

What Now, Little Man?

by Mark Clifton

The mystery of what made the goonie tick tormented me for twenty years.

Why, when that first party of big game hunters came to Libo, why didn't the goonies run away and hide, or fight back? Why did they instantly, immediately, almost seem to say, "You want us to die, Man? For you we will do it gladly!" Didn't they have any sense of survival at all? How could a species survive if it lacked that sense?

"Even when one of the hunters, furious at being denied the thrill of the chase, turned a machine gun on the drove of them," I said to Paul Tyler, "they just stood there and let him mow them down."

Paul started to say something in quick protest, then simply looked sick.

"Oh, yes," I assured him. "One of them did just that. There was a hassle over it. Somebody reminded him that the machine gun was designed just to kill human beings, that it wasn't sporting to turn it on game. The hassle sort of took the edge off their fun, so they piled into their space yacht and took off for some other place where they could count on a chase before the kill."

I felt his sharp stare, but I pretended to be engrossed in measuring the height of Libo's second sun above the mountain range in the west. Down below us, from where we sat and smoked on Sentinel Rock, down in my valley and along the sides of the river, we could see the goonie herds gathering under their groves of pal trees before night fell.

Paul didn't take issue, or feed me that line about harvesting the game like crops, or this time even kid me about my contempt for Earthers. He was beginning to realize that all the old-timer Liboans felt as I did, and that there was reasonable justification for doing so. In fact, Paul was fast becoming Liboan himself. I probably wouldn't have told him the yarn about that first hunting party if I hadn't sensed it, seen the way he handled his own goonies, the affection he felt for them.

"Why were our animals ever called goonies, Jim?" he asked. "They're ... Well, you know the goonie."

I smiled to myself at his use of the possessive pronoun, but I didn't comment on it.

"That, too," I said, and knocked the dottle out of my pipe. "That came out of the first hunting party." I stood up and stretched to get a kink out of my left leg, and looked back toward the house to see if my wife had sent a goonie to call us in to dinner. It was a little early, but I stood a moment to watch Paul's team of goonies up in the yard, still folding their harness beside his rickshaw. I'd sold them to him, as yearlings, a couple years before, as soon as their second pelt showed they'd be a matched pair. Now they were mature young males, and as handsome a team as could be found anywhere on Libo.

I shook my head and marveled, oh, for maybe the thousandth time, at the impossibility of communicating the goonie to anyone who hadn't seen them. The ancient Greek sculptors didn't mind combining human and animal form, and somebody once said the goonie began where those sculptors left off. No human muscle cultist ever managed quite the perfect symmetry natural to the goonie—grace without calculation, beauty without artifice. Their pelts varied in color from the silver blond of this pair to a coal black, and

their huge eyes from the palest topaz to an emerald green, and from emerald green to deep-hued amethyst. The tightly curled mane spread down the nape and flared out over the shoulders like a cape to blend with the short, fine pelt covering the body. Their faces were like Greek sculpture, too, yet not human. No, not human. Not even humanoid, because—well, because, that was a comparison never made on Libo. That comparison was one thing we couldn't tolerate. Definitely, then, neither human nor humanoid.

I turned from watching the team which, by now, had finished folding their harness into neat little piles and had stretched out on the ground to rest beside the rickshaw. I sat back down and packed my pipe again, with a Libo weed we called tobacco.

"Why do we call them goonies?" I repeated Paul's question. "There's a big bird on Earth. Inhabits some of the South Sea islands, millions of them crowd together to nest. Most stupid creature on Earth, seems like, the way they behave on their nesting grounds. A man can hardly walk among them; they don't seem to know enough to move out of the way, and don't try to protect themselves or their nests. Some reason I don't know, it's called the Goonie Bird. Guess the way these animals on Libo behaved when that hunting party came and shot them down, didn't run away, hide, or fight, reminded somebody of that bird. The name stuck."

Paul didn't say anything for a while. Then he surprised me.

"It's called the Goonie Bird when it's on the ground," he said slowly. "But in the air it's the most magnificent flying creature known to man. In the air, it's called the albatross."

I felt a chill. I knew the legend, of course, the old-time sailor superstition. Kill an albatross and bad luck will haunt you, dog you all the rest of your days. But either Paul didn't know *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* or was too tactful a young man to make it plainer. I supplied the Libo colony with its fresh meat. The only edible animal on the planet was the goonie.

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Carson's Hill comes into the yarn I have to tell—in a way is responsible. Sooner or later almost every young tenderfoot finds it, and in his mind it is linked with anguish, bitterness, emotional violence, suppressed fury.

It is a knoll, the highest point in the low range of hills that separates my valley from the smaller cup which shelters Libo City. Hal Carson, a buddy of mine in the charter colony, discovered it. Flat on top, it is a kind of granite table surrounded by giant trees, which make of it a natural table surrounded by giant trees, which make of it a natural amphitheater, almost like a cathedral in feeling. A young man can climb up there and be alone to have it out with his soul.

At one time or another, most do. "*Go out to the stars, young man, and grow up with the universe!*" the posters say all over Earth. It has its appeal for the strongest, the brightest, the best. Only the dull-eyed breeders are content to stay at home.

In the Company recruiting offices they didn't take just anybody, no matter what his attitude was—no, indeed. Anybody, for example, who started asking questions about how and when he might get back home—with the fortune he would make—was coldly told that if he was already worrying about getting

back, he shouldn't be going.

Somehow, the young man was never quite sure how, it became a challenge to his bravery, his daring, his resourcefulness. It was a bait which a young fellow, anxious to prove his masculinity, the most important issue of his life, couldn't resist. The burden of proof shifted from the Company to the applicant, so that where he had started out cautiously inquiring to see if this offer might suit him, he wound up anxiously trying to prove he was the one they wanted.

Some wag in the barracks scuttlebutt once said, "They make you so afraid they won't take you, it never occurs to you that you'd be better off if they didn't."

"A fine mess," somebody else exclaimed, and let a little of his secret despair show through. "To prove you are a man, you lose the reason for being one."

That was the rub, of course.

Back when man was first learning how to misuse atomic power, everybody got all excited about the effects of radiation on germ plasm. Yet nobody seemed much concerned over the effects of unshielded radiation in space on that germ plasm—out from under the protecting blanket of Earth's atmosphere, away from the natural conditions where man had evolved.

There could be no normal colony of man here on Libo—no children. Yet the goonies, so unspeakably resembling man, could breed and bear. It gave the tenderfoot a smoldering resentment against the goonie which a psychologist could have explained; that wild, unreasoning fury man must feel when frustration is tied in with prime sex—submerged and festering because simple reason told the tenderfoot that the goonie was not to blame.

The tide of bitterness would swell up to choke the young tenderfoot there alone on Carson's Hill. No point to thinking of home, now. No point to dreaming of his triumphant return—space-burnt, strong, virile, remote with the vastness of space in his eyes—ever.

Unfair to the girl he had left behind that he should hold her with promises of loyalty, the girl, with ignorance equal to his own, who had urged him on. Better to let her think he had changed, grown cold, lost his love of her—so that she could fulfill her function, turn to someone else, some damned Company reject—but a reject who could still father children.

Let them. Let them strain themselves to populate the universe!

At this point the angry bitterness would often spill over into unmanly tears (somebody in the barracks had once said that Carson's Hill should be renamed Crying Hill, or Tenderfoot's Lament). And the tortured boy, despising himself, would gaze out over my valley and long for home, long for the impossible undoing of what had been done to him.

Yes, if there hadn't been a Carson's Hill, there wouldn't be a yarn to tell. But then, almost every place has a Carson's Hill, in one form or another, and Earthers remain Earthers for quite a while. They can go out to the stars in a few days or weeks, but it takes a little longer before they begin to grow up with the universe.

Quite a little longer, I was to find. Still ahead of me, I was to have my own bitter session there again, alone—an irony because I'd thought I'd come to terms with myself up there some twenty years ago.

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It is the young man who is assumed to be in conflict with his society, who questions its moral and ethical structures, and yet I wonder. Or did I come of age late, very late? Still, when I look back, it was the normal thing to accept things as we found them, to be so concerned with things in their relationship to us that we had no time for wonder about relationships not connected with us. Only later, as man matures, has time to reflect—has something left over from the effort to survive ...

When I first came to Libo, I accepted the goonie as an animal, a mere source of food. It was Company policy not to attempt a colony where there was no chance for self-support. Space shipping-rates made it impossible to supply a colony with food for more than a short time while it was being established. Those same shipping-rates make it uneconomical to ship much in the way of machinery, to say nothing of luxuries. A colony has to have an indigenous source of food and materials, and if any of that can also be turned into labor, all the better. I knew that. I accepted it as a matter of course.

And even as I learned about my own dead seed, I learned that the same genetic principles applied to other Earth life, that neither animal nor plant could be expected to propagate away from Earth. No, the local ecology had to be favorable to man's survival, else no colony. I accepted that; it was reasonable.

The colony of Libo was completely dependent on the goonie as the main source of its food. The goonie was an animal to be used for food, as is the chicken, the cow, the rabbit, on Earth. The goonie is beautiful, but so is the gazelle, which is delicious. The goonie is vaguely shaped like a human, but so is the monkey, which was once the prime source of protein food for a big part of Earth's population. I accepted all that, without question.

Perhaps it was easy for me. I was raised on a farm, where slaughtering of animals for food was commonplace. I had the average farm boy's contempt for the dainty young lady in the fashionable city restaurant who, without thought, lifts a bite of rare steak, dripping with blood, to her pearly teeth, but who would turn pale and retch at the very thought of killing an animal. Where did she think that steak came from?

At first we killed the goonies around our encampment which was to become Libo City: went out and shot them as we needed them, precisely as hunters do on Earth. In time we had to go farther and farther in our search for them, so I began to study them, in hope I could domesticate them. I learned one of their peculiarities—they were completely dependent upon the fruit of the pal tree, an ever-bearing tree. Each goonie had its own pal tree, and we learned by experiment that they would starve before they would eat the fruit from any other pal tree.

There was another peculiarity which we don't yet understand, and yet we see it in rudimentary form on Earth where game breeds heartily during seasons of plentiful food, and sparsely in bad years. Here, the goonie did not bear young unless there were unclaimed pal trees available, and did bear young up to a limit of such trees.

My future was clear, then. Obtain the land and plant the pal trees to insure a constant supply of meat for the colony. It was the farm boy coming out in me, no doubt, but no different from any farm boy who grows up and wants to own his own farm, his own cattle ranch.

I was a young man trying to build a secure future for himself. There was no thought of the goonie except as a meat supply. I accepted that as a matter of course. And as Libo City grew, I continued to increase my planting of pal trees in my valley, and my herds of goonies.

It was only later, much later, that I found the goonie could also be trained for work of various kinds. I accepted this, too, in the same spirit we trained colts on the farm to ride, to pull the plow, to work.

Perhaps it was this training, only for the crudest tasks at first, then later, calling for more and more skill, that proved my undoing. On the farm we separated our pet animals from the rest; we gave our pets names, but we never gave names to those destined for slaughter, nor formed any affection for them. This was taboo. I found myself carrying out the same procedures here. I separated those goonies I trained from the meat herds. Then I separated the common labor goonies from the skilled labor.

I should have stopped there—at least there. But when man's curiosity is aroused . . . Can we say to the research scientist, "You may ask this question, but you are forbidden to ask that one. You may take this step, but you must not take a second, to see what lies beyond." Can we say that to the human mind? I did not say it to myself.

I taught certain goonies to speak, to read, to write.

The goonies accepted this training in the same joyful exuberance they accepted everything else from man. I never understood it, not until now. Their whole behavior, their whole being seemed the same as greeted the first hunting party. "You want us to die, man? For you, we will do it gladly."

Whatever man wanted, the goonie gave, to the limit of his capacity. And I had not found that limit.

I took one step too many. I know that now.

And yet, should I not have taken that last step—teaching them to speak, to read, to write? The capacity was in them for learning it all the time. Was it finding it out that made the difference? But what kind of moral and ethic structure is it that depends on ignorance for its support?

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Miriam Wellman comes into the yarn, too. She was the catalyst. My destruction was not her fault. It would have come about anyway. She merely hastened it. She had a job to do; she did it well. It worked out as she planned, a cauterizing kind of thing, burning out a sore that was beginning to fester on Libo—to leave us hurting a little, but clean.

Important though she was, she still remains a little hazy to me, a little unreal. Perhaps I was already so deep into my quandary, without knowing it, that both people and things were a little hazy, and the problem deep within me my only reality.

I was in Libo City the day she landed from the tender that serviced the planets from the mother ship orbiting out in space. I saw her briefly from the barbershop across the street when she came out of the warehouse and walked down our short main street to the Company Administration Building. She was a dark-haired little thing, sharp-eyed, neither young nor old—a crisp, efficient career gal, she seemed to me. I didn't see any of the men on the street make a pass at her. She had the looks, all right, but not the look.

There weren't more than a dozen women on the whole planet, childless women who had forgone having children, who had raked up the exorbitant space fare and come on out to join their man anyhow; and the

men should have been falling all over Miriam Wellman—but they weren't. They just looked, and then looked at each other. Nobody whistled.

I got a little more of what had happened from the head warehouseman, who was a friend of mine. He smelled something wrong, he said, the minute the tender cut its blasts and settled down. Usually there's joshing, not always friendly, between the tender crew and the warehouse crew—the contempt of the spaceman for the landbound; the scorn of the landbound for the glamour-boy spacemen who think their sweat is wine.

Not today. The pilot didn't come out of his cabin at all to stretch his legs; he sat there looking straight ahead, and the ship's crew started hustling the dock loaders almost before the hatches opened for unloading a few supplies and loading our packages of libolines—the jewel stone which is our excuse for being.

She came down the gangplank, he said, gave a crisp, careless flick of her hand toward the pilot, who must have caught it out of the corner of his eye, for he nodded briefly, formally, and froze. Later we learned he was not supposed to tell us who she really was, but he did his best. Only we didn't catch it.

She came across the yard with all the human warehousemen staring but not stepping toward her. Only the goonies seemed unaware. In their fashion, laughing and playing, and still turning out more work than humans could, they were already cleaning out the holds and trucking the supplies over to the loading dock.

She came up the little flight of stairs at the end of the dock and approached Hal, the head warehouseman, who, he said, was by that time bug-eyed.

"Do you always let those creatures go around stark naked?" she asked in a low, curious voice. She waved toward the gangs of goonies.

He managed to get his jaw unhinged enough to stammer.

"Why, ma'am," he says he said, "they're only animals."

Nowadays, when he tells it, he claims he saw a twinkle of laughter in her eyes. I don't believe it. She was too skilled in the part she was playing.

She looked at him, she looked back at the goonies, and she looked at him again. By then he said he was blushing all over, and sweating as if the dry air of Libo was a steam room. It wasn't any trick to see how she was comparing, what she was thinking. And every stranger was warned, before she landed, that the one thing the easygoing Liboan wouldn't tolerate was comparison of goonie with man. Beside them we looked raw, unfinished, poorly done by an amateur. There was only one way we could bear it—there could be no comparison.

He says he knows he turned purple, but before he could think of anything else to say, she swept on past him, through the main aisle of the warehouse, and out the front door. All he could do was stand there and try to think of some excuse for living, he said.

She had that effect on people—she cut them down to bedrock with a word, a glance. She did it deliberately. Yes, she came as a Mass Psychology Therapist, a branch of pseudo-science currently epidemic on Earth which believed in the value of emotional purges whipped up into frenzies. She came as a prime troublemaker, as far as we could see at the time. She came to see that dear, fresh boys who were swarming out to conquer the universe didn't fall into the evil temptations of space.

She came at the critical time. Libo City had always been a small frontier spaceport, a lot like the old frontier towns of primitive Earth—a street of warehouses, commissaries, an Administration building, couple of saloons, a meeting hall, the barracks, a handful of cottages for the men with wives, a few more cottages built by pairs of young men who wanted to shake free of barracks life for a while, but usually went back to it. Maybe there should have been another kind of House, also, but Earth was having another of its periodic moral spasms, and the old women of the male sex who comprised the Company's Board of Directors threw up their hands in hypocritical horror at the idea of sex where there was no profit to be made from the sale of diapers and cribs and pap.

Now it was all changing. Libo City was mushrooming. The Company had made it into a shipping terminal to serve the network of planets still out beyond as the Company extended its areas of exploitation. More barracks and more executive cottages were going up as fast as goonie labor could build them. Hundreds of tenderfoot Earthers were being shipped in to handle the clerical work of the terminal. Hundreds of Earthers, all at once, to bring with them their tensions, their callousness, swaggering, boasting, cruelties and sadisms which were natural products of life on Earth—and all out of place here where we'd been able to assimilate a couple or so at a time, when there hadn't been enough to clique up among themselves; they'd had to learn a life of calmness and reason if they wanted to stay.

Perhaps Miriam Wellman was a necessity. The dear, fresh boys filled the meeting hall, overflowed it, moved the nightly meetings to the open ground of the landing field. She used every emotional trick of the rabble-rouser to whip them up into frenzies, made them drunk on emotion, created a scene of back-pounding, shouting, jittering maniacs. It was a good lesson for anybody who might believe in the progress of the human race toward reason, intelligence.

I had my doubts about the value of what she was doing, but for what it was, she was good. She knew her business.

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Paul Tyler put the next part of the pattern into motion. I hadn't send him since our talk about the first hunting party, but when we settled down in our living-room chairs with our pipes and our tall cool glasses, it was apparent he'd been doing some thinking. He started off obliquely.

"About three years ago," he said, as he set his glass back down on the table, "just before I came out here from Earth, I read a book by an Australian hunter of kangaroos."

The tone of his voice made it more than idle comment. I waited.

"This fellow *told* the reader, every page or so, how stupid the kangaroo is. But everything he said *showed* how intelligent it is, how perfectly it adapts to its natural environment, takes every advantage. Even a kind of rough tribal organization in the herds, a recognized tribal ownership of lands, battles between tribes or individuals that try to poach, an organized initiation of a stray before it can be adopted into a tribe."

"Then how did he justify calling it stupid?" I asked.

"Maybe the real question is 'Why?' "

"You answer it," I said.

"The economy of Australia is based on sheep," he said. "And sheep, unaided, can't compete with kangaroos. The kangaroo's teeth are wedge-shaped to bite clumps, and they can grow fat on new growth while sheep are still down into the heart of grass unable to get anything to eat. The kangaroo's jump takes him from clump to sparse clump where the sheep will walk himself to death trying to stave off starvation. So the kangaroo has to go, because it interferes with man's desires."

"Does that answer 'Why?' " I asked.

"Doesn't it?" he countered. "They have to keep it killed off, if man is to prosper. So they have to deprecate it, to keep their conscience clear. If we granted the goonie equal intelligence with man, could we use it for food? Enslave it for labor?"

I was quick with a denial.

"The goonie was tested for intelligence," I said sharply. "Only a few months after the colony was founded. The Department of Extraterrestrial Psychology sent out a team of testers. Their work was exhaustive, and their findings unequivocal."

"This was before you trained goonies for work?" he asked.

"Well, yes," I conceded. "But as I understood it, their findings ran deeper than just breaking an animal to do some work patterns. It had to do with super-ego, conscience. You know, we've never seen any evidence of tribal organization, any of the customs of the primitive man, no sense of awe, fear, worship. Even their mating seems to be casual, without sense of pairing, permanence. Hardly even herd instinct, except that they grouped where pal trees clustered. But on their own, undirected, nobody ever saw them plant the pal tree. The psychologists were thorough. They just didn't find evidence to justify calling the goonie intelligent."

"That was twenty years ago," he said. "Now they understand our language, complicated instruction. You've taught them to speak, read, and write."

I raised my brows. I didn't think anyone knew about that except Ruth, my wife.

"Ruth let the cat out of the bag," he said with a smile. "But I already knew about the speaking. As you say, the goonie has no fear, no conscience, no sense of concealment. They speak around anybody. You can't keep it concealed, Jim."

"I suppose not," I said.

"Which brings me to the point. Have you gone a step farther? Have you trained any to do clerical work?"

"Matter of fact," I admitted, "I have. The Company has sharp pencils. If I didn't keep up my records, they'd take the fillings out of my teeth before I knew what was happening. I didn't have humans, so I trained goonies to do the job. Under detailed instruction, of course," I added.

"I need such a clerk, myself," he said. "There's a new office manager, fellow by the name of Carl Hest. A—well, maybe you know the kind. He's taken a particular dislike to me for some reason—well, all right, I know the reason. I caught him abusing his rickshaw goonie, and told him off before I knew who he was. Now he's getting back at me through my reports. I spend more time making corrected reports, trying to please him, than I do in mining libolines. It's rough. I've got to do something, or he'll accumulate enough evidence to get me shipped back to Earth. My reports didn't matter before, so long as I brought

in my quota of libolines—the clerks in Libo City fixed up my reports for me. But now I've got to do both, with every T crossed and I dotted. It's driving me nuts."

"I had a super like that when I was a Company man," I said with sympathy. "It's part of the nature of the breed."

"You train goonies and sell them for all other kinds of work," he said at last. "I couldn't afford to buy an animal trained that far, but could you rent me one? At least while I get over this hump?"

I was reluctant, but then, why not? As Paul said, I trained goonies for all other kinds of work, why not make a profit on my clerks? What was the difference? And, it wouldn't be too hard to replace a clerk. They may have no intelligence, as the psychologists defined it, but they learned fast, needed to be shown only once.

"About those kangaroos," I said curiously. "How did that author justify calling them stupid?"

Paul looked at me with a little frown.

"Oh," he said, "various ways. For example, a rancher puts up a fence, and a chased kangaroo will beat himself to death trying to jump over it or go through it. Doesn't seem to get the idea of going around it. Things like that."

"Does seem pretty stupid," I commented.

"An artificial, man-made barrier," he said. "Not a part of its natural environment, so it can't cope with it."

"Isn't that the essence of intelligence?" I asked. "To analyze new situations, and master them?"

"Looking at it from man's definition of intelligence, I guess," he admitted.

"What other definition do we have?" I asked.

I went back to the rental of the goonie, then, and we came to a mutually satisfactory figure. I was still a little reluctant, but I couldn't have explained why. There was something about the speaking, reading, writing, clerical work—I was reluctant to let it get out of my own hands, but reason kept asking me why. Pulling a rickshaw, or cooking, or serving the table, or building a house, or writing figures into a ledger and adding them up—what difference?

In the days that followed, I couldn't seem to get Paul's conversation out of my mind. It wasn't only that I'd rented him a clerk against my feelings of reluctance. It was something he'd said, something about the kangaroos. I went back over the conversation, reconstructed it sentence by sentence, until I pinned it down.

"Looking at it from man's definition of intelligence," he had said.

"What other definition do we have?" I had asked.

What about the goonie's definition? That was a silly question. As far as I knew, goonies never defined anything. They seemed to live only for the moment. Perhaps the unfailing supply of fruit from their pal tree, the lack of any natural enemy, had never taught them a sense of want, or fear. And therefore, of conscience? There was no violence in their nature, no resistance to anything. How, then, could man ever hope to understand the goonie? All right, perhaps a resemblance in physical shape, but a mental life so totally alien ...

Part of the answer came to me then.

Animal psychology tests, I reasoned, to some degree *must* be based on how man, himself, would react in a given situation. The animal's intelligence is measured largely in terms of how close it comes to the behavior of man. A man would discover, after a few tries, that he must go around the fence; but the kangaroo couldn't figure that out—it was too far removed from anything in a past experience which included no fences, no barriers.

Alien beings are not man, and do not, cannot, react in the same way as man. Man's tests, therefore, based solely on his own standards, will never prove any other intelligence in the universe equal to man's own!

The tests were as rigged as a crooked slot machine.

But the goonie did learn to go around the fence. On his own? No, I couldn't say that. He had the capacity for doing what was shown him, and repeating it when told. But he never did anything on his own, never initiated anything, never created anything. He followed complicated instructions by rote, but only by rote. Never as if he understood the meanings, the abstract meanings. He made sense when he did speak, did not just jabber like a parrot, but he spoke only in direct monosyllables—the words, themselves, a part of the mechanical pattern. I gave it up. Perhaps the psychologists were right, after all.

A couple of weeks went by before the next part of the pattern fell into place. Paul brought back the goonie clerk.

"What happened?" I asked when we were settled in the living room with drinks and pipes. "Couldn't he do the work?"

"Nothing wrong with the goonie," he said, a little sullenly. "I don't deserve a smart goonie. I don't deserve to associate with grown men. I'm still a kid with no sense."

"Well, now," I said with a grin. "Far be it from me to disagree with a man's own opinion of himself. What happened?"

"I told you about this Carl Hest? The office manager?"

I nodded.

"This morning my monthly reports were due. I took them into Libo City with my libolines. I wasn't content just to leave them with the receiving clerk, as usual. Oh, no! I took them right on in to Mr. High-and-mighty Hest, himself. I slapped them down on his desk and I said, 'All right, bud, see what you can find wrong with them this time!' "

Paul began scraping the dottle out of his pipe and looked at me out of the corner of his eyes.

I grinned more broadly.

"I can understand," I said. "I was a Company man once, myself."

"This guy Hest," Paul continued, "raised his eyebrows, picked up the reports as if they'd dirty his hands, flicked through them to find my dozens of mistakes at a glance. Then he went back over them—slowly. Finally, after about ten minutes, he laid them down on his desk. 'Well, Mr. Tyler,' he said in that nasty voice of his. 'What happened to you? Come down with an attack of intelligence?'

"I should have quit when my cup was full," Paul said, after I'd had my laugh. "But oh, no. I had to keep

pouring and mess up the works—I wasn't thinking about anything but wiping that sneer off his face. 'Those reports you think are so intelligent,' I said, 'were done by a goonie.' Then I said, real loud because the whole office was dead silent, 'How does it feel to know that a goonie can do this work as well as your own suck-up goons—as well as you could, probably, and maybe better?'

"I walked out while his mouth was still hanging open. You know how the tenderfeet are. They pick up the attitude that the goonie is an inferior animal, and they ride it for all it's worth; they take easily to having something they can push around. You know, Jim, you can call a man a dirty name with a smile, and he'll sort of take it; maybe not quite happy about it, but he'll take it because you said it right. But here on Libo you don't compare a man with a goonie—not anytime, no how, no matter how you say it."

"So then what happened?" I'd lost my grin suddenly.

"It all happened in front of his office staff. He's got a lot of those suck-ups that enjoy his humor when he tongue-skins us stupid bastards from out in the field. Their ears were all flapping. They heard the works. I went on about my business around town, and it wasn't more than an hour before I knew I was an untouchable. The word had spread. It grew with the telling. Maybe an outsider wouldn't get the full force of it, but here in Libo, well, you know what it would mean to tell a man he could be replaced by a goonie."

"I know," I said around the stem of my pipe, while I watched his face. Something had grabbed my tailbone and was twisting it with that tingling feeling we get in the face of danger. I wondered if Paul, even yet, had fully realized what he'd done.

"Hell! All right, Jim, goddamn it!" he exploded. "Suppose a goonie could do their work better? That's not going to throw them out of a job. There's plenty of work, plenty of planets besides this one—even if the Company heard about it and put in goonies at the desks."

"It's not just that," I said slowly. "No matter how low down a man is, he's got to have something he thinks is still lower before he can be happy. The more inferior he is, the more he needs it. Take it away from him, and you've started something."

"I guess," Paul agreed, but I could see he had his reserve of doubt. Well, he was young, and he'd been fed that scout-master line about how noble mankind is. He'd learn.

"Anyhow," he said. "Friend of mine, better friend than most, I've found out, tipped me off. Said I'd better get rid of that goonie clerk, and quick, if I knew which side was up. I'm still a Company man, Jim. I'm like the rest of these poor bastards out here, still indentured for my space fare and wouldn't know how to keep alive if the Company kicked me out and left me stranded. That's what could happen. Those guys can cut my feet out from under me every step I take. You know it. What can I do but knuckle under? So—I brought the goonie back."

I nodded.

"Too bad you didn't keep it under your hat, the way I have," I said. "But it's done now."

I sat and thought about it. I wasn't worried about my part in it—I had a part because everybody would know I'd trained the goonie, that Paul had got him from me. It wasn't likely a little two-bit office manager could hurt me with the Company. They needed me too much. I could raise and train, or butcher, goonies and deliver them cheaper than they could do it themselves. As long as you don't step on their personal egos, the big boys in business don't mind slapping down their underlings and telling them to behave themselves, if there's a buck to be made out of it.

Besides, I was damn good advertising, a real skill for their recruiting offices. "See?" they'd say. "Look at Jim MacPherson. Just twenty years ago he signed up with the Company to go out to the stars. Today he's a rich man, independent, free enterprise. What he did, you can do." Or they'd make it seem that way. And they were right. I could go on being an independent operator so long as I kept off the toes of the big boys.

But Paul was a different matter.

"Look," I said. "You go back to Libo City and tell it around that it was just a training experiment I was trying. That it was a failure. That you exaggerated, even lied, to jolt Hest. Maybe that'll get you out from under. Maybe we won't hear any more about it."

He looked at me, his face stricken. But he could still try to joke about it, after a fashion.

"You said everybody finds something inferior to himself," he said. "I can't think of anything lower than I am. I just can't."

I laughed.

"Fine," I said with more heartiness than I really felt. "At one time or another most of us have to get clear down to rock bottom before we can begin to grow up."

I didn't know then that there was a depth beyond rock bottom, a hole one could get into, with no way out. But I was to learn.

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I was wrong in telling Paul we wouldn't hear anything more about it. I heard, the very next day. I was down in the south valley, taking care of the last planting in the new orchard, when I saw a caller coming down the dirt lane between the groves of pal trees. His rickshaw was being pulled by a single goonie, and even at a distance I could see the animal was abused with overwork, if not worse.

Yes, worse, because as they came nearer I could see whip welts across the pelt covering the goonie's back and shoulders. I began a slow boil inside at the needless cruelty, needless because anybody knows the goonie will kill himself with overwork if the master simply asks for it. So my caller was one of the new Earthers, one of the petty little squirts who had to demonstrate his power over the inferior animal.

Apparently Ruth had had the same opinion, for instead of treating the caller as an honored guest and sending a goonie to fetch me, as was Libo custom, she'd sent him on down to the orchard. I wondered if he had enough sense to know he'd been insulted. I hoped he did.

Even if I hadn't been scorched to a simmering rage by the time the goonie halted at the edge of the orchard—and sank down on the ground without even unbuckling his harness—I wouldn't have liked the caller. The important way he climbed down out of the rickshaw, the pompous stride he affected as he strode toward me, marked him as some petty Company official.

I wondered how he had managed to get past Personnel. Usually they picked the fine, upstanding, cleancut hero type—a little short on brains, maybe, but full of noble derring-do, and so anxious to be

admired they never made any trouble. It must have been Personnel's off day when this one got through—or maybe he had an uncle.

"Afternoon," I greeted him, without friendliness, as he came up.

"I see you're busy," he said briskly. "I am, too. My time is valuable, so I'll come right to the point. My name is Mr. Hest. I'm an executive. You're MacPherson?"

"Mr. MacPherson," I answered dryly.

He ignored it.

"I hear you've got a goonie trained to bookkeeping. You leased it to Tyler on a thousand-dollar evaluation. An outrageous price, but I'll buy it. I hear Tyler turned it back."

I didn't like what I saw in his eyes, or his loose, fat-lipped mouth. Not at all.

"The goonie is unsatisfactory," I said. "The experiment didn't work, and he's not for sale."

"You can't kid me, MacPherson," he said. "Tyler never made up those reports. He hasn't the capacity. I'm an accountant. If you can train a goonie that far, I can train him on into real accountancy. The Company could save millions if goonies could take the place of humans in office work."

I knew there were guys who'd sell their own mothers into a two-bit dive if they thought it would impress the boss, but I didn't believe this one had that motive. There was something else, something in the way his avid little eyes looked me over, the way he licked his lips, the way he came out with an explanation that a smart man would have kept to himself.

"Maybe you're a pretty smart accountant," I said in my best hayseed drawl, "but you don't know anything at all about training goonies." I gestured with my head. "How come you're overworking your animal that way, beating him to make him run up those steep hills on those rough roads? Can't you afford a team?"

"He's my property," he said.

"You're not fit to own him," I said, as abruptly. "I wouldn't sell you a goonie of any kind, for any price."

Either the man had the hide of a rhinoceros, or he was driven by a passion I couldn't understand.

"Fifteen hundred," he bid. "Not a penny more."

"Not at any price. Good day, Mr. Hest."

He looked at me sharply, as if he couldn't believe I'd refuse such a profit, as if it were a new experience for him to find a man without a price. He started to say something, then shut his mouth with a snap. He turned abruptly and strode back to his rickshaw. Before he reached it, he was shouting angrily to his goonie to get up out of that dirt and look alive.

I took an angry step toward them and changed my mind. Whatever I did, Hest would later take it out on the goonie. He was that kind of man. I was stopped, too, by the old Liboan custom of never meddling in another man's affairs. There weren't any laws about handling goonies. We hadn't needed them. Disapproval had been enough to bring tenderfeet into line, before. And I hated to see laws like that come to Libo, morals-meddling laws—because it was men like Hest who had the compulsion to get in control of making and enforcing them, who hid behind the badge so they could get their kicks without fear of reprisal.

I didn't know what to do. I went back to planting the orchard and worked until the first sun had set and the second was close behind. Then I knocked off, sent the goonies to their pal groves, and went on up to the house.

Ruth's first question, when I came through the kitchen door, flared my rage up again.

"Jim," she said curiously, and a little angry, "why did you sell that clerk to a man like Hest?"

"But I didn't," I said.

"Here's the thousand, cash, he left with me," she said and pointed to the corner of the kitchen table. "He said it was the price you agreed on. He had me make out a bill of sale. I thought it peculiar because you always take care of business, but he said you wanted to go on working."

"He pulled a fast one, Ruth," I said, my anger rising.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Right after supper I'm going to Libo City. Bill of sale, or not, I'm going to get that goonie back."

"Jim," she said, "be careful." There was worry in her eyes. "You're not a violent man—and you're not as young as you used to be."

That was something a man would rather not be reminded of, not even by his wife—especially not by his wife.

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Inquiry in Libo City led me to Hest's private cottage, but it was dark. I couldn't arouse any response, not even a goonie. I tried the men's dormitories to get a line on him. Most of the young Earthers seemed to think it was a lark, and their idea of good sportsmanship kept them from telling me where to find him. From some of them I sensed a deeper, more turgid undercurrent where good, clean fun might not be either so good or so clean.

In one of the crowded saloons there was a booth of older men, men who'd been here longer, and kept a disdainful distance away from the new Earthers.

"There's something going on, Jim," one of them said. "I don't know just what. Try that hell-raisin', snortin' female. Hest's always hanging around her."

I looked around the booth. They were all grinning a little. So the story of how Hest had outfoxed me had spread, and they could enjoy that part of it. I didn't blame them. But I could tell they didn't sense there was anything more to it than that. They told me where to locate Miriam Wellman's cottage, and added as I started to leave, "You need any help, Jim, you know where to look." Part of it was to say that in a showdown against the Earthers, they were on my side, but most of it was a bid to get in on a little fun, break the monotony.

I found the woman's cottage without trouble, and she answered the door in person. I told her who I was, and she invited me in without any coy implications about what the neighbors might think. The cottage was

standard, furnished with goonie-made furniture of native materials.

"I'll come right to the point, Miss Wellman," I said.

"Good," she answered crisply. "The boys will be gathering for their meeting, and I like to be prompt."

I started to tell her what I thought of her meetings, how much damage she was doing, how far she was setting Libo back. I decided there wouldn't be any use. People who do that kind of thing, her kind of thing, get their kicks out of the ego-bloating effect of their power over audiences and don't give a good goddamn about how much damage they do.

"I'm looking for Carl Hest," I said. "I understand he's one of your apple-polishers."

She was wearing standard coverall fatigues, but she made a gesture as if she were gathering up folds of a voluminous skirt to show me there was nothing behind them. "I am not hiding Carl Hest," she said scornfully.

"Then you know he is hiding." I paused, and added, "And you probably know he conned my wife out of a valuable goonie. You probably know what he's got in mind to do."

"I do, Mr. MacPherson," she said crisply. "I know very well."

I looked at her and felt a deep discouragement. I couldn't see any way to get past that shell of hers, that armor of self-righteousness ... No, that wasn't it. She wasn't quoting fanatic, meaningless phrases at me, clouding the issue with junk. She was a crisp businesswoman who had a situation well in hand.

"Then you know more than I do," I said. "But I can guess some things. I don't like what I can guess. I trained that goonie; I'm responsible. I'm not going to have it—well, whatever they plan to do with it—just because I trained it to a work that Hest and his toadies don't approve."

"Very commendable sentiments, Mr. MacPherson," she said dryly. "But suppose you keep out of an affair that's none of your business. I understood that was Liboan custom, not to meddle in other people's doings."

"That *was* the custom," I said.

She stood up suddenly and walked with quick, short strides across the room to a closet door. She turned around and looked at me, as if she had made up her mind to something.

"It's still a good custom," she said. "Believe it or not, I'm trying to preserve it."

I looked at her dumfounded.

"By letting things happen, whatever's going to happen to that goonie?" I asked incredulously. "By coming out here and whipping up the emotions of these boys, stirring up who knows what in them?"

She opened the door of the closet, and I could see she was taking out a robe, an iridescent, shimmering thing.

"I know precisely what I'm stirring up," she said. "That's my business. That's what I'm here for."

I couldn't believe it. To whip up the emotions of a mob just for the kicks of being able to do it was one thing. But to do it deliberately, knowing the effect of arousing primitive savagery ...

She turned around and began slipping into the garment. She zipped up the front of it with a crisp motion,

and it transformed her. In darkness, under the proper spotlights, the ethereal softness completely masked her calculating efficiency.

"Why?" I demanded. "If you know, if you really do know, why?"

"My work here is about finished," she said as she came over to her chair and sat down again. "It will do no harm to tell you why. You're not a Company man, and your reputation is one of discretion ... The point is, in mass hiring for jobs in such places as Libo, we make mistakes in Personnel. Our tests are not perfect."

"We?" I asked.

"I'm a troubleshooter for Company Personnel," she said.

"All this mumbo-jumbo," I said. "Getting out there and whipping these boys up into frenzies ..."

"You know about medical inoculation, vaccination," she said. "Under proper controls, it can be psychologically applied. A little virus, a little fever, and from there on, most people are immune. Some aren't. With some, it goes into a full-stage disease. We don't know which is which without test. We have to test. Those who can't pass the test, Mr. MacPherson, are shipped back to Earth. This way we find out quickly, instead of letting some Typhoid Marys gradually infect a whole colony."

"Hest," I said.

"Hest is valuable," she said. "He thinks he is transferred often because we need him to set up procedures and routines. Actually it's because he is a natural focal point for the wrong ones to gather round. Birds of a feather. Sending him out a couple months in advance of a troubleshooter saves us a lot of time. We already know where to look when we get there."

"He doesn't catch on?" I asked.

"People get blinded by their own self-importance," she said. "He can't see beyond himself. And," she added, "we vary our techniques."

I sat there and thought about it for a few minutes. I could see the sense in it, and I could see, in the long run, how Libo would be a better, saner place for the inoculation that would make the better-balanced Earthers so sick of this kind of thing they'd never want any more of it. But it was damned cold-blooded. These scientists! And it was aside from the issue of my goonie clerk.

"All right," I said. "I guess you know what you're doing. But it happens I'm more interested in that goonie clerk."

"That goonie clerk is another focal point," she said. "I've been waiting for some such incident."

"You might have waited a long time," I said.

"Oh, no," she answered. "There's always an incident. We wait for a particularly effective one."

I stood up.

"You'd sacrifice the goonie to the job you're doing," I said.

"Yes," she said shortly. "If it were necessary," she added.

"You can find some other incident, then," I said. "I don't intend to see that goonie mistreated, maybe

worse, just to get a result for you."

She stood up quickly, a flash of shimmering light.

"You will keep your hands entirely off it, Mr. MacPherson," she said crisply. "I do not intend to have my work spoiled by amateur meddling. I'm a professional. This kind of thing is my business. I know how to handle it. Keep off, Mr. MacPherson. You don't realize how much damage you could do at this point."

"I'm not a Company man, Miss Wellman," I said hotly. "You can't order me."

I turned around and stalked out of her door and went back to the main street of town. It was nearly deserted now. Only a few of the older hands were sitting around in the saloons, a few so disgusted with the frenetic meetings they wouldn't go even to break the monotony.

I went over to the main warehouse and through the gate to the landing field. The crowd was there, sitting around, standing around, moving around, waiting for the show to start. At the far end there was a platform, all lighted up with floods. It was bare except for a simple lectern at the center. Very effective. Miss Wellman hadn't arrived.

Maybe I could spot Hest somewhere up near the platform.

I threaded my way through the crowd, through knots of young Earthers who were shooting the breeze about happenings of the day, the usual endless gossip over trivialities. For a while I couldn't pin it down, the something that was lacking. Then I realized that the rapt, trancelike hypnotism I expected to see just wasn't there. The magic was wearing off. It was at this stage of the game that a smart rabble-rouser would move on, would sense the satiation and leave while he was still ahead, before everybody began to realize how temporary, pointless, and empty the whole emotional binge had been. As Miss Wellman had said, her work here was about finished.

But I didn't spot Hest anywhere. I moved on up near the platform. There was a group of five at one corner of the platform.

"Where could I find Mr. Hest?" I asked them casually.

They gave me the big eye, the innocent face, the don't-know shake of the head. They didn't know. I turned away and heard a snicker. I whirled back around and saw only wooden faces, the sudden poker face an amateur puts on when he gets a good hand—later he wonders why everybody dropped out of the pot.

I wandered around some more. I stood on the outside of little knots of men and eavesdropped. I didn't hear anything of value for a while.

It wasn't until there was a buzz in the crowd, and a spotlight swept over to the gate to highlight Miss Wellman's entrance that I heard a snatch of phrase. Maybe it was the excitement that raised that voice just enough for me to hear.

"... Carson's Hill tonight ..."

"Shut up, you fool!"

There was a deep silence as the crowd watched Miss Wellman in her shimmering robe; she swept down the path that opened in front of her as if she were floating. But I had the feeling it was an appreciation of good showmanship they felt. I wondered what it had been like a couple of weeks back.

But I wasn't waiting here for anything more. I'd got my answer. Carson's Hill, of course! If Hest and his gang were staging another kind of show, a private one for their own enjoyment, Carson's Hill would be the place. It fitted—the gang of juvenile delinquents who are compelled to burn down the school, desecrate the chapel, stab to death the mother image in some innocent old woman who just happened to walk by at the wrong moment—wild destruction of a place or symbol that represented inner travail.

I was moving quickly through the crowd, the silent crowd. There was only a low grumble as I pushed somebody aside so I could get through. Near the edge I heard her voice come through the speakers, low and thrilling, dulcet sweet.

"My children," she began, "tonight's meeting must be brief. This is farewell, and I must not burden you with my grief at leaving you ..."

I made the yard gate and ran down the street to where my goonie team still waited beside the rickshaw.

"Let's get out to Carson's Hill as fast as we can," I said to the team. In the darkness I caught the answering flash of their eyes, and heard the soft sound of harness being slipped over pelt. By the time I was seated, they were away in a smart mile-covering trot.

Miriam Wellman had been damned sure of herself, burning her bridges behind her while Hest and his rowdies were still on the loose, probably up there on Carson's Hill, torturing that goonie for their own amusement. I wondered how in hell she thought that was taking care of anything.

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The road that led toward home was smooth enough for a while, but it got rough as soon as the goonies took the trail that branched off toward Carson's Hill. It was a balmy night, warm and sweet with the fragrance of pal-tree blossoms. The sky was full of stars, still close, not yet faded in the light of the first moon that was now rising in the east. It was a world of beauty, and the only flaw in it was Man.

In the starlight, and now the increasing moonlight, Carson's Hill began to stand forth, blocking off the stars to the west. In the blackness of that silhouette, near its crest, I seemed to catch a hint of reddish glow—a fire had been built in the amphitheater.

Farther along, where the steep climb began, I spoke softly to the team, had them pull off the path into a small grove of pal trees. From here on the path wound around and took forever to get to the top. I could make better time with a stiff climb on foot. Avoid sentries, too—assuming they'd had enough sense to post any.

The team seemed uneasy, as if they sensed my tenseness, or knew what was happening up there on top. We understood them so little, how could we know what the goonie sensed? But as always they were obedient, anxious to please man, only to please him, whatever he wanted. I told them to conceal themselves and wait for me. They would.

I left the path and struck off in a straight line toward the top. The going wasn't too bad at first. Wide patches of no trees, no undergrowth, open to the moonlight. I worried about it a little. To anyone watching from above I would be a dark spot moving against the light-colored grass. But I gambled they would be too intent with their pleasures, or would be watching only the path, which entered the grove

from the other side of the hill.

Now I was high enough to look off to the southeast where Libo City lay. I saw the lights of the main street, tiny as a relief map. I did not see the bright spot of the platform on the landing field. Too far away to distinguish, something blocking my view at that point ... or was the meeting already over and the landing field dark?

I plunged into a thicket of vines and brush. The advantage of concealment was offset by slower climbing. But I had no fear of losing my way so long as I climbed. The glow of light was my beacon, but not a friendly one. It grew stronger as I climbed, and once there was a shower of sparks wafting upward as though somebody had disturbed the fire. Disturbed it, in what way?

I realized I was almost running up the hill and gasping for breath. The sound of my feet was a loud rustle of leaves, and I tried to go more slowly, more quietly as I neared the top.

At my first sight of flickering raw flame through the trunks of trees, I stopped.

I had no plan in mind. I wasn't fool enough to think I could plow in there and fight a whole gang of crazed sadists. A fictional hero would do it, of course—and win without mussing his pretty hair. I was no such hero, and nobody knew it better than I.

What would I do, then? Try it anyway? At my age? Already panting for breath from my climb, from excitement? Maybe from a fear that I wouldn't admit? Or would I simply watch, horror-stricken, as witnesses on Earth had watched crazed mobs from time immemorial? Surely man could have found some way to leave his barbarisms back on Earth, where they were normal.

I didn't know. I felt compelled to steal closer, to see what was happening. Was this, too, a part of the human pattern? The horror-stricken witness, powerless to turn away, powerless to intervene, appalled at seeing the human being in the raw? To carry the scar of it in his mind all the rest of his days?

Was this, too, a form of participation? And from it a kind of inverse satisfaction of superiority to the mob?

What the hell. I pushed my way on through the last thickets, on toward the flames. I didn't know I was sobbing deep, wracking coughs until I choked on a hiccup. Careful MacPherson! You're just asking for it. How would you like to join the goonie?

As it was, I almost missed the climax. Five minutes more and I would have found only an empty glade, a fire starting to burn lower for lack of wood, trampled grass between the crevices of flat granite stones.

Now from where I hid I saw human silhouettes limned against the flames, moving in random patterns. I drew closer and closer, dodging from tree to tree. Softly and carefully I crept closer, until the blackness of silhouette gave way to the color-tones of firelight on flesh. I could hear the hoarseness of their passion-drunk voices, and crept still closer until I could distinguish words.

Yet in this, as in the equally barbaric meeting I'd left, something was missing. There wasn't an experienced lyncher among them. At least Personnel had had the foresight to refuse the applications from areas where lynching was an endemic pleasure. The right words, at the right time, would have jelled thought and action into ultimate sadism, but as it was, the men here milled about uncertainly—driven by the desire, the urge, but not knowing quite how to go about it ... the adolescent in his first sex attempt.

"Well, let's do something," one voice came clearly. "If hanging's too good for a goonie that tries to be a man, how about burning?"

"Let's skin him alive and auction off the pelt. Teach these goonies a lesson."

I saw the goonie then, spread-eagled on the ground. He did not struggle. He had not fought, nor tried to run away. Naturally; he was a goonie. I felt a wave of relief, so strong it was a sickness. That, too. If he had fought or tried to run away, they wouldn't have needed an experienced lyncher to tell them what to do. The opposition would have been enough to turn them into a raving mob, all acting in one accord.

And then I knew. I knew the answer to the puzzle that had tortured me for twenty years.

But I was not to think about it further then, for the incredible happened. She must have left only moments after I did, and I must have been hesitating there, hiding longer than I'd realized. In any event, Miriam Wellman, in her shimmering robe, walking as calmly as if she were out for an evening stroll, now came into the circle of firelight.

"Boys! Boys!" she said commandingly, chiding, sorrowfully, and without the slightest tremor of uncertainty in her voice. "Aren't you ashamed of yourselves? Teasing that poor animal that way? Cutting up the minute my back is turned? And I trusted you, too!"

I gasped at the complete inadequacy, the unbelievable stupidity of the woman, unprotected, walking into the middle of it and speaking as if to a roomful of kindergarten kids. But these were not kids! They were grown human males in a frenzy of lust for killing. Neither fire hoses, nor tear gas, nor machine-gun bullets had stopped such mobs on Earth.

But she had stopped them. I realized they were standing there, shock still, agape with consternation. For a tense ten seconds they stood there frozen in tableau, while Miss Wellman clucked her tongue and looked about with exasperation. Slowly the tableau began to melt, almost imperceptibly at first—the droop of a shoulder, the eyes that stared at the ground, one sheepish, foolish grin, a toe that made little circles on the rock. One, on the outskirts, tried to melt back into the darkness.

"Oh, no, you don't, Peter Blackburn!" Miss Wellman snapped at him, as if he were four years old. "You come right back here and untie this poor goonie. Shame on you. You, too, Carl Hest. The very idea!"

One by one she called them by name, whipped them with phrases used on small children—but never on grown men.

She was a professional; she knew what she was doing. And she had been right in what she had told me—if I'd butted in, there might have been incalculable damage done.

Force would not have stopped them. It would have egged them on, increased the passion. They would have gloried in resisting it. It would have given meaning to a meaningless thing. The resistance would have been a part, a needed part, and given them the triumph of rape instead of the frustration of encountering motionless, indifferent acceptance.

But she had shocked them out of it, by not recognizing their grown maleness, their lustful dangerousness. She saw them as no more than naughty children—and they became that, in their own eyes.

I watched them in a kind of daze, while, in their own daze, they untied the goonie, lifted him carefully as if to be sure they didn't hurt him. The goonie looked at them from his great glowing green eyes without fear, without wonder. He seemed only to say that whatever man needed of him, man could have.

With complete casualness, Miss Wellman stepped forward and took the goonie's hand. She led it to her own rickshaw at the edge of the grove. She spoke to her team, and without a backward look she drove away.

Even in this she had shown her complete mastery of technique. With no show of hurry, she had driven away before they had time to remember they were determined, angry men.

They stared after her into the darkness. Then meekly, tamely, without looking at one another, gradually even as if repelled by the presence of one another, they moved out of the grove toward their own rickshaws on the other side of the grove near the path.

The party was over.

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For those who find violent action a sufficient end in itself, the yarn is over. The goonie was rescued and would be returned to me. The emotional Typhoid Marys had been isolated and would be shipped back to Earth, where the disease was endemic and would not be noticed. Paul Tyler would be acceptable again in the company of men. Miriam Wellman would soon be on her way to her next assignment of troubleshooting, a different situation calling for techniques which would be different but equally effective. The Company was saved some trouble that could have become unprofitable. Libo would return to sanity and reason, the tenderfeet would gradually become Liboans, insured against the spread of disease by their inoculation ... The mob unrest and disorders were finished.

But the yarn was not over for me. What purpose to action if, beyond giving some release to the manic-depressive, it has no meaning? In the middle of it all, the answer to the goonie puzzle had hit me. But the answer solved nothing; it served only to raise much larger questions.

At home that night I slept badly, so fitfully that Ruth grew worried and asked if there was anything she could do.

"The goonie," I blurted out as I lay and stared into the darkness. "That first hunting party. If the goonie had run away, they would have given those hunters, man, the chase he needed for sport. After a satisfactory chase, man would have caught and killed the goonie down to the last one. If it had hid, it would have furnished another kind of chase, the challenge of finding it, until one by one all would have been found out, and killed. If it had fought, it would have given man his thrill of battle, and the end would have been the goonie's death."

Ruth lay there beside me, saying nothing, but I knew she was not asleep.

"I've always thought the goonie had no sense of survival," I said. "But it took the only possible means of surviving. Only by the most complete compliance with man's wishes could it survive. Only by giving no resistance in any form. How did it know, Ruth? How did it know? First contact, no experience with man. Yet it knew. Not just some old wise ones knew, but all knew instantly, down to the tiniest cub. What kind of intelligence—?"

"Try to sleep, dear," Ruth said tenderly. "Try to sleep now. We'll talk about it tomorrow. You need your rest ..."

We did not talk about it the next day. The bigger questions it opened up for me had begun to take form. I couldn't talk about them. I went about my work in a daze, and in the later afternoon, compelled, drawn irresistibly, I asked the goonie team to take me again to Carson's Hill. I knew that there I would be

alone.

The glade was empty, the grasses were already lifting themselves upright again. The fire had left a patch of ashes and blackened rock. It would be a long time before that scar was gone, but it would go eventually. The afternoon suns sent shafts of light down through the trees, and I found the spot that had been my favorite twenty years ago when I had looked out over a valley and resolved somehow to own it.

I sat down and looked out over my valley and should have felt a sense of achievement, of satisfaction that I had managed to do well. But my valley was like the ashes of the burned-out fire. For what had I really achieved?

Survival? What had I proved, except that I could do it? In going out to the stars, in conquering the universe, what was man proving, except that he could do it? What was he proving that the primitive tribesman on Earth hadn't already proved when he conquered the jungle enough to eat without being eaten?

Was survival the end and all? What about all these noble aspirations of man? How quickly he discarded them when his survival was threatened. What were they then but luxuries of a self-adulation which he practiced only when he could safely afford it?

How was man superior to the goonie? Because he conquered it? Had he conquered it? Through my ranching, there were many more goonies on Libo now than when man had first arrived. The goonie did our work, we slaughtered it for our meat. But it multiplied and thrived.

The satisfactions of pushing other life-forms around? We could do it. But wasn't it a pretty childish sort of satisfaction? Nobody knew where the goonie came from, there was no evolutionary chain to account for him here on Libo, and the pal tree on which he depended was unlike any other kind of tree on Libo. Those were important reasons for thinking I was right. Had the goonie once conquered the universe, too? Had it, too, found it good to push other life-forms around? Had it grown up with the universe, out of its childish satisfactions, and run up against the basic question: Is there really anything beyond survival, itself, and if so, what? Had it found an answer, an answer so magnificent that it simply didn't matter that man worked it, slaughtered it, as long as he multiplied it?

And would man, someday, too, submit willingly to a new, arrogant, brash young life-form—in the knowledge that it really didn't matter? But what was the end result of knowing nothing mattered except static survival?

To hell with the problems of man; let him solve them. What about yourself, MacPherson? What are you trying to avoid? What won't you face?

To the rest of man the goonie is an unintelligent animal, fit only for labor and food. But not to me. If I am right, the rest of man is wrong—and I must believe I am right. I *know*.

And tomorrow is slaughtering day.

I can forgive the psychologist his estimation of the goonie. He's trapped in his own rigged slot machine. I can forgive the Institute, for it is, must be, dedicated to the survival, the superiority, of man. I can forgive the Company—it must show a profit to its stockholders or go out of business. All survival, all survival. I can forgive man, because there's nothing wrong with wanting to survive, to prove that you can do it.

And it would be a long time before man had solved enough of his whole survival problem to look beyond it.

But I had looked beyond it. Had the goonie, the alien goonie, looked beyond it? And seen what? What had it seen that made anything we did to it not matter?

We could, in clear conscience, continue to use it for food only so long as we judged it by man's own definitions, and thereby found it unintelligent. But I knew now that there was something beyond man's definition.

All right. I've made my little pile. I can retire, go away. Would that solve anything? Someone else would simply take my place. Would I become anything more than the dainty young thing who lifts a bloody, dripping bite of steak to her lips but shudders at the thought of killing anything? Suppose I started all over, on some other planet, forgot the goonie, wiped it out of my mind, as humans do when they find reality unpleasant. Would that solve anything? If there are definitions of intelligence beyond man's own, would I not merely be starting all over with new scenes, new creatures, to reach the same end?

Suppose I deadened my thought to reality, as man is wont to do? Could that be done? Could the question, once asked, and never answered, be forgotten? Surely other men have asked the question: What is the purpose of survival if there is no purpose beyond survival?

Have any of the philosophies ever answered it? Yes, we've speculated on the survival of the ego after the flesh, that ego so overpoweringly precious to us that we cannot contemplate its end—but survival of ego to what purpose?

Was this the fence across our path? The fence so alien that we tore ourselves to pieces trying to get over it, go through it?

Had the goonies found a way around it, an answer so alien to our kind of mind that what we did to them, how we used them, didn't matter—so long as we did not destroy them all? I had said they did not initiate, did not create, had no conscience—not by *man's* standards. But by their own? How could I know? How could I know?

Go out to the stars, young man, and grow up with the universe!

All right! We're out there!

What now, little man?

The End

Author Biography and Bibliography

In the early 1950s, Mark Clifton retired from twenty years as a practicing industrial psychologist, mostly responsible for personnel entrance and exit interviews. Between July 1952 and his death in early 1963 Clifton published three novels and at least twenty stories and novelettes. Nearly a third of his stories were written in collaboration with Alex Apostolides

and Frank Riley.

His first novel, *They'd Rather Be Right*, in collaboration with Frank Riley, won the second science fiction Hugo award for best novel of the year. The others, written alone, were not as successful, and none of them had mass market editions during his lifetime.

During his last six years, Clifton published only four or five of his short stories and the last two novels. Although his first cluster of short stories, appearing in *Astounding Science Fiction* between 1952 and 1955, attracted vast attention and created the impression of enormous prolificacy, the fact is that Clifton's output, compared with other science fiction writers of his decade, was only moderate.

An innovator, Clifton was one of the first to etch lines of wisdom and maturity into the youthful visage of commercial science fiction. He used the common themes of science fiction—alien invasion, expanding technology, revolution against political theocracy, and space colonization—but unlike any writer before him, he imposed upon these standard themes the full range of sophisticated psychological insight.

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