolley left beforehand because they were afraid she might be too slow at the critical moment.

Down the street the aliens began to break down the doors and ransack the houses. However it looked from O'Bannon's window that the occupants had fled in time and that the invaders didn't take any prisoners.

Mullon became more hopeful. They had to search 6 more houses before they reached O'Bannon's place. If they found them all empty, they might give up the search and turn back. However his hopes were disappointed. When the raiders began to pound the door of Wolley's home, Freddy climbed out through the back window and the others scrambled after her as quickly as they could. Before they had shattered the door of O'Bannon's house everybody had escaped.

Mullon and his men hid in a narrow passage between the 2 houses. Meanwhile it was totally dark and the aliens couldn't find them unless they searched the passage with a lamp.

Chellish crouched at the far end of the passage. Suddenly he turned around and whispered: "2 of them are snooping around back here. They seem to be alone. I guess I'll take a crack at them."

Without waiting for Mullon's consent, he got up. They heard some crackling steps on the gravel O'Bannon had spread in his backyard. 2 peeping and whistling voices carried on a strange conversation.

Mullon saw a shadow at the end of the passage and then he heard 2 sharp blows after which Chellish announced: "I think I got 'em. At least they don't move any more."

The tumult in the street gradually faded away. Their pursuers apparently got fed up with the fruitless search and moved away from their street. They didn't seem to miss their 2 companions knocked down by Chellish.

"I think we can go back to the house," O'Bannon said. "They didn't find anybody and they probably won't come back so soon."

There were no objections. They lifted the 2 unconscious victims through the window into the house.

Chellish peered along the street and said: "There's no one in sight. I believe it's safe to turn on the light for a moment so that we can take a look at these strange birds."

When O'Bannon tried to switch the lamp on it remained dark. The bombs had demolished the power station. He found a flashlight and turned its beam on the 2 figures lying motionless on the floor.

They were at least 2 meters long and appeared to be so fragile as to make one think they would break apart if they got up. Their hairless skull looked as if they had put on a dunce cap. Their eyes were closed but they seemed to be fairly big. The noses were bony and the lower half spread out grotesquely over a wide mouth with narrow lips. The slender arms were about 132 meters long, had 2 joints like a human arm and ended in hands with 6 claw-like fingers and a round palm that measured no more than 4 centimetres across.

The strange beings were clothed in a uniform which seemed to be made of leather. Around their waists they wore something resembling belts to which objects were attached that could be easily identified as weapons.

Chellish picked one up and inspected it. With the barrel pointed at the floor, he operated every part which could be moved without getting any results. "I'm afraid I'm too dumb," he finally muttered. "Or this thing doesn't work."

He examined another one with the same result. The weapon seemed to have a safety lock which he had not yet been able to detect.

"What do you think they are?" Mullon inquired. "I mean, by what principle do these weapons work?"

Chellish showed him the weapon. "Do you see this funnel-shaped enlargement at the end of the barrel? It definitely doesn't shoot projectiles. Ultrasonic, I'd say."

"Oh, I've never seen such a gun," Mullon said. "Is it dangerous?"

Chellish shook his head. "Not particularly," he assured him calmly. "If you're hit with its full energy, the worst that can happen is that your skull develops a resonance crack."

"We don't appreciate this type of humour here, young man," Mrs. Wolley scolded him.

"You'd like it even less if you'd get a blast from this weapon," Chellish shot back airily. "I think we better put out this light before it attracts attention."

* * * *

It was difficult to decide what to do next. The town seemed to be deserted.

Meanwhile Chellish had contacted Capt. Blailey a 2nd time and learned that Blailey had received precise instructions on how to proceed in particular cases. 10 different situations had been specified and Blailey was authorized to intervene only if 1 of them occurred.

Therefore Chellish proposed to Mullon and the others that somebody be sent on a patrol in order to check up on the situation. However Mullon waited till 4 o'clock before he consented and then he insisted on making the inspection trip by himself.

Instead of his rifle he preferred to take Freddy's pistol along since it was handier. He left the house through the rear and cautiously ventured out into the street through the passage between O'Bannon's and Wolley's house.

Using the side walls of the houses as cover he reached the centre of town. On the way he also passed his own home and saw that his door was broken like all the others. He felt like crossing the street to inspect the damage the aliens had caused but he thought better of it.

When he came to the city hall, the only larger building in town, he thought he could hear a low moaning. He stopped and tried to find out from whence it came. He examined 2 of the narrow alleys separating the houses and found a figure lying motionlessly on the ground in a 3rd alley.

He determined at the first glance that it was not one of the slim strangers. The man was short and rather corpulent. Mullon bent down and put his arm under the head of the semiconscious man.

It was Ferris, one of the men who had earlier followed Hollander and then chose the side of the law

when Hollander staged his rebellion. He seemed to recognize Mullon. "Water...!" he gasped. "I'm dying of thirst."

Mullon first examined his injuries. The left side of his face was ripped open and he had lost a lot of blood. "Wait a minute," Mullon whispered. "And stop moaning or the aliens will find you again."

Ferris stopped groaning and Mullon sneaked into the city hall where he found a few cups on the table of the conference room which had not yet been cleaned up. He filled 3 of them with water and took them back to Ferris.

Ferris gulped down 2 of them and kept the 3rd one at his side. "Just in case," he panted. "But I feel much better already."

Mullon helped him to sit up and lean his back against the wall. "What happened?" he wanted to know. "Tell me about it!"

"I don't know much," Ferris replied. "I woke up in the middle of the night when I heard a commotion at the door. I got up and looked out the window. There were a few figures who looked so horrible that they gave me cold shivers. Instead of taking my rifle and killing them I was foolish enough to climb out of the rear window. I wanted to run to you because I felt that you should be the first to know what's going on. But when I reached the street it was full of these ugly creatures. One of these hoodlums discovered me and took a shot at me. At any rate I received a blow to my head as if kicked by a horse. I was out for a long time. When I regained consciousness I was lying in front of Shelly's house where the shot had struck me down. By then it was quiet in the town except for some weird squeaking and whistling noises at the outskirts. I dragged myself in here to get out of their sight in case they come back and I was lying here till you found me."

"Were you able to see what they did to our people?" Mullon inquired.

"Yes. They drove them out of town like a herd of cattle."

"Did you see anybody get killed?"

"No."

"Can you walk?" Mullon asked the wounded man.

Ferris shook his head. "Impossible. Just leave me here. Maybe I can get back on my feet after a little more rest. Where are you going to be? At your house?"

"No, we're at O'Bannon's place. Try to come over as soon as you can."

Ferris nodded. "Thanks for the water," he murmured.

Mullon set out again. He traversed the entire town without seeing more than shattered windows, smashed doors and overturned furniture. The strangers had methodically ransacked the town. He kept wondering why the intruders had spirited away the people of Greenwich. What benefit did they expect from their actions? Did they want to keep them as slaves or sell them?

He noticed that the red light glimmered faintly in the distance under the clouds. The spaceship was still there.

There won't be any use to do anything before 10 o'clock, he thought, because they would need light to see how to proceed with their countermeasures.

He turned back and as he passed the city hall he looked in on Ferris. When he saw that he had fallen asleep he didn't disturb him. He figured that he would recover again after sleeping till the morning and he was certain that the injured man wouldn't suffer wound fever in the dry climate.

The barrel of O'Bannon's rifle still protruded from his window. Mullon identified himself and walked through the battered door. "I found Ferris and he told me the whole sad story," he said.

He quickly regretted his remark. Ferris' observations were not important enough to make everybody in the house leave his post to hear his story, hanging on his lips.

"Galactic slave traders," Chellish scoffed after Mullon had finished his report. "They want to sell us to the intelligent but cruel race of Icebine molluscs."

"Really?" Mrs. Wolley said apprehensively. "Where is Icebine?"

"Oh, Hannah," O'Bannon said scornfully, "how can you fall for that nonsense..."

He didn't get any further. There was a clatter at the door and the windows. Mullon whirled around and saw narrow pointed heads peer over the windowsills and a long figure standing in the doorframe.

A mechanical voice rattled in English: "Don't move and drop your weapons!"

One rifle fell on the floor but in the next moment Mrs. Wolley shouted in a loud voice: "You can't do that to me. I'll show you what..."

"Throw down your rifle!" Chellish barked at her. "If you don't do it at once you'll get us all into trouble."

Mullon was surprised at his tone. It had already occurred to him before that Chellish tried to hide his true qualities. Now he was giving orders like an old top sergeant.

Mrs. Wolley dropped her rifle and the others followed her example. Mullon noticed that Chellish had been the first one to throw away his weapon.

"Now you're being smart," the mechanical voice rasped. "Come out, one at a time!"

Mrs. Wolley was the first to step forward. When she was out in the street and saw the living beanstalks from up close she screamed in horror.

Mullon was the last man to leave the house. Once he was outside he could see that the strangers had levelled their unique ultrasonic weapons at them.

"You've captured some prisoners?" the voice inquired.

"Yes," Mullon answered. "They're inside."

A couple of the skinny sticks went in and carried their still-unconscious comrades out. The other 6 kept chattering in their high-pitched voices.

Finally the mechanical voice commanded: "Walk in front of us down the street and out of town!"

They obeyed. There was no other choice.

This was—for the present—the end of the free town of Greenwich on the planet Grautier.

3/ SLAVES OF THE WHISTLERS

The 2 buildings at the southern outskirts of the town, which had been destroyed by the bombs, were now only smouldering heaps of ashes. One of them had been the power station.

We'll construct a new building and install another generator, Mullon thought as they left the town. But he quickly realized how ridiculous the thought was. The way things looked now, they wouldn't need another generator.

After they had passed the wreck of the *Adventurous* they saw that lights were burning in the vicinity of the alien spaceship. The stick people had set up a number of lamps, forming the outline of a large quadratic field.

The people of Greenwich sat on the field and at least 200 of the aliens patrolled its borders with drawn weapons. The sight was so surprising that Mullon was taken aback and stopped for a moment. He immediately received a hard shove in the back and one of the aliens made some whistling sounds, followed by the mechanical voice rasping: "Keep going!"

Mullon obeyed. The aliens herded them through the chain of guards onto the field where their countrymen sat. Then the guards left.

Mullon was greeted excitedly by the colonists. He asked them to relate the details of what had happened to them. However each had experienced about the same things; first the roar of the explosions, then the pounding on the door and 5 or 6 of the weird figures with odd-looking weapons forcing their way in and dragging them out of the town.

Philip Loft, his wife Mary and his brother Oale were missing. Their house was next to the power station and they were assumed to be dead. They also missed Ferris but Mullon reported that he had found him and that he was alive.

Nobody knew where the aliens came from or what they had up their sleeves. Mullon no longer believed they were bent on deporting them or they would probably have been put aboard their spaceship without further delay.

However he was in no condition to solve the puzzle and he felt he would be better off to catch up on some of his badly needed sleep. He picked a place where he and Freddy could stretch out.

He had hardly closed his eyes when somebody tapped him on the shoulder. It was Chellish. "Leave me alone," Mullon groaned, "I don't have your indestructible stamina."

"It's too cold for me to sleep," Chellish laughed. "Anyway I've got a brilliant proposition."

Mullon looked at him dubiously. "Let's hear it."

"Do you have a deputy?" Chellish asked.

"Of course I do. O'Bannon, didn't you know it?"

Chellish acted as if he hadn't heard the question. "How about appointing me as your deputy?"

Mullon sat up. "Is this what you call a brilliant proposition?"

Chellish nodded. "I think it's terrific."

"Without the confirmation by the People's Assembly..." Mullon began.

But Chellish interrupted him almost rudely. "Cut that nonsense! I want to go with you tomorrow morning when the aliens inform you what they plan to do with us. It's as simple as that."

Mullon glanced at him thoughtfully. "Why?"

"I thought that 4 ears hear more than 2."

It occurred once again to Mullon that there was something more important about Chellish than he cared to admit. "Alright," Mullon said finally. "But now let me get some sleep."

"Good night, boss!" Chellish grinned.

It was anything but a good night.

* * * *

At half past 9 when it slowly began to get light and the grumbling about the growing hunger became more vociferous in the camp, 2 thin heavily armed guards pushed their way through the prisoners huddled closely together on the ground, and approached Mullon. They seized him by the arm with their claws, turned around and pulled him behind them. They moved so fast on their long legs that Mullon had trouble keeping up with them.

Out of a corner of his eye he saw that Chellish got up and followed them. When they reached the border of the camp, the 2 guards wanted to send Chellish back. But Chellish talked so volubly and so long to them—obviously without their understanding a single word—that they got tired of it and decided to take him along.

A gangway extended from the spaceship which had the shape of a pudgy torpedo. The gangway was not as comfortable as those leading to the ships of Terranian construction. They had to use their feet because the floor didn't move them up.

Chellish estimated the height of the ship to be about 90 meters. He observed the 4 huge exhaust tubes, which were attached to the hull far forward of the steering fins and noticed that their rims were blackened. This observation, taken in conjunction with a few others, sufficed to make him determine with virtual certainty that the ship served exclusively for interplanetary travel and that it was not an interstellar transport vehicle. He concluded that the aliens lived in the same system to which Grautier belonged. They probably had not yet learned to master the art of interstellar space travel from system to system.

Mullon didn't bother to make such observations. He was too worried about their fate. He was puzzled by the fact that Chellish had predicted already last night that they would be summoned by their captors.

Chellish, on the other hand, had only eyes for the spaceship, its outer appearance, and after they had entered it over the gangway, its interior equipment. He saw with his expert eye that the vessel was far inferior to a Terranian spaceship. In his opinion, the stage of technology the skinny people had achieved corresponded approximately to the point Terra would have reached at the same time if Perry Rhodan had not undertaken his flight to the Moon where he met 2 Arkonides whose help enabled him to speed up the Terranian civilization by thousands of years in the course of a few decades.

The gangway ended at a circular corridor which ran along the inside wall of the ship. The guards pushed their prisoners to the right. Chellish noticed a number of hatches at regular intervals at the left side. However he was unable to see what they concealed since they were all closed.

When they had walked along the corridor about one-quarter of the ship's periphery, they came to an elevator shaft. Their escort shoved them into a cabin and they went up. To judge by the sound the cabin seemed to be suspended by cables.

The elevator stopped on the 7th floor. The distance between floors was about 5 meters. They stepped out on a corridor similar to the one below but this time they turned left under the prodding of the guards. Finally Mullon and Chellish were made to enter a wide-open hatch door.

Behind the opening lay a rectangular room whose symmetry was broken only by the round wall adjacent to the corridor. The floor was grey and smooth. The only pieces of furniture in the room were 2 chairs and something resembling a huge desk on which a row of thin levers was mounted.

Behind the desk sat another of the slim aliens. He scrutinized the 2 prisoners with his big bulging eyes.

The other chair was occupied by Pashen who greeted Mullon and Chellish with a diabolical grin.

"Look who's here!" Chellish exclaimed angrily. "We forgot all about you. You got real chummy with these beanstalks, didn't lose any time, did you?"

"None at all," Pashen replied. "Wouldn't you know?"

The alien behind the desk began to whistle excitedly. Pashen had barely finished his answer when Chellish was struck a terrible blow in the neck. He fell to the floor but managed to raise himself up.

A tinny voice said in poor English: "You're not allowed to speak unless we ask you a question."

Mullon was perplexed. He looked at the one behind the desk but he was certain that he couldn't have spoken the words. But then who else?

He discovered a small box on the desk which appeared to be a loudspeaker. That's where the voice had come from. The alien apparently used a positronic translator. Mullon had already heard about such gadgets when he was a respected citizen on Earth.

Pashen the traitor had furnished the vocabulary which the instrument required to reproduce the English language. Now it was equipped to translate the words of the whistling squeaky language of the aliens into English and vice versa. What he saw was only the speaker and the set was probably inside the desk.

"You're the president of the horde that invaded this world," the machine pronounced after the alien uttered some sibilant noises.

Mullon didn't know whether it was a question or a statement and he merely answered: "Yes."

"You'll work for us," the machine announced.

Mullon remained silent. The thin ones were strict. He was not permitted to say anything without a direct question. But he was *compelled* to give an answer when they asked him.

Mullon was not prepared for the jab in his back between the shoulder blades. His eyes blurred and everything went dark. When he regained consciousness he was lying on the floor. He never even felt the fall but when he tried to get up, he could hardly move his limbs.

"You'll work for us," the machine repeated.

"I don't care," Mullon answered, furious. He called himself a coward but he was in their power and was afraid they would beat him senseless.

Pashen snickered maliciously.

"You'll grow a variety of wheat for us which we need. We'll put machines at your disposal and you'll deliver a fixed amount of wheat at prescribed times. If you refuse, you'll be punished. Your settlement'll be under strict supervision. We don't tolerate disobedience."

"Yes," Mullon grunted.

Then he was grabbed by the shoulder and pulled up. He tried out his legs, which functioned again, if a little wobbly.

Apparently the conversation was ended and the 2 guards who had picked them up took them back again.

The sun rose as Mullon and Chellish crossed the chain of sentries at the border of the camp.

* * * *

Mullon had no objections when Chellish assumed the task of reporting to their fellow prisoners.

"I behaved like a fool and a coward," he said dejectedly to Freddy. "Chellish probably could have told them off much better than I."

"He could have talked only as long they let him live," Freddy consoled him, "and from what I hear, they wouldn't have given him much time to talk. Don't let it bother you. Nobody can blame you. If you'd known what to expect, you'd have been better prepared for the confrontation and the result would probably have been different."

Freddy's quiet and reasonable way of talking it over reinforced Mullon's self-confidence again and he soon got up and joined the group of people that had formed around Chellish to discuss their dilemma.

"We're free Terranians," somebody shouted irately. "Just let them try to make slaves of us!"

And another one clamoured: "We're 8,000! We can storm their ship and lick 'em. Hey, Mullon! Why don't you say something? That blockhead there wants to tell us that we must say yes to everything."

Mullon squeezed through the crowd to reach Chellish. "This blockhead," he retorted putting his hand on Chellish's shoulder, "is absolutely right. There's nothing we can do at the moment. Or do you want to attack a well-armed spaceship with your bare hands? You couldn't even get through the line of sentries. These 'sticks' have no scruples when it comes to their safety. They want to give us machines to work the land and we'll have plenty of time to think of a better way to get rid of them."

But his speech didn't cut any mustard with the incensed listeners. They were impatient and dying to take immediate action. However after Mullon and Chellish had talked to them for another hour, they finally came around to their opinion that they had not yet reached the point of no return and they were willing to wait as long as their spokesmen held a glimpse of hope for the future.

The group dispersed and left Mullon and Chellish standing alone. Mullon cast a sideways glance at Chellish and finally admitted: "You're an excellent speaker. What did you say you were on Earth?"

"I didn't say anything except that I had some business with Hollander," Chellish replied. "I was a mechanic."

"Really?" Mullon asked. "I've the impression that you're hiding something from me."

Chellish laughed mischievously. "So you've noticed it? You're perfectly right. To tell the truth, I'm the Emperor of China."

"In truth, you're a crank," Mullon muttered in disgust. "What do you think of their agricultural project?"

"Not much. I wonder why the Whistlers want to plant their wheat here and not on their own planet."

"The who?"

"The Whistlers. Don't you like the name?"

"Why, yes. Did you think it up? Maybe the wheat can only be grown here?"

Chellish shook his head. "They seem to need it very badly. Maybe they don't have enough farmland left. I mean, because of overpopulation."

"If there are too many of them, they could grow the wheat themselves," Mullon argued.

"Yes, I've been thinking about this. It seems to me that there must be something which makes it highly unpleasant or too difficult for them to live on Grautier; perhaps the temperature, the air mixture, the gravitation or whatever else it might be. I wish we could find out. It could really be of tremendous help to us."

"It would be nice," Mullon agreed.

* * * *

Soon thereafter one of the little aircrafts zoomed out of the spaceship's belly in the direction of Greenwich, making the same already-familiar whooshing noise. It was quickly followed by a 2nd and 3rd

"Now they're going to collect our weapons," Chellish predicted, "and then they'll let us go home again."

"I wish you were right," Mullon sighed.

One hour later the airplanes returned and were swallowed by their mothership. Then a few Whistlers appeared at the upper end of the gangway and gave some orders to the chain of guards. The guards formed a wedge whose tip pointed to the spaceship. The opposite side was open and the guards proceeded to drive the colonists through the opening toward Greenwich.

"You should have become a prophet," Mullon kidded Chellish.

Chellish studied the wreck of the *Adventurous* as they passed it. "I wonder if they've found the auxiliary ship," he said in a subdued voice. "They'll probably demolish it to keep us from using it against them."

The auxiliary ship aboard the *Adventurous* had remained undamaged when the spaceship crashed on Grautier. The inhabitants of Greenwich had not deemed it necessary to salvage the little spaceship as yet, since there were more important matters to take care of than launching a trip in space.

The guards herded the people into Greenwich and cordoned the town off.

Once back in town the first thing Mullon and Chellish did was to find the injured Ferris. He still was at the same spot where Mullon had left him but he was stretched out flat and the cup Mullon had put at his side was tipped over. Ferris had a wound in his chest which he hadn't had the night before.

Chellish felt his pulse. "Dead," he stated morosely. "They must have shot him when they were searching the town for weapons. A defenceless man!"

Mullon trembled with fury but Chellish remained calm and asked: "Did he have a wife?"

"No," Mullon panted. "Not yet. He wanted to marry Eileen Sunderson. They had already applied to the People's Assembly."

"We'll have to break it to her gently," Chellish murmured glumly.

They left Ferris lying where he was. No sun penetrated into the narrow alley and there was no necessity to bury him immediately.

Mullon took one last look back from the street. "They'll have to pay dearly for this," he muttered under his breath.

* * * *

Shortly before 12 o'clock they heard engine noises accompanied by the clatter of chains approaching from the south. Mullon ran outside and saw a number of heavy, odd-looking machines rolling along the street.

Chellish quickly joined him and began to count in a low voice: "...10... 12... 15... Tremendous vehicles. Apparently multi-purpose machines for ploughing, sowing and harvesting all in one."

Mullon wanted to know how he recognized the purpose of the equipment but at this moment one of the Whistlers sitting on the first machine accosted him. He grabbed him by the arm and dragged him back to the 2nd machine where Pashen was perched.

Pashen looked at them with disdain from the cab, puffing clouds of smoke from a cigarette. "I'm supposed to tell you that these are the machines you've been promised. We brought you about 150 tons of seed which ought to be enough to plant an area of 200 square kilometres. Our friends tell me that the land is very fertile here. They expect a harvest of 300,000 tons in 4 months; so you better hustle."

Mullon had a few nasty comments on the tip of his tongue. Chellish seemed to sense it and stepped forward with the question: "Who is going to show us how to operate this equipment?"

"I," Pashen replied smirking proudly.

Chellish's eyes narrowed. "Are you sure that nobody'll bash in your head?"

"Quite," Pashen chuckled. "If anything happens to me, the whole town of Greenwich will be blown to bits forthwith. I've already explained my ticklish situation to our friends."

"You were so right," Mullon said caustically. "But one of these days we're going to get your scalp nonetheless!"

* * * *

The spaceship took off the same morning.

According to Chellish's estimation the Whistlers who stayed behind numbered about 200. They set up a

tent city at the southern edge of the town and Chellish observed that they were equipped with 2 aircraft and an arsenal of weapons. Among them were a few pieces which resembled heavy mine-throwers. Their short barrels were pointed menacingly at Greenwich.

Pashen left town after Mullan explained to him that he had some other and more urgent matters to attend to than taking lessons in the operation of the machinery. Mullan told him that he would call Pashen when he was ready and the latter answered smugly, he'd come when it suited him.

Mullan summoned the People's Assembly and declared that the first order of the day must be calm and circumspection. Nothing was to be undertaken in perilous haste. If they some day succeeded in throwing off the yoke of the Whistlers, it would come to pass only by careful planning and thorough preparation.

They counted their losses and took inventory of their situation. They had suffered 4 deaths, including Ferris, and 178 wounded.

All their weapons were gone including the few disintegrators and thermo-beamers they had stored in the armoury. Most of the furniture had been damaged as well as all the doors. Hundreds of broken windows would let the bitter chill of the night penetrate their homes until they could be replaced.

Meanwhile Chellish had mulled things over in his head. In his opinion it was impossible to cultivate 200 square kilometres of land in 4 months and deliver a harvest of the size demanded by the Whistlers. On the other hand he didn't believe that the Whistlers would resort to excessive punitive measures after their return in 4 months because it would only contribute to a further delay in the production of wheat.

An additional problem arose by the presence of Hollander's former disciples who had only recently been condemned to 2 years of forced labour. Their sentences now had to be repudiated and he was afraid that the inmates would then use their newfound freedom to gain unfair advantages for themselves.

When Chellish presented these problems to the People's Assembly it was resolved to form a special committee to study the question. This was all they could do for the time being.

* * * *

That same evening Chellish had a long talk with Capt. Blailey. He described the situation and asked what steps Blailey intended to take.

"None," Blailey replied. "This is exactly one of those predicaments in which I've no authority to intervene."

"Why not?" Chellish asked, baffled.

"Nobody's life is in danger. Besides, the Whistlers don't seem to care where the colonists came from and there seems to be no reason for concern that the Whistlers will find out where Terra is located."

"But 4 people have been slain!" Chellish protested. "And perhaps many more than that will lose their lives in 4 months if we can't meet the quota."

"In 4 months we can talk about it again," Blailey retorted. "Right now there is no mortal danger as far as I can see and I'll have to remain in hiding and await further developments.

Chellish had been an officer long enough to realize that further protestations were superfluous. "At least you could find out where the Whistlers come from," he suggested. "They travel in an interplanetary ship and their home must be somewhere in this system."

"That would be interesting," Blailey admitted. "I'll look into it. We were able to monitor the course of their ship for a long distance. I'll consult our astro-maps to see which planet lies on their course. I'll give you the information next time you call back."

Chellish adjusted his watch and looked out the window. It was getting dark and it was time to take a little walk. He climbed out the window and sauntered to the prairie. Then he turned southwest toward the camp of the Whistlers.

The camp was illuminated by numerous lamps which the Whistlers had set up in the meantime. Chellish noticed a large mobile van near the tents and he assumed that it contained a generator to provide electricity for the lamps and other equipment.

He ventured as close as he considered prudent and hid in the tall grass in order to watch the Whistlers without disturbing them. They seemed to have gone to sleep and he saw only one of them seated motionlessly on the ground near a big mine-thrower. He was sure that he slept like all the others in their tents.

They obviously seemed to feel very safe. There was only a single guard near the mine-thrower and he didn't perform his duty very faithfully.

Chellish realized that he didn't know enough about the conditions in the camp to answer this question with certainty.

Then he wondered whether now that all was quiet it would be a good time to check up on the auxiliary ship of the *Adventurous* but he decided against it. Not so much because he didn't trust that he could get away with it but because he was afraid that Mullon would miss him and start looking for him if he stayed away too long.

That shrewd old fox already harboured a suspicion, Chellish thought with amusement. I won't be able to fool him much longer about me.

He went back the same way he had come and reached the town a short time later.

* * * *

Early next morning Mullon went to get Pashen. He approached within 50 meters of the camp without being molested by the Whistlers and called Pashen's name.

Pashen called back that he was having breakfast and that he would come when he was good and ready.

2 hours later he showed up. Bragging about his knowledge and with a nasty flood of insults he instructed Mullon and several other men, Chellish among them, in the operation of the big machines. As they were all the same model it sufficed that he demonstrated only one of them.

The main feature of the machine, as far as they were concerned, was a large control panel with a lever for every function the implement was designed to perform. These operations included ploughing, harrowing, weeding, mowing and thrashing. Pashen explained that no maintenance or fuel was required. Each machine carried a supply of seed and all they had to do was to pull the right lever at the right moment.

Each machine was operated by a crew of 2 men. Mullon inquired whether everybody in town was required to work for the Whistlers since the machines would keep only 30 men busy.

"The task we've set for you," Pashen declared histrionically, "is not easy to fulfil. I foresee the time when all of you will have to go into the fields to bring in the harvest on time. Farming 200 kilometres won't be a picnic."

"If you could tell us a little about this variety of wheat," Chellish interjected, "we might be able to use our own machines and finish the job quicker."

Pashen shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know anything about it," Pashen claimed. "It's up to you how to get it done." With these words he turned around and went back to the camp of the Whistlers.

Chellish jumped on one of the machines and exhorted the colonists: "Let's give a try, all you farmers. Our future depends on agriculture!"

Chellish started the motor. Nobody noticed that he listened intently to the sound it made. He pushed the drive lever forward and drove the machine a short distance down the street without activating any of the farming implements. Finally he switched on the ploughing attachment. The noise of the engine grew a little louder and his speed slowed down as a 2-meter-wide section of the street was ploughed up behind him.

Eventually he tried to turn the machine around but succeeded only after some tricky manoeuvring. He stopped in front of Mullon, turned off the engine and leaped down. "First tractor operator reporting for work," he announced. "We're ready to proceed, boss."

Mullon instructed one of the waiting men: "Tell the women to get the food. Then we'll leave to pick a piece of land which can be farmed easily."

The women had already packed their lunches in the morning. They consisted of canned and concentrated food. Mullon even considered spending the night in the field in order to waste as little time as possible. 200 square kilometres was an area with equal sides of about 14 kilometres length. The best the machines could do was 15 kilometres an hour without using the farming tools. They would save considerable time over the long run if they didn't return to their homes each night.

Chellish took the seat next to Mullon and said: "I hope you don't feel I'm intruding if I..."

"No, I don't mind," Mullon interrupted with a grin. "Perhaps you can tell me on the way how the Emperor of China lives."

"The who?" Chellish questioned in astonishment. Then he remembered the little joke he had pulled yesterday and chuckled. "Of course. It's an interesting story."

They drove off. Mullon headed east because he recalled that he had seen level ground in that direction. Moreover he figured that the soil was more fertile in the east than the west because the river had washed away the mud from the west bank and deposited it on the eastern side.

Mullon began ploughing 2 kilometres outside the town. In a staggered formation the ploughs turned over the soil of the grassy terrain in strips of 2-meter widths.

While the work was in progress, Chellish did a little figuring. "After shifting into ploughing we're making about 10 kilometres an hour. With the necessary pauses it'll take us about 1½ hours to complete a length of 14 kilometres. On each trip we plough a strip of 30 meters together. Therefore we'll have to go back and forth 470 times. This comes to about 700 hours of work. Then we'll use as much time again to barrow and seed the land. These 3 operations alone will require a total of 2,100 hours."

"What are you getting at?" Mullon asked, puzzled.

"That we can't hope to get it done even if we wanted to. 2,100 work hours take at least 35 days which is more than 3 months and the Whistlers want to come back in 4 months to confiscate the harvest."

"You're right," Mullon admitted. "I hadn't given it enough thought. What can we do?"

Chellish shrugged his shoulders. "Stop a minute," he requested Mullon.

"Why?"

"I'll tell you later. Wave to the others to go on with their work."

Mullon complied with his request and the 14 machines continued on their track. After awhile they disappeared in the south behind a curtain of shimmering hot air.

Mullon turned off the engine and an eerie calm returned to the vast land of grass as if no other life existed except the 2 men sitting quietly on the machine.

4/ THE KEY TO THE FORBIDDEN DOOR

"Start the engine," Chellish said.

Mullon flipped a lever.

"Listen closely!"

Mullon heard a slurping sucking noise, then a low rolling sound as if a heavy car started to move inside the machine. It was followed by a muffled hum which gradually grew louder till it finally became the familiar sound of a running engine.

"Enough," Chellish said, pulling the lever back. Now all the sounds could be heard in the reversed

sequence.

"How does it sound to you?" Chellish asked, looking attentively at Mullon.

"I know helicopters and cars but not Whistler machines," Mullon replied with obvious irritation.

"It's nothing peculiar to Whistler technology," Chellish retorted. "In there is an efficient high-speed reactor and a very ordinary steam turbine."

Mullon stared at him, amazed. "Do you think you can determine that just by the sound?"

"You bet I can," Chellish insisted.

"So what? What difference does it make?"

"Think about it a minute," Chellish urged him. "A reactor and a steam turbine. That's not a very advanced method. The Whistlers haven't yet discovered how to change nuclear energy directly into electric power. Otherwise they'd run this machine with electricity and achieve a much higher efficiency. What kind of a reactor do you think it is?"

"You tell me," Mullon murmured.

"A fission reactor," Chellish explained. "A fusion-reactor works with matter that involves the principle of magneto-hydrodynamic conversion and inevitably leads to direct application of electricity."

"So?"

Chellish had waxed hot on the subject. "A fission-reactor works with uranium, plutonium or thorium. This one seems to be fairly small and it must therefore operate with enriched fission material. Let's presume that we could remove a lot of U235 from this machine... then we could fashion a bomb, couldn't we?"

Mullon gaped with open mouth and wide eyes.

"Of course it would require a great deal of work," Chellish continued, all fired up. "We'd have to take some fissionable matter from each machine and construct a mechanism which would unite at the proper moment 2 separate masses of uranium—if that's what the reactors contain—to a supercritical mass." He slapped Mullon on the shoulder. He seemed to be carried away with his enthusiasm although the idea must have occurred to him quite some time before.

"Do you understand this stuff?" Mullon asked dubiously. "I mean, you're not going to blow us all up while you tinker with it."

Chellish laughingly shook his head. "Don't worry. I think I know enough about it. But we've got to watch the Whistlers. The greatest difficulty will be to work without being disturbed. Aren't there any physicists among our men?"

Mullon scratched his head. "Fisher and Stokes know something about these things and a few other people from the crew of the *Adventurous*. Up to now we were too busy to make a list of the occupations our people were engaged in on Earth. Maybe we can find some physicists, for instance among Hollander's men."

"Well, we'll manage somehow," Chellish said hopefully. "But we've got to get to work on it right away if... Listen, what's that?"

Mullon cocked his head. There was a faint clatter in the distance but he couldn't tell from which direction it came. Then he saw a tiny speck shoot up in the western sky. "The helicopter," he exclaimed, startled. "Who could it be?"

"Don't you know?" Chellish laughed. "The Whistlers have confiscated the helicopter to protect themselves from us but they can't fly it. That leaves only one person."

"You mean Pashen?"

"Of course. He'll soon be here to pry."

The helicopter flew northwest and then passed north of Mullon and Chellish's machine. It quickly went into a tight curve, returned and landed on the grass not far from the 2 men.

Pashen climbed out. He was alone. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

"None of your business," Chellish taunted him.

Pashen was extremely annoyed and turned to Mullon. "Did you appoint him to speak for you in this rude manner?"

"I'm glad I don't have to talk to you," Mullon confessed.

"You better be careful," Pashen warned furiously. "And now get moving with your machine. You can't afford to waste a minute."

Mullon didn't lift a finger. Chellish propped up his foot on the side door and looked Pashen straight in the eye. "Get out of here!" he threatened calmly. "If you don't leave at once I'll run over you with this machine. You've got nothing to say around here, so don't try!"

Pashen's face turned white. "I'll fix you... I'll get even with you... you..."

"Kark off (Scram; bug off; beat it; make yourself scarce)" Chellish bellowed without moving.

Pashen flinched and stumbled. Then he turned around and ran away. When he realized that he had let himself be frightened out of his wits, it was already too late to remedy the situation. He was fuming with rage but he merely shook his fist menacingly. Then he climbed into his helicopter and took off.

Chellish began to laugh as the noise of the copter faded away in the distance. Mullon, however, looked rather distressed. "You behaved very recklessly," he chided Chellish.

"I admit I was taking a chance," Chellish said disdainfully, "but not much of a chance. Pashen is scared of his own shadow. I don't think the Whistlers have delegated much authority to him."

Mullon started the machine up again and resumed ploughing.

* * * *

At lunchtime Mullon had caught up with the rest of the machines. They had already driven their machines back and forth 6 times and the width of the ploughed field had grown to 180 meters. Their heads were droning from the noise of the machines and their hands trembled to the beat of the machines' vibrations.

They rested in the shade of the machines for 2 hours. Chellish had no objections to Mullon telling the men about his plan. They all thought it was a terrific idea and supported him wholeheartedly. Chellish admonished them that even the most innocuous remark in the wrong place could wreck his plan and they promised to keep it a secret. Not even their wives were to be told about their intentions.

Then they went back to work and continued till dusk with few interruptions. Mullon had miscalculated the time when the sun was still fairly high above the horizon. He insisted on making another trip back and forth before driving home. By the time they were finished it was already dark and they needed a pause to rest up.

Some leaned against the tracks of the tractors and others who had been at the wheel for a long time stretched out on the ground for a nap.

Chellish got up and left with the excuse that he wanted to take a look at the motor assembly to find out the best way for taking it apart. Nobody seemed to wonder why he picked the machine which was most distant.

He entered the cab and moved around as if looking for something. Then he set his wristwatch-transceiver to call Capt. Blailey. He identified himself as "Prince of Wales", the code word for the day, and reported to Blailey, bringing him up to date.

"I've got some news for you, too," Blailey said. "Now we know where the Whistlers come from."

"You don't say!" Chellish said eagerly. "From where?"

"The sun of this system has 49 planets of various sizes. Grautier is the 7th closest planet to the sun which we've given the name of Myrtha. The Whistlers inhabit Myrtha #12 and we've already taken a look at their globe. It's a fairly small world with a surface gravity of 0.7G. You'll be interested to learn that the air-pressure on the surface is only 0.5 atmospheres compared to 1.2 on Grautier. I think this is the reason why these skinny creatures find it difficult to be on Grautier. They must feel as we would 10 meters under water without protection for our ears."

Chellish whistled through his teeth. "Yes, that must be it," he agreed. "Did you learn anything else?"

"They've spotted us," Blailey replied. "They used regular radar. We were flying at an altitude of about 100 kilometres but they didn't bother us at all. They don't seem to have any good interceptors or missiles. Maybe they can't get them started fast enough. I've seen several big cities. The land seems to be very densely populated."

"We've guessed as much."

"And how do you like farming wheat?" Blailey wanted to know.

"A little boring," Chellish replied.

"How are the colonists holding up?"

"Marvellous. I didn't think they'd take it so well, They didn't lose hope. Mullon is a great guy. You couldn't have picked a better man as a leader."

"Hold on a minute, Chellish," Blailey finally said. "You're talking about people who made an attempt on the life of the Administrator and tried to start a revolution before they were banished from Earth for life."

"I'm convinced the court would let mercy prevail over justice if it could see how bravely these fellows defend their reputation as Terrans," Chellish said in an earnest tone.

"Alright, alright," Blailey muttered. "Unplug it (Knock it off) for today! Call back soon!"

Chellish put his watch back and was about to leave the driver's cab when he heard a noise outside. He remained still as someone came up on the stepladder. The outline of a head appeared over the low door and a voice said: "I didn't think that anybody'd have such a high opinion of us."

It was Mullon. Chellish didn't show any sign of embarrassment. "Did you also hear how I flattered you? Your face must be as red as Betelgeuse, not only because I heaped so much praise on you but because you're snooping around in the neighbourhood so openly."

Mullon chortled. "It wasn't for nothing, it seems. Now are you ready to laundry (Come clean with) your story, Emperor of China?"

"Looks like I don't have a choice, do I?" So Chellish proceeded to reveal his background. "Rhodan is of the opinion," he concluded, "you should be allowed to carry on by yourselves as long as you don't get into serious trouble. But he's holding an invisible hand over you and will continue to do so regardless of whether you approve or not."

Mullon had climbed over the door without opening it and taken the seat next to Chellish. "When we left Terra," he replied slowly with a choked voice, "I'd have resented and opposed such a protection. If they deport us, I felt, we ought to forget all about them. But now, I'd love to hug your Capt. Blailey in gratitude!"

"Be careful," Chellish warned, grinning. "You'll get scratched up; Blailey is seldom well-shaved. But you'll have to promise one thing: this matter mustn't go any further unless I lift the curtain of secrecy myself. OK?"

"Alright," Mullon answered quickly and shook hands with Chellish.

* * * *

At 33 o'clock their machines clattered into Greenwich where those who had stayed behind were standing in the streets. Mullon's machine led the column.

"Why on Earth," Chellish grumbled, "didn't you lay out this town with a few more crooked streets? There isn't a good place to hide a machine."

Only the city hall protruded somewhat farther out into the street than the other houses. Chellish parked his machine so that it was partly concealed by the wall which jutted out and the other machines lined up behind it.

Then Chellish went to the house where he lived alone. He prepared a dinner, ate and went to bed. He set his alarm clock, which had already been converted to the new local time, for 39 o'clock. 5½ hours' sleep ought to be enough, he thought. Chellish had told Mullon that he wanted to begin the work 1 hour before midnight and he was certain that Mullon would come with a few men to stand guard.

When the alarm clock buzzed, Chellish took a cold shower to wake up. As soon as he reached the city hall, Mullon and O'Bannon emerged from the shadow under the roof.

"Did you bring your tools?" Chellish asked tersely.

"We did, sure," O'Bannon confirmed.

Chellish went to work. He had no trouble finding the access panel to the drive assembly. It was located at the side of the machine and was fastened by a row of screws with oddly shaped heads. None of their wrenches fitted the screws and he had to loosen them with a pair of pliers.

He removed the panel and exposed the outer radiation shield of the reactor. As he had expected the shield consisted of several seamlessly fitting parts which were not connected with each other. He took the parts out and stacked them up in sequence in order to replace them again in the same manner later on.

The shield turned out to be a hollow sphere with a 1-meter-thick wall. After Chellish had detached the front half of the shield, he discovered the core of the reactor which also was a sphere but had a diameter of only ½ meter. It had an outer layer of a light grey material which Chellish believed to be beryllium oxide. It served as a reflector and reduced the critical mass of the reactor to a smaller size than would have been necessary without it. Through the top, rods of a metal resembling aluminium were inserted into the core, apparently made of cadmium.

Chellish was satisfied. The reactor didn't differ much from those first built on Earth many years ago. The only question left to be solved now was which fissionable material the reactor used. Chellish dismantled a part of the reflector and detected a smooth metal behind it. He was unable to determine which of the metals it was that had been employed originally on Earth for this purpose: thorium, uranium, plutonium or maybe even one of the more exotic ones like curium. But he was certain that such a small reactor had to contain either highly enriched or even pure fissionable material such as Th229, U235 or Pu239.

Since it had little to do with the task at hand, he was only mildly interested in the heat exchanger which enclosed the reactor core and connected it to the drive aggregate. The heat from the reactor was transferred to water and converted to steam. The steam powered a turbine or a simple piston arrangement.

Chellish sat on the ground and studied the reactor. "Isn't it too dangerous?" Mullon asked. "This stuff radiates, doesn't it?"

"Mainly alpha rays," Chellish murmured almost absentmindedly. "They don't go farther than a few

centimetres. A few gamma rays, not too many and rather soft. No, it isn't particularly dangerous."

Then he looked up as if he had noticed only now that Mullon had asked him a question and that his answer was far from complete. He said with a smile: "Of course you've got to be careful not to hold it too long in your hand, or to swallow it for that matter."

Mullon laughed. "I'll think twice before I do that. Well, how does it look to you? Can you do it?"

"Easy. The way the Whistlers have constructed this reactor they've made it simple for us to build a bomb from it. The problem is how to rig a fuse. We'll have to remove the reflector, which will increase the critical mass. On the other hand, we still have to be able to drive the machine..."

"I don't understand any of it," Mullon interjected as he noticed that Chellish began to ponder the problem. "I guess you'll do alright without me."

Chellish said with amusement: "Thank you for your confidence!"

Then he restored the reflector, reassembled the shield and put the cover back in place.

* * * *

Early next morning they mounted their machines again and resumed the task of cultivation. The crew was the same as the day before and the 30 men operating the machines formed sort of a defence committee without further ado.

After working steadily for hours they took a 2-hour break for lunch during which Chellish confided that he was worried about the job. "I've been thinking about this business last night," he explained. "The Whistlers are smart enough to figure out that we can't finish this job at the rate we're going and I don't believe they'll wait 4 months without doing something about it."

He noticed the concerned expressions of his listeners who obviously as yet had given no thought to this predicament.

"What do you think they'll do?" Mullon inquired.

"There are 2 possibilities: either the 200 guards'll try to speed us up or they'll send a message to their home world asking the spaceship to return."

"Which would you rather have?"

Chellish laughed. "I guess we better be ready to cope with both possibilities; first one, then the other."

O'Bannon cleared his throat. "We'd be grateful to you, Chellish, if you could make it a little clearer what you've in mind."

"I'm trying to. So far I don't know exactly myself what to expect. The point is that we need time to finish the bomb. This could take 10 or 12 days and we can't let the Whistlers interfere before that or we won't

accomplish the job. However, if they don't wait..."

He paused and Mullon finished his sentence: we'll have to repulse them. Is that what you wanted to say?"

"Something to that effect," Chellish agreed. "I'd like to avoid any risk though..."

They watched patiently as he wrestled with the problem.

"Well, this would be one way of doing it," he finally declared as if he had stumbled on a brilliant solution. "We could try to find out how these 200 Whistlers communicate with their own planet. They must maintain some kind of contact with it to let them know they're still alive and to get an emergency call through if necessary. I assume that they're sending a certain signal at regular intervals to inform their home base that everything is in good order on Grautier. If we could detect what kind of a signal it is and were able to operate their transmitter we could do away with all 200 of them and build our bomb without being disturbed by the Whistlers from space."

He proudly looked around but his listeners didn't seem to share his optimism.

"If and when!" O'Bannon muttered. "If we could do this and that—but we can't. How do you want to go about eliminating 200 Whistlers?"

"This is the 2nd question," Chellish tried to set him right. "The first one is how to learn something about the radio communications of the Whistlers."

"We've got a few small radio receivers among our equipment," Mullon said. "Perhaps we could use them to..."

"Probably not," Chellish interrupted him. "Compared to Terrans the Whistlers are a fairly primitive race. They've attained interplanetary space travel but the theory of hyperradio is a closed book to them. I believe that they use an ordinary electromagnetic radio transmitter and if they want to span millions of kilometres with such a simple set they'll have to work with a directional beam in order to concentrate the energy of the transmitter. Therefore we'd have little chance to intercept their signal unless we could get close enough to the transmitter and receive something in their field of scatter. But I don't believe the Whistlers will allow us to do that."

"Too bad," Mullon said dejectedly, "but I can't think of anything better."

However Chellish didn't seem to be discouraged. He changed the subject and soon nobody except Mullon retained any thought that Chellish's speculation about the Whistlers' radio signals were to be taken seriously, not to mention the idea of overpowering 200 of the well-armed creatures.

At the end of their rest after lunch they went back to their machines and continued their work furrow by furrow.

"What kind of a bright idea did you hatch now?" Mullon asked after they had driven a few hundred meters.

Chellish grinned wryly. "Nobody can hide anything from you, can they?"

"I don't know," Mullon replied, "but apparently you can't"

Chellish thought for awhile and finally said: "Pashen is the key to the forbidden door."

Mullon looked at him with astonishment. "Pashen? Do you think he would betray them?"

"Not voluntarily, of course; but I'll force him."

"Oh... and how do you think you can do that?"

Chellish laughed. "Let me have a little fun with that; I'd love to surprise you. Besides I might save myself some embarrassment. After all I don't know if I can really pressure Pashen."

"When will you set the trap?" Mullon wanted to know.

"Tonight at the latest," Chellish replied and his voice boded ill for Pashen.

* * * *

That afternoon they twice heard the whoosh of the Whistlers' airplane. The Whistlers seemed to be satisfied to see the machines working and they refrained from landing.

Mullon didn't insist on being systematic and he stopped work in the middle of a furrow when the sun went down. They were home at 31 o'clock.

Mullon invited Chellish for dinner. "You must feel pretty lonely and bored," he said.

Chellish shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I don't consider this a vacation. We better send a few men right away to the camp of the Whistlers and let them call Pashen. Tell him that I want to talk to him."

"Where do you want to meet him?" Mullon asked.

"Let him come to your house."

"Do Freddy and I have to play any part in it?"

"You may act as unpaid extras without spoken lines," Chellish grinned.

Several men were dispatched to the camp to notify Pashen that his presence was required to discuss an important matter. Chellish had no doubt that his message would induce Pashen to come to the town without delay.

Freddy waited already at the door when they reached Mullon's house. "Ah, I've another place to set at the table," she greeted Chellish with a friendly smile.

"Not without your customary fee, Freddy," Mullon laughed. "Chellish wants us to give a performance."

Chellish was not pleased that Mullon let the cat out of the bag so quickly. Up to now Freddy had

learned nothing about his mission but if Mullon didn't guard his tongue any better he wouldn't be able to keep his secret much longer. Although Freddy had at one time been a special agent herself, by now she probably had already become a full-fledged colonial housewife.

The dinner Freddy served was prepared with the same ingredients most of Chellish's bachelor meals contained. But she had added a special touch to improve the taste and when Chellish complimented her about the pleasant surprise he won Freddy's undivided sympathy.

Milligan entered as they cleared the table. "Pashen is on his way," he reported.

"Is he coming here?" Chellish asked. Milligan nodded.

A few minutes later Pashen arrived. He walked in without knocking at the door and stood in the middle of the room without saying hello. "What's up?" he gruffly asked Mullon.

Mullon remembered what role he was supposed to play and didn't utter a word.

"We don't want to be as impolite as you," Chellish spoke up, pointing to an empty chair. "Sit down!"

Pashen looked at him, puzzled. "Since when are you the master in this house?"

Chellish ignored the question. "As you know, our power station has been destroyed by the Whistlers. We're running out of candles and since we wouldn't like to sit in the dark we wish to rebuild the power station. Do you think your friends would raise objections?"

"I believe so," Pashen replied, snickering scornfully. "You could start all kinds of mischief with electricity. I'm sure they won't condone the reconstruction of the station. Besides my friends have confiscated all generators."

Chellish nodded as if he had expected the rejection. "How do the Whistlers communicate with their home planet?" he suddenly fired his 2nd question in an effort to catch Pashen unawares.

"With a..." Pashen began to answer. Then he realized that he had risen to Chellish's bait and he shouted with flashing eyes: "That's none of your business! What are you getting at?"

"So you do know," Chellish stated calmly. "You're going to tell us how."

Pashen jumped up excitedly. "I'll do nothing of the sort!" he screamed. "But *I will* tell my friends that some people around here are getting awfully nosy."

Chellish waved his hand. "Sit down, you miserable puppet!" His icy calm had the effect of an insult. "You should know that I don't make empty threats. Now listen to me: the Whistlers live in pressure tents, don't they?"

He could hear somebody gasp in the room. It must have been either Mullon, Freddy or Milligan.

Pashen stared at Chellish with bulging eyes. "How did you find that out?" he stammered.

Chellish pointed his finger at him. "From you, Pashen. At least that's what I'm going to tell the Whistlers. You're well aware that the Whistlers live on a planet where the atmospheric pressure is less than 34 that on Grautier. You know what difficulties we had ourselves the first time we entered the atmosphere of

Grautier. The Whistlers can stand the conditions on Grautier only by spending at least ½ a day under the air pressure they're accustomed to. That's why they've brought pressure tents which can be deflated to the desired state. Now imagine, Pashen the Whistlers overlooked a single rifle during their search for weapons—which is quite possible—then all we'd have to do is to shoot a little hole into each tent. The result would be an implosion and the equalization of pressure would take place so quickly that it would cause the instant death of all Whistlers except those who happen to be outside. And the others wouldn't live much longer either if they didn't have any shelters to crawl in. And all this would occur as a consequence of your betrayal, Pashen, the friend of the Whistlers whom they trusted so unwisely with their carefully guarded secrets. How does this strike you, Pashen?"

Pashen was ashen. "You... you..." he spluttered.

Chellish waited calmly till Pashen had regained his ability to speak. "You're a liar!" he cried. "I'd never do such a thing and you know it!"

Chellish shrugged his shoulders. "How stupid do you think I am? I've no intention of treating you with more consideration than you've shown us."

Pashen thought feverishly. Chellish didn't feel as calm as he appeared to be on the outside. It was possible that Pashen had meanwhile become such good friends with the Whistlers that he could explain to them, without the slightest risk to himself, how he had found out that Chellish knew all about their dependence on the low pressure tents and that he tried to blame him, Pashen, in order to blackmail him.

However Pashen didn't look like a man who considered such an alternative. He gave the impression of being caught on the roof of a high house unable to go back because the stairs were burning behind him. "This is extortion!" he finally uttered.

Chellish nodded affably. "Yes, I know."

"And what do you demand of me?" he finally whimpered when he saw no other way out.

"Tell me what kind of a sender the Whistlers use to stay in touch with their planet and the nature of their communications."

Pashen wrung his hands in desperation. "And what guarantee do I have that you won't throw me to the wolves if I give you this information?"

"None at all," Chellish replied, unmoved. "You've only one guarantee, namely, if you don't make pigtalk (Start squealing) in 2 minutes, I'll go to the camp and ump you out (Blow the whistle on you)."

Pashen's eyes were filled with anguish. "Very well," he moaned. "They have a common electromagnetic transmitter in the decimetre frequency range and they use a directional beam for sending only 2 different signals. One is a routine signal which is given about every 5 hours to advise their people at home that everything is alright and the other is a danger signal which may be flashed only in case of emergency."

"Describe the signals exactly!"

"I don't know what they are. The transmitter has a black and a red button. They simply press the black button for the routine signal and the red one for the emergency signal."

"I see, it's automatic. And what answer do they get from the Whistler planet?"

"None at all."

"What happens when they send the danger signal?"

"I don't know for sure but presumably the big spaceship'll come back."

"Only one?"

"They don't have very many. They've only just begun to venture out into space."

Chellish took a few moments to think about the situation in the new light of the information he had gathered. "I've got a job for you," he finally said. "I want you to determine exactly to the minute the interval in which the routine signal is transmitted. Do it as quickly as you can and come back the moment you've learned it. Where is the transmitter?"

"In the tent farthest south, the one closest to the *Adventurous* ."

"Very good. Do the Whistlers have infrared searchlights?"

"I haven't seen any."

"Do they post regular guards?"

"They've got some peep holes in their tents through which they occasionally watch the surroundings. There's a guard at the mine-thrower but he usually sleeps. It's strange how tired they get under the high air pressure."

"There's nothing strange about it," Chellish stated. "Unusual air pressure, whether too high or too low, always makes a person feel tired. But I'd like to know something else: you must have pressure equalization chambers in the tents—how much time do they need to pass through the air chambers?"

Pashen seemed to have regained his composure and he answered rather flippantly: "Normally about 10 minutes. Nevertheless they feel pretty droopoo (Droopy; pooped out) when they get out."

"No wonder," Chellish laughed. "This is the equivalent of the pressure change from an altitude of 6,500 meters down to normal on the surface. Not even a parachute jumper will do that in 10 minutes."

Chellish seemed to have another question on his mind but he appeared to have forgotten what it was. Suddenly his face brightened. "Oh yes! Did you ever go into the tents of the Whistlers? How did you feel in there?"

"Rotten," Pashen replied. "My ears rang, I felt dizzy and short of breath."

"Can a man stand it?"

"Yes. But you have to be careful to move around as little as possible."

"OK," Chellish said. "That'll be all. Now go back to the camp and find out what the interval between the signals is. Keep in mind what the Whistlers will do to you if they find out you've rat-mouthed (Betrayed secrets) them."

Pashen got up and left in a hurry. A sigh of relief went through Mullon's home. As usual, Freddy was the first to put aside her apprehensions and ask in her pert way: "Holy Doughnuts! How do you know all this?"

"Observation, my dear Freddy," Chellish answered cheerily. "I was out there during the night and looked at the tents. Do you know how I was able to tell?"

"No," Freddy admitted.

"By the way the little peep holes are mounted. I could clearly recognize the pressure rings around them."

Chellish secretly said a little prayer that they really would find such pressure rings once they got to see the tents close up. Of course he had not yet been able to discover them because he had never got near enough to catch a glimpse.

Shortly after Pashen had left, O'Bannon and the Wolleys came in. They wondered why Pashen looked so distraught and Mullon related what had happened.

Again Chellish urged the 3 to keep the matter under their hats. Then he bid them good night and went home where he brewed himself a cup of coffee and sat down to design the fuse for the planned bomb.

After he had made the first drawing he remembered that he no longer had to follow his original plan. If he indeed succeeded in incapacitating the 200 Whistlers in the camp, everything would be considerably simpler.

Heretofore he had intended to use fissionable matter from his machine for ½ the bomb and to scrape enough off the other 14 machines' reactors to make the 2nd half. In this manner he could keep all machines running.

But now this was no longer necessary. Once the 200 Whistlers were out of the way he could take the entire fissionable matter from one machine as nobody would be there to notice that a machine was out of order. This was the way to go, he decided.

3 hours later he had constructed a fuse on paper which seemed to satisfy all his requirements. He inspected his work with undisguised pride and then contacted Capt. Blailey to give his daily report. Neither related any information of special interest. Chellish preferred not to mention his tentative plans. If they succeeded in defeating the 200 Whistlers he wanted to give due credit to the colonists.

And so he went to bed.

5/ ATTACKING THE ALIENS

Pashen returned the next morning shortly after sunrise when there were only a few men in the streets. He looked dismayed but didn't appear to be afraid.

"4 hours and 48 minutes," he reported to Chellish who was waiting for him in front of his house. "The next signal is due 32 minutes from now on the dot."

"Did you already change your watch?"

Without a word Pashen pointed to his wristwatch which showed a dial with the new time of Grautier. Chellish was satisfied. He memorized the data—4 hours and 48 minutes—to make sure that he remembered it.

Before Pashen turned to leave, he urged Chellish: "If the Whistlers should by any chance inquire what I was doing here, tell them that I was trying to make you work faster. OK?"

Chellish noted with satisfaction that Pashen had for the first time used the name 'Whistlers' instead of the words 'my friends'. Apparently Pashen had already found it opportune to shift his position when he realized from whence the wind was blowing.

"Alright," Chellish assured him. "This'll be in our mutual interest. And let me give you a little warning. You can imagine that the people of Greenwich don't feel particularly friendly toward you. So don't get any cute ideas such as filching a few guns and taking off with the helicopter. The helicopter is considered vital equipment in Greenwich and if they catch you with the stolen helicopter they'll shoot you on the spot. You better just stay put in the camp and wait until things begin to pop. That way, I believe I can guarantee you that you'll survive the altercation. Do we understand each other?"

Pashen looked flabbergasted. "There's no way you could find me if I wanted to escape in the copter," he replied.

"The fact that you don't know it doesn't mean that we can't apprehend you, Pashen," Chellish reminded him. "Quite a few things have changed around here since you defected to the Whistlers. If I were you I wouldn't try anything foolish."

Pashen raised his eyebrows but left without saying another word.

* * * *

Chellish and Mullon used the day to devise their strategy. As far as Mullon was concerned, it was all very simple: they would knock out the guard at the mine-thrower in a surprise attack and get his gun; then they would shoot a few holes in the tents and the problem would be solved.

However Chellish objected. He said he had no intention of simply killing 200 Whistlers because of a reluctance to think of another plan. Mullon countered by reminding him of Ferris and how callous the Whistlers had been when they killed the Lofts for no reason at all but Chellish defended his opinion by arguing that one murder didn't justify another.

Chellish became quite upset and cried irately: "Do you want to be considered a Terran or a barbarian?"

To his surprise his outburst did the trick. Mullon gave up his plan and conceded that he had acted in anger. Chellish realized how important it had become to Mullon to be respected as an Earthling.

From then on Mullan was content to listen to Chellish's development of a strategy which involved a minimum of force for taking the Whistlers prisoners. This plan—of which Mullan wholeheartedly approved—was presented to the other men during their lunchtime.

At 31 o'clock they returned to Greenwich and began to organize a clandestine army of 500 men who were given orders to carry out the assault on the camp. All other inhabitants were requested to evacuate Greenwich since they had to take into account the possibility that the Whistlers would lob a few rounds from their mine-thrower into the town before their resistance could be broken.

After all preparations had been made, Chellish instructed the men to get some sleep. The evacuation of the town was to begin at the hour of zero and the assault on the camp was set for 1:30.

* * * *

When Chellish got up shortly after midnight, the town was already half empty. Everything went according to plan and the Whistlers didn't seem to have noticed anything; at least their camp was as quiet as before.

Precisely at 1:30 the heavy motors began to rumble. 20 men stood behind each of the tremendous vehicles and they followed in their shadows when the machines began to move.

This time the column headed for the southern exit of the town. Chellish presumed that the Whistlers would not oppose their implied intention to work in the fields at night also after Pashen had put the heat on the toilers. Nevertheless it was a memento of extreme suspense when the huge machines turned to the left at the exit of Greenwich and lined up in a long row facing the camp.

By this time the rest of their army had already taken up positions east and west of the camp in 2 groups of 100 men. They were well hidden in the tall grass so that the Whistlers probably didn't detect them. If the Whistlers showed any interest at all, they were more likely to watch the strange manoeuvre of the vehicles. Chellish, Mullan and Milligan had crept close to the camp from the east. They stayed out of sight until the 15 vehicles had completed their manoeuvre and diverted the attention of the Whistlers. Then they slipped into the camp.

They stopped between 2 tents which were about 20 meters from the mine-thrower and a rack on wheels loaded with shells, to watch the guard who had risen and stared at the machines. Nothing stirred in the tents around them.

"I wouldn't have believed that it would be that easy," Chellish murmured. "Go ahead, let's jump him!"

They leaped out from behind the tent and rushed toward the sentry. The sentry noticed that something was amiss behind his back. He spun around and Chellish saw him drawing his dangerous little ultrasonic pistol to aim it at them.

At the same moment Milligan was already at his side and struck his arm with full force. The weapon sailed through the air in a high curve and the sentry uttered a whistling scream.

Now Chellish gave the signal for the attack by shrilly whistling through his teeth. The 200 men who had

waited in the grass stormed into the camp. Armed with nothing but clubs they posted themselves at the airlocks of the tents from which the Whistlers had to emerge.

Meanwhile Chellish and his companions turned the heavy mine-thrower around and aimed it at the camp. At a 2nd signal 20 men darted across from the machines and started to pull the mine-thrower and the ammunition rack toward the row of vehicles. Chellish watched the transport of the ammunition rack.

The mine-thrower was lighter than the rack and they had to get more help to move the rack faster. Soon the mine-thrower was set up under the cover of the vehicles.

By this time the first of the tents were opened and a few dazed Whistlers staggered outside. It was the moment the hardy pioneers had been waiting for. With sharp blows they put the stunned thin figures out of action and relieved them of their weapons. Although they did not yet know how to use the ultrasonic pistols, it was enough to keep the other Whistlers from leaving their tents when they merely pointed the unfamiliar weapons at them.

In the meantime another group of militiamen had broken into the tent where, according to Pashen's information, their confiscated rifles and pistols were stored. They grabbed what they could carry and ran along the border of the camp back to the assembled machines.

Chellish endeavoured to give the 3rd signal for the battle which he hoped would decide the outcome. He had arranged with his men that the first shot from the mine-thrower would be the signal for retreat from the camp.

But even a man like Chellish found it difficult to figure out this product of a totally strange technology as quickly as the circumstances required. At the rear of the mine-thrower was a control panel with about a dozen levers, buttons and switches. 3 of them served to operate the movement of the barrel which was easy enough to recognize. 2 belonged to an illuminated scale with peculiar letters and a sliding indicator, presumably an instrument to compute the target. Chellish unscrewed the fasteners from the control panel and lifted it out of its brackets. He noticed that thin wires ran from 2 coloured buttons to the lower end of the barrel and he concluded that these buttons activated the trigger of the fuse.

At this moment Milligan came running, panting heavily. "I don't believe our men'll be able to keep the Whistlers back in their tents much longer, sir," he blurted, addressing Chellish like an officer in his eagerness although he had no idea who Chellish was. "Is it possible to speed..."

"Give me a hand," Chellish interrupted him, "and pray that this mine-thrower functions like our mortars."

Using the 3 levers whose purpose he had already determined at first sight, he adjusted the barrel so that the fired shell would hit and detonate far beyond the camp of the Whistlers.

Milligan picked up one of the heavy shells which measured about 20 centimetres across and held its flat bottom over the barrel. He watched Chellish very carefully.

He's not afraid, Chellish thought, although it could tear him apart in the next second! "Take cover as soon as you let go!" he called to Milligan.

"All clear, sir!" Milligan replied. "Just say the word!"

Chellish took a fleeting look at the detached control panel and raised his hand. "Watch it... now!"

Milligan let the shell drop, jumped to the side and hit the ground. Chellish crouched behind the gun carriage. With a special clarity which sometimes sharpens the senses in moments of danger he heard the shell slide down the barrel and release a catch with a clicking noise. Then came the bang—not as loud as Chellish had expected it to be followed by a sharp whistling sound and the missile reeled away in a steep curve. It made a strange rattling noise and it flew over the tents and plunged into the darkness.

Chellish nervously waited for the impact. Damn it, he thought, it should hit now. It took a frustratingly long time. He still could hear the rattle of the shell in the distance, a sign that it was in unstable flight.

Finally the noise stopped for a second and a glaring flash lit up the night beyond the camp. Chellish closed his blinded eyes and the roar of a powerful explosion rolled over the machines.

Much too far, Chellish thought, I've got to correct the angle. He didn't intend to hit the camp because he had no desire to kill the Whistlers. But he would have preferred if the shell had exploded only a few meters beyond the southern border of the camp instead of half a kilometre farther away since he didn't want the Whistlers to know how inefficient he was at handling the mine-thrower.

Next to him someone shouted: "Good shot, Chellish! Let 'em have it! We've got the rifles."

"Shut up!" Chellish shouted, annoyed. "It was a lousy shot. Spread out and be ready to hold the Whistlers back when they try to break out."

He adjusted the ballistic angle and fired a 2nd shot with Milligan's help. It detonated so close to the camp that it shook many tents severely.

The men, who had stood guard at the exits of the tents to keep the Whistlers from leaving, pulled back. The Whistlers noticed it and burst forward in droves.

Chellish took one of the ultrasonic pistols captured from the Whistlers and examined it while gunfire erupted all around him. The uncoordinated advance of the Whistlers faltered and soon was stopped by the hail of bullets. The Whistlers then crawled behind their tents and waited for a more favourable moment.

Chellish put the pistol down to launch another shot from the mine-thrower. He turned the barrel more toward the east and put the shell exactly where he wanted it near the edge of the camp. Thereby he proved to the Whistlers that he had already learned to shoot the weapon with precision.

The colonists held their fire when the Whistlers took cover, which gave Chellish a little breather for testing the ultrasonic pistol. He finally discovered the safety device. He determined that the funnel-shaped barrel could be rotated back and forth around its axis between 2 stops. At the right stop the pistol was secured and couldn't be fired. But when Chellish turned the barrel all the way to the left, aimed at a spent cartridge lying next to him in the trampled grass and pulled the trigger, the empty cartridge hissed and was transformed into a little lump of grey metal dust.

Suddenly there was a shout: "They're coming! On the left, from behind the tents!"

Chellish raised his head. The Whistlers had sneaked to the northern rim of the camp and—with ear-piercing shrieks—lunged forward from the tent standing closest to the machines. The guns began to clatter again. One of the defenders on top of the machine screamed in pain and tumbled down at Chellish's feet. The man had a bloody wound below his ear. Apparently he had been grazed by an ultrasonic shot.

Chellish threw himself down and hugged the ground. The Whistlers advanced, firing steadily, and forced the defenders to seek cover. When they had come within 10 meters, Chellish caused considerable confusion in their lines by loosing a whining ultrasonic salvo. The riflemen used this opportunity to come out from their cover and to tear wider gaps in the rows of Whistlers by a concentrated drum-fire.

This was enough for the Whistlers to call it quits, at least for the time being. Chellish took advantage of the lull to distribute the other ultrasonic pistols, which had been captured, among the men and to explain to them how they worked.

When the Whistlers attacked again a short time later they didn't get very far and their thrust collapsed after a few steps. Chellish had no inclination to waste more time. With Milligan's assistance he placed a mortar shell so close to the tent farthest north that the fragments pierced its wall and caused the air to rush in. The Whistlers inside began to wail in a high-pitched screech.

Then 15 minutes passed and nothing happened. Chellish asked Milligan to get another shell but suddenly a long thin figure stepped out between the tents, waving a rag and carrying a box the size of a small suitcase on a strap over his shoulder.

Milligan put the shell back on the rack. The Whistler with the rag hesitated a moment but felt encouraged when he saw Chellish waving at him. He came closer, whistling and squealing something, and before he had reached Chellish the mechanical voice emanated from the instrument: "What's the meaning of this? Why are you attacking us?"

Chellish replied: "Don't ask such stupid questions if you want to negotiate with us. We don't relish being your slaves and if you don't surrender in 15 minutes we're going to rip your tents to shreds. Go back to your people and tell them to come out one by one and to throw their weapons into the open space in the middle of the tents. Do you know what I mean by 15 minutes?"

The box translated Chellish's demand into the language of the Whistlers. The spindly go-between listened attentively. Then he turned around and went back without saying another word.

Chellish waited impatiently. The battle was far from decided. If the Whistlers had more fighting spirit than he thought they might try a 4th sally and if they decided to follow a sensible plan instead of blindly running head-on into their deadly fire with a lot of squealing then their chances for victory were not to be underestimated.

6/ BOMB BRIGHT: 20 SUNS

The last tent to the south of the camp was kept under especially sharp vigilance by Chellish. That was the place where the transmitter was located according to Pashen. It was to be expected that the Whistlers would try to send the alarm signal before they capitulated. Perhaps the 10 men who stood around that tent armed only with clubs would not suffice to prevent this. Therefore Chellish assigned 3 more men with ultrasonic pistols to guard the transmitter, thus depriving his own position of 1/3rd of the weapons so far wrested from the Whistlers.

When 10 minutes of the ultimatum given the Whistlers had lapsed a shrill scream resounded from the southern edge of the camp and a booming voice, probably O'Bannon's, called: "Chellish! One of them tried it but we nailed him!"

Chellish was pleased. He looked at Milligan who stood near the munitions rack peering at his watch from time to time. When he noticed Chellish's glance he winked an eye and smiled.

Soon the Whistler appeared again with his piece of cloth. He kept just far enough away to be seen in the darkness. He waved but didn't come closer. Then another Whistler walked down the lane between the tents, threw an object on the ground which they couldn't recognize and stood still, staring at Chellish. Chellish gestured to him to come over and he obeyed.

"Frisk him for weapons!" Chellish instructed the men standing behind him.

A 3rd Whistler emerged, threw something on the ground and followed the 2nd one. The first intermediary remained standing at the edge of darkness waving his tattered flag of truce.

One hour later all Whistlers were in safe custody. Everything had gone without a hitch. They were ready to yield and were much too frightened to contemplate further resistance. Despite their outlandish physiognomy the Earthlings could clearly recognize the shock and horror expressed in their faces. They seemed incredulous that a mere handful of people whom they had considered to be firmly under their cudgel had not only dared to rebel but had the audacity to be successful.

183 Whistlers were taken prisoners; about 40 of them were wounded and 20 others had been killed during the skirmish while the colonists had suffered only one casualty, the man who had been slightly wounded.

All the tents were still intact with the exception of the one which had been slashed by the fragments of a shell. They were inspected in order to flush out any concealed weapons. Then the Whistlers were put back into their tents so that they would be protected against the high air pressure. They were defenceless and could do no more harm. They were left alone to take care of their wounded and to bury their dead in accordance with their own customs.

Pashen was found hiding in one of the inner tents. He looked terrified after his ordeal and was detained without protest. One of the houses whose door had already been repaired served as his jail.

Chellish posted well-armed guards around the tent which contained the transmitter and instructed one of the men to push the black button of the set every 4 hours and 48 minutes.

Another chain of guards ringed the camp in order to snuff out any flickering of a renewed fighting spirit of the Whistlers. These precautions seemed adequate to Chellish and he returned with men and machines to Greenwich.

* * * *

The next morning Chellish began the construction of the bomb. The mechanism of the fuse, which had to unite the 2 halves of the bomb to a supercritical mass at the right moment, could be built without his

supervision but he had to be present at the reshaping of the fissionable matter extracted from the 2 reactors. Since the bomb was to form another sphere, the fissionable matter had to be shaped into 2 hemispheres. It was inevitable that chips were scattered which, though tiny, were very dangerous due to their long-lasting radioactivity. Chellish insisted that the men working on this job be protected by anti-radiation suits and that the tools be buried after they used them. The shop where the work was performed was to be sealed and nobody would be allowed to enter it in the future.

Chellish tried to calculate the explosive force of the bomb. He found it necessary to install a reflector shield for the fuse in order to avoid any unnecessary risk. Provided with this shield the bomb had, according to his computations, a detonating force of 15,000 pounds of TNT. However Chellish conceded that he could have made an error of 30% on the high or low side, having no means available to refine his calculations.

This powerful if minuscule bomb compared to those produced on Earth raised new problems which Chellish had so far given little thought.

It was reasonable to assume that the huge spaceship of the Whistlers would land at the same spot as before when it returned at the end of 4 months. This spot was located at a distance of 8 kilometres from Greenwich. As the wreck of the *Adventurous* lay between that landing place and the town there was no need to fear the direct effect of the bomb but the radioactive fallout of the bomb could have created a great hazard to Greenwich.

He endeavoured to estimate the total effect of the radiation caused by the bomb and concluded that it would be advisable to evacuate Greenwich for the 2nd time. But this time it would be unsafe to return so that they would be compelled to dismantle the houses and to rebuild the town at another place where they would not be exposed to the fallout.

Chellish did his best to convince the People's Assembly of the necessity of this precaution. Although his suggestion was not greeted with great enthusiasm, the members finally realized that it was an unavoidable measure.

Furthermore he prevailed upon the colonists to continue the cultivation of the fields despite the tense situation. A number of the assembly delegates were of the opinion that other more important matters should be tackled before tending the fields but Chellish looked to the future and worried about diseases that could be caused by deficiencies of the concentrated canned foods they depended on. He succeeded in presenting his view so ably that the assembly accepted his arguments and resolved to resume planting of the grain on an area of 40 square kilometres.

Thus the agricultural machines—with the exception of 2 whose reactors were being converted to the bomb—moved out to the farm land again and peace quickly returned to Grautier after the ambush on the camp of the intruders... although the calm was very deceptive.

* * * *

For the next 2 weeks after defeating the Whistlers, Chellish seemed to suffer some secret anxieties. He was not his usual cheerful self and Mullon, who considered himself his friend, kept inquiring about his trouble. However, he didn't learn the reason until the day Chellish stated with a sigh of relief: "I believe

we're out of the woods now."

"I'm happy to hear that. What woods?" Mullon asked.

"Think for a moment," Chellish explained, "what could've happened if Pashen had lied to us when we, asked him about the transmitter. Let's say he had given us a wrong interval for the routine signal for some reason or other. What do you think would've happened?"

Mullon spread out his arms. "Very simple: the Whistlers back home would've jumped into their spaceship and scooted to Grautier to straighten the matter out."

"Right," Chellish agreed. "But they didn't do it; therefore Pashen's information was correct."

Mullon looked surprised. "How do you know that?"

"The distance between Grautier and Myrtha 12, the home planet of the Whistlers, is roughly 400 million kilometres at this time. Capt. Bailey estimates that the spaceship of the Whistlers attains a maximum speed of no more than 300,000 meters per second. This means that it'll take them at least 10 days to reach Grautier after leaving Myrtha 12. I'd think that the Whistlers'd have been in a great hurry to come here if they had detected something unkosh. Now it's been 2 weeks since we've given the Whistlers a drubbing and they haven't shown up yet. This leads me to believe that in all probability they didn't notice anything wrong yet. Does this sound logical to you?"

"Perfectly," Mullon replied, deeply impressed.

* * * *

At the end of the 2nd month a construction crew began to build an encampment at the banks of the river flowing near Greenwich. Inside the encampment the people of Greenwich could be protected in case of emergency against wind and weather if they had to seek refuge from the effects of the bomb before their houses had been erected again. If necessary the encampment could be shielded by canvas from above.

Chellish estimated that it would take about 3 or 4 days from the time of the evacuation to the restoration of the homes. This was not too much time for the colonists to spend out in the open since they were already used to many hardships.

The site was located about 20 kilometres northeast of Greenwich and outside the bomb's range of destruction. The new town of Greenwich was to be founded again in the same vicinity.

At the end of 3 months the 180 prisoners, who had remained quiet and obedient all the time, were also transferred with their low-pressure tents along the river. Only the transmitter was left at its original location to avoid any possible damage or interruption during the transport.

Meanwhile the farming of the 40 square kilometres of land had progressed to the point where the seed had germinated. According to the opinion of their experts they could indeed expect a 2000-fold yield, a harvest which the Whistlers had demanded. The grain stalks soon became as thick as fingers and the sprouting spikes seemed to grow to the size of ears of corn. The Whistlers would have won first prize

with their grain in an agricultural exhibition on Earth.

* * * *

The last days of the 3rd month were spent with increasing apprehension. Chellish didn't want to begin the evacuation of Greenwich earlier than necessary and he waited for Capt. Blailey's signal. Blailey, with his instruments aboard the Gazelle, would be able to detect the hostile spaceship in sufficient time to let the settlers occupy the encampment at the Green River without haste. Now that the river had unexpectedly gained greater importance they had given it a name.

Nobody except Mullon was aware of the secret connections Chellish enjoyed with their unseen guardians. Some settlers were disheartened enough to call him irresponsible and the braver men were merely puzzled by his delaying tactics. However Chellish faced the reproaches with calm in the knowledge that all resentment would evaporate the moment the first bomb exploded.

On the morning of April 15th by the new Grautier calendar, Chellish was awakened by the buzzing of the transceiver on his wristband. He tuned the little set for reception.

"Flower of Hawaii," Blailey announced in a crisp voice.

"The Flower of Hawaii is now in Tahiti," Chellish answered.

"We've tracked a spaceship coming from the direction of Myrtha 12," Blailey informed him. "Distance 25×10^9 , velocity 900,000. It's already begun to decelerate; it seems to be in no hurry."

"Thank you," Chellish replied. "Did you monitor the rate of deceleration? When will the ship arrive here?"

"Between 37 and 40 hours. Is everything under control over there?"

"Yes, sir," Chellish confirmed.

"Fine, I'll keep my wheels spinning (Ref. prayer wheels - equivalent of old phrase of keeping one's fingers crossed.). I guess we'll have more to talk about later on."

"Yes?" Chellish drawled.

"Yes. Terra has been kept up to date on the local events. They expressed high regard for the determination of the settlers and they're willing to support them in their fight against the Whistlers. Or did you think by any chance that the annihilation of a single spaceship would ensure peace for all times?"

"Of course not, sir."

"There you are! From the moment the bomb goes off, Grautier will be in a state of alarm. Although we're still alone on Grautier, we can expect to receive reinforcement by a cruiser of the Terra class when the situation becomes serious."

Chellish suppressed a shout of joy. All Bailey could hear was a grunt.

"What did you say?" Bailey inquired. "Nothing? Well, I've heard through the grapevine that Myrtha 12 has been picked as a base for our fleet. The place must be more important than I can see. Do a good job! Is there anything you need?"

"No, thank you," Chellish replied. "Let the colonists prove their own mettle."

"Crosch! (21st century exclamation equivalent to 'wow!')" Bailey exclaimed, finishing the conversation. "My compliments!"

* * * *

The evacuation of Greenwich began at sunrise. By midday half the inhabitants had reached the encampment at the Green River and by 30 o'clock nobody was left in town except 5 men who were responsible for the bomb.

Bailey had called Chellish once more to advise him that the spaceship could be expected to land on Grautier between 7:30 and 8, local time.

The bomb was loaded on one of the vehicles, which was driven close to the landing place after sundown. If the vessel of the Whistlers touched down at the same place as the first time it would be within 200 meters of the bomb's deadly range.

"What if they choose some other place?" Mullon asked.

Chellish cast a sideways glance at him. "Then one of us'll hop on the machine and drive it close enough."

"But the Whistlers are sure to spy it and become alarmed."

"There's no getting away from that," Chellish admitted, "although the risk'll be less than you might think because they'll arrive when it's still dark. Besides we'll keep our helicopter ready and if necessary the driver of the machine can be quickly picked up. You must keep in mind that the spaceship they have is rather unwieldy. They can't make lightning starts and we can trigger our bomb before they can take off. By the way, what time have you got?"

Mullon gave him the time and Chellish said: "We'll have to press the black button again in 2 hours or they might become suspicious at the last moment."

They stopped the vehicle and returned to town on foot.

* * * *

Chellish had snoozed for awhile. The others—Mullon, Milligan, O'Bannon and Wolley—were unable to sleep. They sat in O'Bannon's house around the table on which the device for the ignition of the bomb stood.

When Chellish got up and entered the room he could hear Wolley say: "It can give you the creeps. All I have to do here is flick a little switch and pandemonium will reign 10 kilometres away."

Chellish yawned. "If you get a kick out of it you can do it pretty soon. What time is it? Not yet 6 o'clock. This waiting is a pain in the neck. Have you got a cup of coffee for me?"

"Drink as much as you like," O'Bannon muttered, bringing a large can of coffee. "The cups are over there."

Chellish poured himself a cup and asked: "Did you transmit the signal?"

"Certainly," Mullon confirmed. "Right on the dot."

Chellish blew on his coffee. As if trying to take his companions' minds off the Whistlers he said: "I've been thinking about the grain. I'm afraid we won't be able to use the 2 kilometres of grain in the west. It'll be contaminated by the fallout."

O'Bannon responded immediately on the subject. "That would be 6 square kilometres out of 42. I think we can stand to lose that much."

"And as far as the houses are concerned," Chellish continued, "we'll have to thoroughly wash all components in the river before we assemble them again. We must remove the radioactive dust."

"Do you think it's good enough to wash it off?" Mullon asked.

"Yes, I'm sure. Don't we have plenty of radiation counters to check it over?"

Mullon nodded. "About 30 instruments. We've thought of it already."

Wolley got up and went outside. He seemed to be unable to listen to the conversation.

"His nerves are getting thin," O'Bannon laughed but his laughter sounded as if he didn't feel much better than Wolley.

Shortly before 7 o'clock Chellish talked for the last time to Blailey.

"The ship is coming in right on the button," Blailey called in. "It won't miss the old target by a centimetre."

"Where are you that you can see all this?" Chellish asked.

"We're concealed in a narrow mountain pass," Blailey replied. "They can't spot us with radar and they have nothing else."

"How much longer will it take them?"

"30 to 40 minutes," Blailey predicted. "They have cut off the plasma propulsion engine and are using an

artificial gravitation field to float down as gently as a falling leaf."

Chellish mused for a moment. "Isn't it strange that they have already developed such sophisticated methods and still fly around in these old-fashioned contraptions?"

Chellish imagined he could see Blailey shrug his shoulders as he answered: "Science sometimes takes the strangest detours, my dear Chellish. For instance we knew all about the quantum theory on Earth before we knew much about the inner structure of the atom."

Chellish had his doubts about the validity of this comparison but he preferred not to argue the point.

* * * *

The little band of resisters carried the ignition box out of town and Mullon followed them in the helicopter. He landed 2 kilometres south of the town and was soon joined by his companions at the rendezvous.

At 6:25 the familiar red light came into view and slowly descended from the sky. At the same time they began to hear a soft high-pitched droning sound.

Milligan and O'Bannon took various sightings of the light and determined that the spaceship would touch the ground no more than 50 meters from its goal.

"That will suit us just fine," Chellish said tersely. Mullon pass the word!"

Mullon pulled the antenna out of his walkie-talkie and switched it on. He pressed it against his ear and heard a voice answer: "This is Stokes. What's the latest?"

"OK. Ignition in one minute!" Mullon held his breath.

* * * *

There it was!

A gigantic ball of fire ascended in the south with the brilliance of 20 suns. The huge wreck of the *Adventurous* looked like a small speck at its lower edge. This was the spectacle as observed from the Green River.

Chellish and his 4 companions could see only a flood of light bursting in front of them. They covered in a small trough in the ground behind a shield of metal-plastic to protect them against the heat radiation. After the initial flash of light they pulled the shield over their bodies and waited with bated breath till the pressure wave and the thunderous roar of the explosion had swept over them.

When the worst was over they boarded their helicopter and flew back. In the south a glowing red column of smoke was rising straight into the dark sky.

* * * *

Luckily a strong wind coming from the jungle in the east pushed the fallout up against the mountains in the west. Eventually the fallout would come down in the rain at the foot of the hills and run off into the river in diminishing strength.

2 days after the explosion they inspected the terrain from the helicopter. The pilot and his companion wore special clothes to ward off the perilous radiation. They found a large crater but no trace of the Whistlers' spaceship. The magnitude of the radiation at 200 meters above the centre of the crater was almost 1 roentgen per hour and it must have been considerably worse on the ground.

As Chellish had foreseen, a wreck of the *Adventurous* had taken the brunt of the explosion and held it back from Greenwich. Although the *Adventurous* was located only a few kilometres from the bomb when it went off, it didn't move a centimetre. Its side facing the bomb was extremely radioactive but there was virtually no danger inside the vessel.

In Greenwich only a few windows were shattered. Nothing else was damaged. The radiation measured 1 milli-roentgen per hour, which amounted to 4 times as much as the usual degree of background radiation.

Chellish gave instructions to take the houses down as quickly as possible and to transport them to their new location before the wind changed. The moving team simplified the job by throwing the components into the river as soon as they reached its bank and letting them float down to their destination. When they picked them up again at the building site, all radioactive dust had been safely rinsed away.

The reconstruction of the town of Greenwich proceeded with amazing speed. Because of the insignificant danger by radioactivity, most able-bodied men shared in the task and on the 5th of May the little town was established again 20 kilometres away.

The families moved in and were happy to live in their old homes instead of camping out. They were elated that the Whistlers' 2nd attempt to interfere with their lives had been nipped in the bud and thought that it would be the last they had seen of them on Grautier. Those few who had their reservations preferred to keep silent about their troubled minds.

Chellish had taken a small circle of men into his confidence and informed them that Terra was holding a mighty and benevolent hand over their future fate. This disclosure was greeted with great enthusiasm and their troubles almost vanished.

A careful study of the vast wheat field showed that only a narrow stretch along one fringe was contaminated by the radiation. The strip was mowed down and burned when the wind was favourable. The rest was getting ready to be harvested and everybody's mouth watered at the thought of freshly baked bread.

Chellish intended to remain in Greenwich until normal conditions had returned and then he wanted to pay

a visit to Capt. Blailey with Mullon and O'Bannon. He anticipated more schemes from the Whistlers and wanted to devise coördinated preparations. Since Greenwich was entitled to the status of an independent colony, as based on the judgment against the banished people, it was Blailey's duty to consult with the President of the colony and to defer to his decisions.

The captured Whistlers bore the fate of their huge spaceship with lassitude. It seemed that they were reconciled to the idea that any resistance to the Earthlings was futile. They were willing to cooperate with the colonists to the best of their ability and as a token of their good will they gave the colonists lessons in flying their surrendered airplanes.

On the 2nd of June, Mullon and O'Bannon departed with Chellish from Greenwich, taking Pashen with them, because it would have been too difficult to mete out adequate justice to the traitor in the young colony of Grautier. Chellish assured Pashen that he was not in peril of his life on Terra but that mankind would see to it that his peculiar concepts of loyalty and truthfulness could do no more harm to his fellow men.

CONTENTS

[1/ KHEK-KHEK-KHEK!](#)

[2/ THE SIEGE OF GREENWICH](#)

[3/ SLAVES OF THE WHISTLERS](#)

[4/ THE KEY TO THE FORBIDDEN DOOR](#)

[5/ ATTACKING THE ALIENS](#)

[6/ BOMB BRIGHT: 20 SUNS](#)

THE SHIP OF THINGS TO COME

THE GUARDIANS

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THE SHIP OF THINGS TO COME

Son

Of

Rhodan

YOU'VE BEEN WAITING TO MEET HIM. YOU WILL IN—

INTERLUDE ON SILIKO 5

By

Kurt Brand

