

Science Fiction

# Double Dare

By Robert Silverberg

  
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BY THE TIME the spaceship had finished jiggling and actually stood firmly on Domerangi soil, Justin Marner was beginning to doubt his sanity.

"We must be crazy," he said. "We *must* be."

The other Earthman, who had been gazing out the viewplate at the green-and-gold alien vista, glanced around suddenly at Marner's remark. "Huh?"

"There are limits to which one goes in proving a point," Marner said. He indicated the scene outside. "This little journey exceeds the limits. Now that we're here, Kemridge, I'm sure of it. *Nobody* does things like this."

Kemridge shrugged sourly. "Don't be silly Justin. You know why we're here, and you know how come we're here. This isn't any time to—"

"All right," Marnar said. "I take it all back." He stared for a moment at his delicate, tapering fingers—the fingers that could have belonged to a surgeon, were they not the property of a top-rank technical engineer. "Don't pay any attention to whatever I just said. It's the strain that's getting me."

The door of the cabin chimed melodiously.

"Come in," said Kemridge.

\* \* \* \*

The door slid open and a Domerangi, clad in a bright yellow sash, gray-green buskins, and a glittering diadem of precious gems, stepped heavily into the cabin. He extended two of his five leathery tentacles in welcome.

"Hello, gentlemen. I see you've come through the trip in fine shape."

"What's going on now, Plorvash?" Marner asked.

"The ship has landed at a spaceport just outside the city," the alien said. "I've come to take you to your quarters. We're giving you two the finest accommodations our planet can offer. We want your working conditions to be of the best."

"Glad to hear it." Marner flicked a glance at his companion. "They're most considerate, aren't they, Dave?"

The taller of the two Earthmen nodded gravely. "Definitely."

Plorvash grinned. "Suppose you come with me now. You would like to be well rested before you undertake your task. After all, you should be at your best, since planetary pride is at stake."

"Of course," Marner said.

"The test will begin as soon as you wish. May I offer you good luck?"

"We won't need it," Kemridge stated grimly. "It's not a matter of luck at all. It's brains—brains and sweat."

"Very well," Plorvash said. "This is what you're here to prove. It ought to be amusing, in any case—whatever the outcome may be."

Both Earthmen tried to look calm and confident, absolutely sure of themselves and their skill.

They merely managed to look rigidly worried.

\* \* \* \*

Statisticians have no records on the subject, but it is an observed phenomenon that the most serious differences of opinion generally originate in bars. It had been in a bar at 46th Street and Sixth Avenue that Justin Marner had ill-advisedly had

words with a visiting Domerangi, a month before, and it had been in the same bar that the train of events that had brought the two Earthmen to Domerang V had started—and never stopped gaining momentum.

It had been a simple altercation at first. Marner had been reflectively sipping a whisky sour, and Kemridge, seated to his left with his long legs uncomfortably scrunched up, had been toying with a double Scotch. The Domerangi had entered the bar with a characteristically ponderous stride.

Though contact with Domerang V had been made more than a century before, Domerangi were still rare sights in New York. Marner and Kemridge knew this one, though—he was attached to the Domerangi Consulate on 66th Street and Third, and they had had dealings with him a year ago in the matter of some circuit alignments for the building's lighting system. Domerangi,

with their extraordinary peripheral vision, prefer subdued, indirect lighting, and Marner and Kemridge had designed the lighting plot for the Consulate.

The Domerangi spotted them immediately and eased his bulk onto the stool next to them. "Ah, the two clever engineers," the alien rumbled. "You remember me, of course?"

"Yes," Marner said quickly. "How's the lighting job working out?"

"As well as could be expected." The Domerangi waved toward the bartender. "Barkeep! Two beers, please."

"What do you mean by that?" Kemridge demanded as the beers were drawn and set on the bar.

"Just one moment, please." The alien curled two tentacles gently around the beers and poured one into each of the two feeding-mouths at the sides of his face. "Marvelous liquid, your



beer. The one point where Earth is clearly superior to Domerang is in brewing.”

“To get back to the lights—” Kemridge prodded.

“Oh, yes,” the alien said. “The lights. Well, they're a pretty fair job—as good as we could have hoped for from a second-rate technology.”

“Now hold on a minute!” Marner said hotly, and that was how it started.

\* \* \* \*

“I wish we'd kept our mouths shut,” Marner said glumly. He stared balefully at the spotless ceiling of the hotel room in which the Domerangi had installed them.

Kemridge whirled and glared down at the smaller man. “Listen, Justin: we're here and we're going to show them up and go home rich and famous. Got that?”

"Okay," Marner said. He ran a finger along his thin lower lip. "I'm sorry I keep popping off like this. But it does seem screwy to have gone to this extent just to prove a point that came up in a barroom debate."

"I know. But we wouldn't have come here if the State Department hadn't heard about the argument and thought it needed settling. The Domerangi have been acting lordly about their technology as long as we've known them. I think it's a great idea to send a couple of honest-to-Christmas Terran engineers up here to show them once and for all who's got what it takes."

"But suppose we *don't* show them?"

"We will! Between the two of us, we can match anything they throw at us. Can't we?"

Marner smiled gloomily. "Sure we can," he said without conviction. "I haven't doubted it for one minute."

Kemridge walked to the door and, with a swift searching motion of his fingers, found the plate that covered the door mechanism. He unclipped it.

"Look in here, for example," he said, after a moment's scrutiny. "Simple cybernetic mechanism. I don't quite figure the way this green ceramic relay down here controls the power flow, but it's nothing we couldn't dope out, given a screwdriver and a little spare time."

Marner stood on tiptoes and peered in. "Perfectly understandable gadget," he commented. "Not nearly as efficient as our kind, either."

"That's just the point," Kemridge said. "These Domerangi aren't half the sharks they think they are. We stipulated that we

could duplicate anything they gave us, right? With our natural savvy and a little perspiration, we ought to be able to match the best gadget they test us with. If we follow through up here and those two Domerangi engineers on Earth mess up their half of the test, then we've done it. The State Department's counting on our versatility. That's all we need, Justin—cleverness!”

Marner's eyes lit up. “Dave, I'm sorry I was so pig-headed a minute ago. We'll give them the business, all right!”

He stood up a little higher and gingerly extended a hand into the gaping servomechanism in the wall.

“What are you doing?” Kemridge asked.

“Never mind. Get on the phone and tell Plorvash that we'll be ready to get to work tomorrow. While you're doing that, I want to fool with this relay. Might as well get some practice now!” He was radiant with new-found enthusiasm.

\* \* \* \*

When Plorvash knocked on the door the following morning, the mood was still on them. They were clear-eyed, wide awake, and firmly convinced they could master any problem.

“Who's there?” Marner asked loudly.

“Me,” the Domerangi said. “Plorvash.”

Instantly the door flew open and the dumbfounded alien charge d'affaires was confronted with the sight of the two Earthmen still snug in their beds. He peered behind the door and in the closet.

“Who opened the door?” he asked suspiciously.

Marner sat up in bed and grinned. “Try it again. Go outside and call out ‘Plorvash’ the way you just did.”

The alien lumbered out, pulling the door shut behind him. When he was outside, he said his name again and the door

opened immediately. He thundered across the threshold and looked from Marner to Kemridge. "What did you do?"

"We were experimenting with the door-opener last night," Kemridge said. "And before we put it back together, we decided it might be fun to rig up a modified vocoder circuit that would open the door automatically at the sound of the syllables 'Plorvash' directed at it from outside. It works very nicely."

The alien scowled. "Ah—yes. Very clever. Now as to the terms of this test you two are to engage in: We've prepared a fully equipped laboratory for you in Central Sqorvik—that's a suburb not far from here—and we've set up two preliminary problems for you, as agreed. When you've dealt with those—if you've dealt with those—we'll give you a third."

"And if we don't deal with them successfully?"

"Why, then you'll have failed to demonstrate your ability."

"Reasonable enough," Marner said. "But just when do we *win* this thing? Do you go on giving us projects till we miss?"

"That would be the ultimate proof of your ability, wouldn't it?" Plorvash asked. "But you'll be relieved to know that we have no such plans. According to the terms of the agreement between ourselves and your government, the test groups on each planet will be required to carry out no more than three projects." The alien's two mouths smiled unpleasantly. "We'll consider successful completion of all three projects as ample proof of your ability."

"I don't like the way you say that," Kemridge objected. "What's up your sleeve?"

"My sleeve? I don't believe I grasp the idiom," Plorvash said.

"Never mind. Just a Terran expression," said Kemridge.

\* \* \* \*

A car was waiting for them outside the hotel—a long, low job with a pulsating flexible hood that undulated in a distressing fashion, like a monstrous metal artery.

Plorvash slid the back door open. “Get in. I’ll take you to the lab to get started.”

Marner looked at the alien, then at Kemridge. Kemridge nodded. “How about one for the road?” Marner suggested.

“Eh?”

“Another idiom,” he said. “I mean a drink. Alcoholic beverage. Stimulant of some kind. You catch?”

The alien grinned nastily. “I understand. There’s a dispensary on the next street. We don’t want to rush you on this thing, anyway.” He pointed to the moving roadway. “Get aboard and we’ll take a quick one.”



They followed the Domerangi onto the moving strip and a moment later found themselves in front of a domed structure planted just off the roadway.

"It doesn't look very cozy," Kemridge commented as they entered. A pungent odor of ether hit their nostrils. Half a dozen Domerangi were lying on the floor, holding jointed metal tubes. As they watched, Plorvash clambered down and sprawled out on his back.

"Come join me," he urged. "Have a drink." He reached for a tube that slithered across the floor toward him and fitted it into his left feeding mouth.

"This is a bar?" Kemridge asked unhappily. "It looks more like the emergency ward of a hospital."

Plorvash finished drinking and stood up, wiping a few drops of green liquid from his jaw. "Good," he said. "It's not beer, but it's good stuff. I thought you two wanted to drink."

Marner sniffed the ether-laded air in dismay and shook his head. "We're not—thirsty. It takes time to get used to alien customs, I suppose."

"I suppose so," Plorvash agreed. "Very well, then. Let's go to the lab, shall we?"

\* \* \* \*

The laboratory was, indeed, a sumptuous place. The two Earthmen stood at the entrance to the monstrous room and marveled visibly.

"We're impressed," Marner said finally to the Domerangi.

"We want to give you every opportunity to succeed," Plorvash said. "This is just as important for us as it is for you."

Marner took two or three steps into the lab and glanced around. To the left, an enormous oscilloscope wiggled greenly at him. The right-hand wall was bristling with elaborate servomechanisms of all descriptions. The far wall was a gigantic toolchest, and workbenches were spotted here and there. The lighting—indirect, of course—was bright and eye-easing. It was the sort of research setup a sane engineer rarely bothers even to dream of.

“You're making it too easy for us,” said Kemridge. “It can't be hard to pull off miracles in a lab like this.”

“We are honest people. If you can meet our tests, we'll grant that you're better than we are. *If* you can, that is. If you fail, it can't be blamed on poor working conditions.”

“Fair enough,” Kemridge agreed. “When are you ready to start?”

"Immediately." Plorvash reached into the bagging folds of his sash and withdrew a small plastic bubble, about four inches long, containing a creamy-white fluid.

"This is a depilator," he said. He squeezed a few drops out of the bubble into the spoonlike end of one tentacle and rubbed the liquid over the thick, heavy red beard that sprouted on his lower jaw. A streak of beard came away as he rubbed. "It is very useful." He handed the bubble to Marner. "Duplicate it."

"But we're engineers, not chemists," Marner protested.

"Never mind, Justin." Kemridge turned to the alien. "That's the first problem. Suppose you give us the second one at the same time, just to make things more convenient. That way, we'll each have one to work on."

Plorvash frowned. "You want to work on two projects at once? All right." He turned, strode out, and returned a few moments

later, carrying something that looked like a large mousetrap inside a cage. He handed it to Kemridge.

“We use this to catch small house pests,” Plorvash explained. “It’s a self-baiting trap. Most of our house pests are color-sensitive and this trap flashes colors as a lure. For example, it does this to trap vorks—” he depressed a lever in the back and the trap glowed a lambent green— “and this to catch flaihs.” Another lever went down and the trap radiated warm purple. An unmistakable odor of rotting vegetation emanated from it as well.

“It is, as you see, most versatile,” the alien went on. “We’ve supplied you with an ample number of vermin of different sorts—they’re at the back of the lab, in those cages—and you ought to be able to rig a trap to duplicate this one. At least, I hope you can.”

"Is this all?" Kemridge asked.

Plorvash nodded. "You can have all the time you need. That was the agreement."

"Exactly," Kemridge said. "We'll let you know when we've gotten somewhere."

"Fine," said Plorvash.

After he had left, Marner squeezed a couple of drops of the depilatory out onto the palm of his hand. It stung and he immediately shook it off.

"Better not fool with that till we've run an analysis," Kemridge suggested. "If it's potent enough to remove Domerangi beards, it's probably be a good skin-dissolver for Earthmen. Those babies have tough hides."

Marner rubbed his hand clean hastily. "What do you think of the deal in general?"

"Pretty soft," Kemridge said. "It shouldn't take more than a week to knock off both these things, barring complications. Seems to me they could pick tougher projects than these."

"Wait till the final one," warned Marner. "These are just warm-ups."

\* \* \* \*

Four days later, Marner called Plorvash from the lab. The alien's bulky form filled the screen. "Hello," he said mildly. "What's new?"

"We've finished the job," Marner reported.

"Both of them?"

"Naturally."

"I'll be right over."

Plorvash strode into the lab about fifteen minutes later, and the two Earthmen, who were busy with the animal cages at the back of the lab, waved in greeting.

"Stay where you are," Kemridge called loudly. He reached up, pressed a switch, and thirty cages clanged open at once.

As a horde of Domerangi vermin came bounding, slithering, crawling, and rolling across the floor toward Plorvash, the alien leaped back in dismay. "What kind of trick is this?"

"Don't worry," Marner said, from the remotest corner of the lab. "It'll all be over in a second."

The animals ignored Plorvash and, to his surprise, they made a beeline for a complex, humming arrangement of gears and levers behind the door. As they approached, it began flashing a series of colors, emanating strange odors, and making curious clicking noises. When the horde drew closer, jointed arms



suddenly sprang out and scooped them wholesale into a hopper that gaped open at floor level. Within a moment, they were all stowed away inside.

Marner came across the lab, followed by Kemridge. "We've improved on your model," he said. "We've built a better trap. Your version can deal with only one species at a time."

Plorvash gulped resoundingly. "Very nice. Quite remarkable, in fact."

"We have the schematics in our room," said Kemridge. "The trap may have some commercial value on Domerang."

"Probably," Plorvash admitted. "How'd you do on the depilator?"

"That was easy," Marner said. "With the setup you gave us, chemical analysis was a snap. Only I'm afraid we've improved on the original model there, too."

"What do you mean?"

Marner rubbed the side of his face uneasily. "I tried our stuff on myself, couple of days ago, and my face is still smooth as a baby's. The effect seems to be permanent."

"You'll submit samples, of course," Plorvash said. "But I think it's fairly safe to assume that you've passed through the first two projects—ah—reasonably well. Curiously, your counterparts on Earth also did well on their preliminaries, according to our Consul in New York."

"Glad to hear it," Marner lied. "But the third problem tells the tale, doesn't it?"

"Exactly," said Plorvash. "Let's have that one now, shall we?"

\* \* \* \*

A few minutes later, Marner and Kemridge found themselves staring down at a complicated nest of glittering relays and tubes

that seemed to power an arrangement of pistons and rods. Plorvash had carried it in with the utmost delicacy and had placed it on a workbench in the middle of the vast laboratory.

“What is it?” Marner asked.

“You'll see,” promised the alien. He fumbled in the back of the machine, drew forth a cord, and plugged it into a wall socket. A small tube in the heart of the machine glowed cherry red and the pistons began to move, first slowly, then more rapidly. After a while, it was humming away at an even, steady clip, pistons barreling back and forth in purposeless but inexorable motion.

Kemridge bent and peered as close to the workings of the gadget as he dared. “It's an engine. What of it?”

“It's a special kind of engine,” Plorvash said. “Suppose you take the plug out.”

The Earthman worked the plug from its socket and looked at the machine. Then the plug dropped from his limp hand and skittered to the floor.

"It—doesn't stop going, does it?" Kemridge asked quietly. "The pistons keep on moving."

"This is our power source," Plorvash said smugly. "We use them in vehicles and other such things. It's the third problem."

"We'll give it a try," Marner tried to say casually.

"I'll be most interested in the results," Plorvash said, "And now I must bid you a good day."

"Sure," Marner said weakly. "Cheers."

They watched the broadbeamed alien waddle gravely out of the laboratory, waited till the door was closed, and glanced at the machine.

It was still moving.

Marner licked his lips and looked pleadingly at Kemridge.  
“Dave, can we build a perpetual-motion machine?”

\* \* \* \*

The Domerangi machine worked just as well plugged in or unplugged, once it had tapped some power source to begin with. The pistons threaded ceaselessly up and down. The basic components of the thing seemed simple enough.

“The first step to take,” Marner said, “is to shut the damned thing off so we can get a look at its innards.”

“How do we do that?”

“By reversing the power source, I suppose. Feed a negative pulse through that power input and that ought to do it. We'll have to reverse the polarity of the signal.”

Half an hour's hard work with the tools and solder had done that. They plugged the scrambled cord into the socket and the machine coughed twice and subsided.

"Okay," Marner said, rubbing his hands with an enthusiasm he did not feel. "Let's dig this baby apart and find out what makes it tick." He turned and stared meaningfully at Kemridge. "And let's adopt this as a working credo, Dave: inasmuch as the Domerangi have already built this thing, it's not impossible. Okay?"

"That seems to be the only basis we can approach it on," Kemridge agreed.

They huddled around the device, staring at the workings. Marner reached down and pointed at a part. "This thing is something like a tuned-plate feedback oscillator," he observed. "And I'll bet we've almost got a thyratron tube over here. Their

technology's a good approximation of ours. In fact, the whole thing's within our grasp, technically."

"Hmm. And the result is a closed regenerative system with positive feedback," Kemridge said dizzily. "Infinite energy, going round and round the cycle. If you draw off a hundred watts or so—well, infinity minus a hundred is still infinity!"

"True enough." Marner wiped a gleaming bead of perspiration from his forehead. "Dave, we're going to have to puzzle this thing out from scratch. And we don't dare fail."

He reached doggedly for a screwdriver. "Remember our motto. We'll use our natural savvy and a little perspiration, and we ought to do it."

Three weeks later, they had come up with their first trial model—which wobbled along for half an hour, then gave up.

And a month after that, they had a machine that didn't give up.

\* \* \* \*

Hesitantly, they sent for Plorvash. "There it is," Marner said, pointing to the bizarre thing that stood next to the original model. Both machines were humming blithely, plugs dangling from the sockets.

"It works?" Plorvash whispered, paling. "It hasn't stopped yet," Marner said. There were heavy rings under his eyes and his usually plump face was drawn, with the skin tight over his cheekbones. It had been two months of almost constant strain and both Earthmen showed it.

"It works, eh?" Plorvash asked. "*How?*"

"A rather complex hyperspace function," Kemridge said. "I don't want to bother explaining it now—you'll find it all in our



report—but it was quite a stunt in topology. We couldn't actually duplicate your model, but we achieved the same effect, which fulfills the terms of the agreement.”

“All as a matter of response to challenge,” said Marner. “We didn't think we could do it until we *had* to—so we did.”

“I didn't think you could do it, either,” Plorvash said hoarsely. He walked over and examined the machine closely. “It works, you say? Honestly, now?” His voice was strained.

“Of course,” Marner said indignantly. “We have just one question.” Kemridge pointed to a small black rectangular box buried deep in a maze of circuitry in the original model. “That thing down there—it nearly threw us. We couldn't get it open and so we had to bypass it and substitute a new system for it. What in blazes is it?”

Plorvash wheeled solidly around to face them. "That," he said in a strangled voice, "is the power source. It's a miniature photoelectric amplifier that should keep the model running for—oh, another two weeks or so. Then the jig would have been up."

"How's that?" Marner was startled.

"It's time to explain something to you," the alien said wearily. "*We don't have any perpetual-motion machines.* You've been cruelly hoaxed into inventing one for us. It's dastardly, but we didn't really think you were going to do it. It took some of our best minds to rig up the model we gave you, you know."

Marner drew up a lab stool and sat down limply, white-faced. Kemridge remained standing, his features blank with disbelief.

Marner said, "You mean we invented the thing and you didn't—you—"

Plorvash nodded. "I'm just as astonished as you are," he said. He reached for a lab stool himself and sat down. It groaned under his weight.

Kemridge recovered first. "Well," he said after a moment of silence, "now that it's all over, we'll take our machine and go back to Earth. This invalidates the contest, of course."

"I'm afraid you can't do that," Plorvash said. "By a statute enacted some seven hundred years ago, any research done in a Domerangi government lab is automatically government property. Which means, of course, that we'll have to confiscate your—ahem—project."

"That's out of the question!" Marner said hotly.

"And, furthermore, we intend to confiscate *you*, too. We'd like you to stay and show us how to build our machines."

"This is cause for war," Kemridge said. "Earth won't let you get away with this—this kidnapping!"

"Possibly not. But in view of the way things have turned out, it's the sanest thing we can do. And I *don't* think Earth will go to war over you."

"We demand to see our Consul," said Marner.

"Very well," Plorvash agreed. "It's within your rights, I suppose."

\* \* \* \*

The Earth Consul was a white-haired, sturdy gentleman named Culbertson, who arrived on the scene later that day.

"This is very embarrassing for all of us," the Consul said. He ran his hands nervously down his traditional pin-striped trousers, adjusting the crease.

"You can get us out of it, of course," Marner said. "That machine is our property and they have no right to keep us prisoners here to operate it, do they?"

"Not by all human laws. But the fact remains, unfortunately, that according to *their* laws, they have every right to your invention. And by the treaty Of 2716, waiving extraterritorial sovereignty, Earthmen on Domerang are subject to Domerangi laws, and vice versa." He spread his hands in a gesture of sympathetic frustration.

"You mean we're stuck here," Marner said bluntly. He shut his eyes, remembering the nightmare that was the Domerangi equivalent of a bar, thinking of the morbid prospect of spending the rest of his life on this unappetizing planet, all because of some insane dare. "Go on, tell us the whole truth."

The Consul put the palms of his hands together delicately. "We intend to make every effort to get you off, of course—naturally so, since we owe a very great debt to you two. You realize that you've upheld Earth's pride."

"Lot of good it did us," Marner grunted.

"Nevertheless, we feel anxious to make amends for the whole unhappy incident. I can assure you that we'll do everything in our power to make your stay here as pleasant and as restful as—"

"Listen, Culbertson," Kemridge said grimly. "We don't want a vacation here, not even with dancing girls twenty-four hours a day and soft violins in the background. We don't like it here. We want to go home. You people got us into this—now get us out."

The Consul grew even more unhappy-looking. "I wish you wouldn't put it that way. We'll do all we can." He paused for a

moment, deep in thought, and said, "There's one factor in the case that we haven't as yet explored."

"What's that?" Marnar asked uneasily.

"Remember the two Domerangi engineers who went to Earth on the other leg of this hookup?" The Consul glanced around the lab. "Is this place wired anywhere?"

"We checked," Kemridge said, "and you can speak freely. What do they have to do with us?"

Culbertson lowered his voice. "There's a slim chance for you. I've been in touch with authorities on Earth and they've been keeping me informed of the progress of the two Domerangi. You know they got through their first two projects as easily as you did."

The two Earthmen nodded impatiently.

The old diplomat smiled his apologies. "I hate to admit this, but it seems the people at the Earth end of this deal had much the same idea the Domerangi did."

"Perpetual motion, you mean?"

"Not quite," Culbertson said. "They rigged up a phony anti-gravity machine and told the Domerangi to duplicate it just as was done here. Our psychologies must be similar."

"And what happened?" Marner asked.

"Nothing, yet," the Consul said sadly. "But they're still working on it, I'm told. If they're as clever as they say they are, they ought to hit it sooner or later. You'll just have to be patient and sweat it out. We'll see to it that you're well taken care of in the meantime, of course, and—"

"I don't get it. What does that have to do with us?" Marner demanded.



"If they keep at it, they'll invent it eventually."

Marner scowled. "That may take years. It may take forever. They may *never* discover a workable anti-grav. Then what about us?"

The Consul looked sympathetic and shrugged.

A curious gleam twinkled in Kemridge's eye. He turned to Marner. "Justin, do you know anything about tensor applications and gravitational fields?"

"What are you driving at?" Marner said.

"We've got an ideal lab setup here. And I'm sure those two Domerangi down there wouldn't mind taking credit for someone else's anti-grav, if they were approached properly. What do you think?"

Marner brightened. "That's right—they must be just as anxious to get home as we are!"

“You mean,” said the Consul, “you'd build the machine and let us smuggle it to Earth so we could slip it to the Domerangi and use that as a talking-point for a trade and—”

He stopped, seeing that no one was listening to him, and looked around. Marner and Kemridge were at the far end of the lab, scribbling equations feverishly.

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