

THE HATERS

BY WILLIAM MORRISON

They flung themselves across light years of space to show the world their hatred and contempt. And out among the stars, they learned at last what hatred could really mean to them and what they hated!

"We'll show them," said Kerman.

Grayson didn't answer. Kerman was more than half crazy, and he had been talking about showing them ever since coming on board. Grayson had got used to him, just as he had got used to all the others. After all, you couldn't expect to hire a crew that was exactly normal, not for a trip like this. You simply picked up what you could get and took these characters in your stride, and when they started talking in their different peculiar ways, you didn't pay attention.

Still, if ever Kerman's remark had been appropriate, it was at a time like this. Here was a planet that would everything they were looking for. And nobody to stop them from taking it.

McGant, who acted as first mate, came over to him and said, "We're all set to land, Captain."

"Hold off for awhile," replied Grayson. "I'm checking our observations."

"There's nothing to check," commented McGant sourly. "Oxygen, temperature, gravity; air pressure—everything's in the right range. Radioactivity's a little high, but that's the way we want it. Not enough to hurt, but high enough to be promising."

"I'm not sure about the inhabitants," Grayson said.

McGant looked at him oddly. You didn't get respect from a crew like this, thought Grayson. Some were slavish, but in general you were lucky if you got grudging obedience, and didn't have to dodge a knife in the back. McGant, now, was not exactly half crazy, but he was a good quarter of the way gone. And here he was looking at Grayson as if he considered the latter the one who was weak in the head. Maybe he had something there at that, thought Grayson.

"There's no danger from them," said McGant. "Only one intelligent species, and not many specimens of them around. And they're still in the ape-man stage."

"I'm not so sure."

"By Pluto, Captain, it's obvious enough. Not a building, not a boat, not a canal in the place. No sign that they've ever heard of the use of tools. No sign that they grow their own plant food or use weapons to kill their prey. What more do you want of them, an I. Q. test?"

"That would help," said Grayson. "For lack of it, I'm taking another look at some of these telescopic films we made."

"I've gone through them. They don't show any danger."

"I tend to agree with you. But it doesn't pay to be careless."

"Anything you say, Captain," replied McGant in a respectful voice, managing to convey his contempt by facial expression alone. "*Somebody* on every ship has to be careful, just as somebody has to be the ship's clown. But I'll lay two to one that you're only wasting our time. An hour from now we'll be coming in for the landing we should be making right now."

"I don't doubt it," returned Grayson coldly. He didn't like that remark about the clown.

"And then, by Pluto, we'll start collecting the stuff. We'll, show the dirty so-and-so's, Captain."

"You have restricted objectives," said Grayson. McGant's dirty so-and-so's, of course, were the inhabitants of his native Mars. Kerman's "them" were the officers of the Interplanetary Transport Service, who had fired him for perfectly justifiable reasons.

Grayson himself wasn't so petty. The "them" that he was going to show was nothing less than the entire human race.

He studied the films, running them through three more times, looking for any clue that might hint at an advanced but concealed state of civilization, for any sign that the intelligence of the highest race, the

A-race, was above what he called the ape-man stage. There was nothing.

The intelligent ones were not particularly impressive-looking. They were about five feet high, rather slender in build, and not at all humanoid in appearance. They looked like walking lizards, which they were not. Their jaws protruded and their foreheads receded, as if they relied more upon their teeth than upon their brains. And Grayson had learned that in an enemy you had to fear brains more than anything else.

Completely sane or not, McGant was right. After an hour, Grayson gave the signal, and the ship spiralled in for a landing. It settled down on a smooth grassy plot that was red and gray with small growing plants.

They got out, their weapons ready, and looked around them. There was nothing startling, and Grayson wondered why he couldn't shake off the feeling of danger. The plants were unusual, of course, but no more unusual than those of a planet like Venus, for instance. Tall gray trees, red and gray bushes, blue grass. They were fixed where they grew, as plants should be, and Grayson saw no reason to fear them. Still, tests had to be made.

A couple of the men, directed by McGant, were already gathering samples to make them. They took specimens of the air, the soil, they took the leaves and bark of different plants. In the ship itself, Stratton, the biochemist, who was a very kindly and gentle person except when he took a notion that the Universe was persecuting him, fed the materials through the electrono-chemical tester system. This read off their important characteristics in no more than the time that a human analyst would have taken to focus a microscope.

"No poisons and no very bad skin irritants," he reported, "except on one of the larger species of trees, and I don't think there'll be much trouble, Captain, in getting an antitoxin to control that. Some of the grasses produce mild allergens, but our drugs should handle them."

No danger from that source then. As for the animals—Grayson heard the click of a gun going off, and saw a blue animal leap out of the grass and lie still. Kerman and a couple of others were assembling specimens of the larger species. Another crew was collecting the planetary equivalent of insects. Soon they would get together numerous representative types of animal life, study how the creatures reacted, find out how easy they were to kill. Another electronic analyzer would dissect them and report all their important characteristics to the waiting men.

An hour later, the summarized reports began to come in. By the end of the afternoon, a hundred small species and a dozen of the larger ones had been analyzed. There was nothing to be afraid of.

Meanwhile, the rest of the crew had not been idle. Under Grayson's direct orders, a dozen of them were scouting at low levels in their one-man helicopters. If the planet was as rich in the different metals as it seemed to be, they should have located enough ores to make fortunes for the entire crew in a single day of mining.

When the reports began to come in over the radio, Grayson knew that he was right. Their fortunes would be made.

"We'll show them," grinned Kerman, almost drooling at the idea of the money he was going to have.

This time Grayson nodded. He dreamed of what the money would do for him, and the bitter smile he habitually wore slowly hardened. What a showing that was going to be.

They operated on a twenty-four hour day, although the period of rotation of the planet was closer to thirty. It was still dark when the morning wake-up bell out and began to get the mining sounded, and the men tumbled machinery ready for operation. A technician, relatively sane but surly, tested the electron filters in banks, replaced one that was faulty, gave the mechanical parts a quick once-over, and reported, "Shipshape, Captain."

"Start mining." Grayson had made a map, showing the different ore-rich areas listed in the preceding day's explorations. He pointed out Area 1 and said, "Try that first."

The man nodded. "Could use more equipment."

"We'll get along this trip. And next trip we'll have enough equipment to go ten times as fast."

The 'copter with the mining group flew into the surrounding darkness, its glowlights lighting up the trees for a distance of a thousand feet ahead. Things were settling down to a routine, thought Grayson.

Everything quiet, everything in order. Absolutely no danger.

McGant came out of the inside of the ship and grinned at him. "No trouble, Captain?"

"None so far."

"It's like I expected. That A-race isn't dangerous at all. And as for brains—well, they've got just enough to keep out of our way."

"We didn't run across any yesterday?"

"There don't seem to be many around. One of the men came across a single specimen. He shot at it, but the thing was quite a way off, and he missed."

"Tell the men not to kill them. We'll see if we can tame them and get some use out of them."

But he wasn't actually counting on that. It was enough, he told himself, to know that the race was harmless. From now on, the only thing that counted was the rate at which the metal could be mined and brought to the ship.

All the same, he experienced a feeling of uneasiness later, when he overheard two of the men talking. One of them was jeering, "Don't tell me you missed him, Fernald. Why, I thought you could hit a target with that gun of yours from ten miles away."

"I can. But I'm not used to the air here, and my range-finder doesn't work the way it does on Earth or Mars."

Then the two men became aware that Grayson was near them, and they slouched to attention and saluted sloppily. What did the man miss? Grayson asked himself. An animal at which he was shooting, of course. But what sort of animal? One of the A-race?

Discipline was bad enough without letting the men know that he had overheard part of their conversation and wanted to hear the rest of it. He passed by them, and noticed that they resumed talking in low voices when he was out of earshot.

The incident annoyed him, and the next day he himself went out with one of the hunting parties. The animals had learned caution now, and were in no hurry to show themselves. One of the men had to flush them out of their hiding places with a strong ultrasonic beam, which he swept in all directions, and even then they moved so swiftly that they were not easy to kill. By the time you aimed at them they had changed color and taken refuge in their next hideout. And then you had to go through the whole process all over again.

It was an hour before Grayson himself got a shot. When he did let loose finally it was at a small lizard-like animal only a foot high that came placidly out of a burrow thirty feet away and stood there, as if oblivious of the irritation of the ultrasonic beam, examining the men with interest.

Grayson's blast had more power in it than he would have wanted to use on so small a creature. It caught the lizard full in the middle, and knocked it back. For a moment Grayson was afraid that he had torn the thing to pieces.

He hadn't. As he watched in amazement, the animal picked itself up, completely unhurt, and moved slowly into its burrow again.

One of the men laughed uneasily. "You didn't catch it head on, Captain. You just sideswiped it."

Grayson said firmly, "I hit it head on."

"Besides," said another of the men, "even a glancing shot with that much power should have killed it."

"It should have," agreed Grayson. "Has anybody here killed one of these things before?"

"I aimed at one yesterday, Captain, but I missed."

It was Fernald who spoke. Captain Grayson said sharply, "Sure you missed?"

"Not now I ain't, Captain. But I thought so at the time."

"Prentiss," said Grayson, "flush that thing out with the ultrasonic beam again. I want another look at it."

The ultrasonic beam rose to full power. Nothing came out of the burrow.

Grayson's forehead was damp. He said, "Somebody toss a grenade down there. That should get it out, in pieces if need be."

They stepped back and Fernald tossed the grenade. Fernald liked to toss grenades. The clumps of dirt shot up and out in all directions, and left a hollow a dozen feet across. At the bottom of the hollow

they could see the small lizard looking up at them. It seemed annoyed that its privacy had been disturbed, but otherwise not particularly upset. Grayson stared at it more, closely than before. The thing helped him by standing up on its hind legs so that he could get a better look at it.

The jaws protruded, the forehead receded. It looked like a small-scale, slightly altered edition of the members of the A-race. "Probably an earlier and smaller form," he thought. "It must have the same evolutionary relation to the A-race as monkeys have to men."

The thing looked at him and opened its jaws. Grayson heard the thinnest of squeaks. Most of the sound, he realized, must be in the ultrasonic range.

Another small lizard popped out of a burrow close by; and disregarding the presence of the men a couple of dozen feet away, the two things held a squeaky conversation. Then both turned and moved calmly into the second burrow.

"Want me to open that one too?" asked Fernald eagerly.

"Don't bother." Fernald was too anxious. Better keep him under control, or he'd let his passion for throwing grenades be the better of him.

"I got something a little better than a grenade, Captain," said one of the other men. "Midget-sized nuclear bomb. We'll have to back up, though, if we want to use it."

"We'll try that," said Grayson.

The man moved cautiously to the burrow and planted the bomb. Then they all moved back. When the bomb went off, the explosion could be felt a half mile away. Dirt and rocks flew into the air, and with them the two small lizard things.

When the men approached once more, the two beasts had their heads together again, squeaking away as before. Apparently they had been unharmed by the explosion.

Grayson looked at his men and they looked back at him, and nobody spoke. Finally, Fernald, now no longer fingering a grenade, suggested, "There seems to be nothin' much we can do to those things, Captain. And it would be too bad if they came after us. Maybe we better leave them alone."

"I'm afraid we'd better. Back to the ship, everyone."

He spoke calmly, but inside he wasn't at all calm. He had been right from the first, there was danger here, terrible danger. So far, by some miracle, the little lizards had shown no inclination to harm them. But what if the bombing of their burrows had aroused their anger?

The next day he learned that the small lizards were not invulnerable.

They had set a trap a half mile from the ship, and when the alarm went off, Captain Grayson looked at the visor to see what he had caught. It was a big lizard this time, a member of the A-race. The thing stood on its hind legs within the smooth hard walls of transparent metal and gazed around it, as if wondering what had happened. It made no sudden motion, showed no sign of panic. It simply examined the situation in what seemed to Grayson a very human way.

Something moved at the edge of the visor screen, and Grayson perceived that a small lizard was inspecting its larger relative through the transparent metal wall. Half a dozen additional small lizards joined the first, and for a few seconds they stared placidly at the large creature inside the trap.

Then the large one acted. Its paws swiped at the metal wall, and the wall tore. A second later the large one was out of the trap, attacking the small creatures which surrounded it.

The walls must have caved in completely then, for the visor screen blanked out. Grayson swore in frustration, and then barked, "McGant, Fernald! Get a couple of men with midget nuclear bombs and come with me! I want to see what's going on there!"

Two minutes later they were in a 'copter, flying over the place where the broken remains of the trap lay. McGant looked out and said, "All quiet now, Captain."

"We'll land and look around. You fellows keep your bombs ready for use. They don't seem to hurt the beasts, but at least they'll blow them out of the way."

As they eased the 'copter off the ground, Grayson sprang out and ran over to what seemed to be a torn rag. It was what was left of one of the small lizards. He stared at it in disbelief for a moment, aware that his heart was pounding with fear. He found it hard to believe.

Fernald said gloomily, "We couldn't make a dent on that thing, Captain, but the big one seems to

have torn it to pieces in no time at all. Absolutely no time at all."

"What'll happen to us if the big one comes after us?" asked McGant.

Grayson shook his head. "Better not talk about it. So far we've been lucky enough to have it avoid us. God help us if it ever acquires a fondness for our company," he told them.

Fernald pointed. "Here's another little one, dead as a door nail. Looks like it's been burned."

The skin seemed to have been scorched. Grayson said, "That must be one of the pair we caught with our midget nuclear, bomb."

"So the bomb had an effect after all," observed McGant.

"Not enough. If we had a full sized one—"

"Which we haven't, Captain."

"Which we haven't. But if we had, we might protect ourselves. As it is—" He hesitated. "As it is, we're getting off this planet."

"No, Captain!" exclaimed McGant. "By Pluto, we were all going to get rich here and go back and show them. You can't go off now, leaving all that valuable metal untouched."

Grayson's lips tightened. "In the 'copter, you fools," he ordered. "We're going back to the ship, and once we get there we're leaving the planet. If you don't like the idea, McGant, you can stay here with these lizard beasts. And you can keep any man who wants to stay here with you."

The others shook their heads and Fernald spoke for them "Not us, Captain. Not after what we've seen them do."

The flight back to the ship was made in swift silence. Grayson got out and saw Kerman gaping foolishly at him. "All quiet, Kerman?"

"All quiet, Captain."

"Get back on the ship. Have Sparks send out a message recalling all reconnaissance and mining crews. We're leaving in fifteen minutes. Anybody not on board in that time stays behind on this planet."

He ran down the corridor and threw open the door to his office. In the doorway he stood as if paralyzed. One of the A-beasts was there near his desk, staring at him. A hole torn in the metal floor showed how the beast had entered.

His hand swung to the weapon at his belt and then dropped away. Explosive weapons were useless. The only thing that could save him was his head, his human brain, the great brain of a race which had set out to conquer the universe.

A crewman came running down the corridor to him and shouted, "Captain! They've torn a hole in the side! And they're ripping out the engine!"

Another A-beast suddenly opened the storeroom door and looked out at him. It was at this moment that Grayson almost realized the full hopelessness of their situation. But not quite. He knew that the ship could not take off without extensive repairs, and that he and the other crew members were prisoners at the mercy of the A-race. What he did not realize was the most important fact of all.

There came the burst of an explosion from an adjoining corridor, then screams of panic. There must have been at least half a dozen guns blasting, thought Grayson. All, he knew, were useless, completely useless. Not one of them could harm the big lizard-like things. They could only excite them, enrage them, inspire them to revenge.

He peered around the corner and saw what was happening. Very gently, two of the A-race were advancing upon a dozen cowering crew members. Like nurses removing dangerous toys from children who might hurt themselves, they were taking away the guns and grenades which the latter had been using.

It was at that moment that the full truth burst upon Grayson. The A-beasts were not averse to killing. The way in which one of them had slaughtered the smaller creatures of his own planet showed that. If they were caring for the human beings it was for one reason alone—that the human beings were valuable to them, that the human beings knew things that they needed to know.

And if they could acquire knowledge from the human beings, that meant that they themselves were intelligent, highly intelligent. That was the horrible truth, the stupendous danger that paralyzed Grayson's mind. His knees buckled under him, and he sank back against a wall and gasped for breath. For the first

time since he had been released from prison, his fear for the human race was so great that he forgot his hatred of it.

The A-beasts were very intelligent jailers. To prevent the human beings from escaping they had removed the 'copter engines and retired, leaving the prisoners both their quarters and the weapons they needed to protect themselves against lower beasts. In addition, as protection against the smaller lizards against which the weapons had proved so useless, they had thoughtfully left two of their own kind as guards.

The guards picked out Grayson and Stratton, the biochemist, herded them gently into the captain's office, and began to question them.

They pointed to different objects and waited to hear the names. Very obediently, Captain Grayson began to teach them the human language.

"Shrewd," he told himself, "very shrewd. They've picked us two as the most intelligent of the entire ship. They figured we'd make the best teachers. Well, barring a touch of insanity, we're not bad."

The other man seemed to have been frightened out of his delusions of persecution. No delusions at this moment, thought Grayson, just the persecution itself. Stratton said nervously, "They have a good memory, Captain. They repeat the words we give them without making a mistake."

In fact, the A-creatures were learning to speak at a rapid rate. Grayson could not imagine himself learning their language with such speed and accuracy.

At the end of three days they could communicate-with the human beings with a fair degree of fluency. One of the first questions they asked was further evidence of their shrewdness. "Why do you have such men?"

Stratton, with his delusions, naturally misunderstood. He began to explain, "All the men have different duties. One plots the ship's course, one takes charge of the engines—"

The A-beast said, "That is not what is meant."

Grayson nodded. "I think understand. You want to know why I have such a peculiar crew. But first, why do you think the men are peculiar?"

"There is not sufficient regularity. We do not know what the human norm is. But we do know that this cannot be a normal sample. There is too great a variety of behavior. Some are dull and apathetic, like Kerman, some are excitable, like McGant. There is both cowardice and reckless indifference to loss of life. Some obey slavishly, others carry out orders only as a last resort."

"A fine crew, aren't we?" agreed Grayson bitterly. "But for a trip like this, the bunch I picked was the best to be found."

"They are irrational. They hate. And they act upon their hatred."

"Yes, we hate. That is the one thing we have in common! McGant hates his native planet, which banished him for crimes he had committed. Kerman hates the Interplanetary Transport Service, which fired him for petty thievery. Fernald hates the Courts of Justice, which convicted his father of taking bribes. Some hate for reasons which exist in their twisted minds only. Others, like me, have good reason for hating the entire human race."

The two A-creatures exchanged glances. Grayson said angrily, "Don't look superior. If you knew what they did to me, you'd understand. I was convicted for a murder I didn't commit. I was sent to a penal colony to be reconditioned. After I had served ten years—the full period—they discovered the real murderer, who was by that time on his deathbed, and died thumbing his nose at them.

"Ten years out of my life—think of it!" His voice choked with rage as he recalled his wrongs. "The most precious ten years. They couldn't make it up to me, of course, but the thing was that they didn't even try. They didn't begin to try. They simply informed me that they'd note the correction in my dossier, and that I could go about my business as before, with no stain on my record."

He hadn't meant to speak so freely, but now that he had listeners, the temptation to go on was irresistible. And in the back of his mind was another reason, a reason only half formed. He would hold nothing back. Nothing, except—

"They forgot that they had reconditioned me. When I entered the colony I was a reasonably normal human being. When I left it, I was—as you see me now. I hated every one. Almost the first thing I did

was to square the account a bit. I had paid the customary ten years for a human life, paid it in advance. I took what was coming to me by killing the most brutal of the guards. I felt better then, but I still hated people.

"While I was in the penal colony, the intergalactic drive had been discovered. But its use was prohibited indefinitely. The authorities reasoned that the other galaxies might be full of unknown dangers, and they didn't want to bring any of them down upon the Solar System: Intergalactic exploration was forbidden to all ships but official Government vessels, which were to be especially trained to take the necessary precautions."

He grinned unpleasantly. "Personally I didn't give a damn whether I brought danger down upon the Solar System or not. All I knew was that there were hundreds of thousands of planets yet unexplored, and that they probably contained enough in raw materials to make fortunes for everybody in the first few thousand crews to explore them. I started recruiting a crew as fast as I could.

"As it turned out, I couldn't get even ordinary criminals to join up with me. They had too much of a sense of human responsibility, too much conscience. That's why I had to fall back on this outfit of haters. With them—and with me—it's every man for himself, and devil take the hindmost."

"That was what we wished to know."

Again the two A-creatures exchanged glances, and Grayson thought he detected doubt. He had been telling the truth, for reasons of his own, of course, but the truth none the less. He said harshly, "If you don't believe me, ask the others. They'll tell you whether or not I'm lying. There's only one thing to add. That is, that we hadn't counted on coming across a race like yours. Now we'll never get back to our native planet to enjoy the wealth we found."

If he could only be sure of that! But perhaps they *would* get back. There was a good possibility. The ship's engines hadn't been destroyed, they had merely been removed. Perhaps the crew would yet return to the System and to the people they had so bitterly hated.

"We shall repair your ship. Perhaps we shall build several others like it. And you will lead us back."

It was as he had feared. Grayson stared at the two creatures and had a moment of panic. He hadn't told them that he had changed his mind about hating the human race. He hadn't told them that a man could think he knew his own mind, knew his own dearest wish—and when face to face with its realization, perceive that he knew nothing of the sort. That was one thing he mustn't tell. Nor must he tell them that he was terrified now at the nightmare of what would happen when such almost invulnerable creatures descended upon the weak things that called themselves "men." And for a moment he was afraid that they would read his mind.

That, however, was absurd. If they could do that, they would never have bothered to ask him so many questions. His thoughts were his own—up to the point where his own cowardice would force him to reveal them.

But if they could not read his mind in the literal sense, they could at least judge what he was thinking. One of the A-creatures said, "You are wondering about us. We have no machinery such as fills *your* ship, we lack much of your science. How can we dream of building another ship?"

"Yes, *I'm* wondering. I don't understand your race in the least."

"We have only recently begun to understand ourselves." The creature said softly, "We are a young race. Those that look like us but are so much smaller, like the creatures you call lizards—those are our ancestors."

"I thought there was a relationship. But it doesn't make sense. Those small ones," objected Grayson, "are the only creatures we have seen you destroy."

"They are the only ones we have to fear," returned the other.

Not the only ones, thought Grayson. You have us—me. Yes, I hated the human race for what it did to me. It was a blind, reasoning hate, and some of its members deserved part of what I felt—but no one hurt me intentionally, no one but the murderer and the guard I killed, and both of these were themselves enemies of humanity. Now that I've got all that bitter stuff off my chest, I can see it more clearly, but I can realize too that even at my worst, I never intended to destroy my own kind. I might have subjected it carelessly to danger, just as a man will subject himself when he is overconfident of his own ability and

careless of his own life. I wanted people to realize that I had been unjustly treated, I wanted them to fear my revenge. I would have come back with millions and lorded it over those who had harmed me, used my money to punish those in power who had treated me as a mere number on the list of prisoners.

But I never had any intention of bringing disaster to the System. And that is what I have done—what I shall have done in discovering you and your kind, unless I can stop you. I have no weapon now but my mind, my human mind which you unfortunately cannot read. And this mind I must use to the utmost to discover your weakness, to prevent you from fastening yourself upon my people and enslaving them, as I am afraid you will do if you attack before they are warned.

The A-beast said, "These small ancestors of ours are thoughtless, stupid. In the struggle for life upon this planet, however, they have had one advantage. In appearance they seem, as we do, little out of the ordinary. But no ordinary weapon can harm them, much less, destroy them. They do not even die of old age. They die only when they destroy each other.

"They must have been formed originally by some tremendous mutation of the germ plasm. Once in existence, they spread rapidly among creatures who by comparison were of a completely lower order of strength. It was not until they had covered the entire land surface of the planet that they began to come into serious conflict with each other, and thus to limit their own numbers.

"A few hundred thousand years back, our own race first arose. It was distinguished at first only by its size. It had the same near-invulnerability and the same lack of intelligence.

"At first it was only a subspecies of the dominant, smaller race. But creature against creature, the smaller ones were helpless to combat it, and it grew in numbers. But the struggle for survival was a desperate one. Its members had to learn to band together, to hunt their enemies systematically and relentlessly. We learned to know, each of us, his own strength. We learned to recognize against what odds we could win and against what odds we must lose, and we developed our original language to a level that would permit us to work together.

"Thus we became the intelligent race you see today. In all this, however, we had no need to master nature as your own race has done. No ordinary enemy could hurt us, no weapon penetrate our bodies. There were no perils of nature against which we needed protection. Our only enemies were the smaller race; these we had begun to conquer by teeth and claws.

"In the past few years, our intelligence has turned the tide definitely in our favor. And this same intelligence has enabled us to foresee that in the future we shall no longer be limited to the few square miles of land we now inhabit. In a few years, the entire planet will be ours. What then? We do not die when there is insufficient food, but we cease to grow and propagate. Shall our race be brought to a standstill for lack of space in which to expand?

"We had just begun to consider our problem when your ship arrived. You have given us the answer. Other planets, other galaxies would provide us with new homes. There remained only one question. Could we build such a ship as yours to conquer space?

"We studied you and your men and arrived at the conclusion that individual for individual we were immensely superior to you. Whatever you could do, we could do with greater ease. But you have a long start on us. We have therefore been careful to harm no one, even the least among you, you who have knowledge that we may use.

"On all the planets we conquer, we shall learn. It will not be long before we acquire the knowledge you yourself have gained over the course of your entire history."

And then—Grayson shrugged. "So long as it takes more than my lifetime, that is a matter of indifference to me."

He had had a great deal of experience in concealing his true feelings, and these creatures had known human beings for only a short time. Nevertheless he had a ghastly fear that they would see through him, that they would realize that he was lying, and had spoken so freely of his hate for the human race only because he no longer hated.

These creatures had brains that *were* superior, he thought desperately. They had learned the human tongue in a few days, but he had not the slightest idea of their own language. They were as grown men to children. And could a child successfully deceive a grown man in so important a matter?

He might, thought Grayson. Once in a while he might. If he pretended selfish indifference to anything but his own personal interests, if he pretended complete and unquestioning obedience, he might.

In the days that followed he realized that even his crew members, haters of their own kind though they were, felt guilty at the thought of their great betrayal. Among others, Kerman came to him and said uneasily, "Say, Captain, these lizards want us to tell them everything we know."

"You don't know much, Kerman," Grayson said.

"Yes, but Captain, there are some things—"

"Do as they want," said Grayson, knowing that his own attitude would be reflected in the more revealing attitude of the crewmen. "Don't volunteer information because that would be showing disrespect. But don't hold back when they ask you."

"But, gosh, Captain, they're lizards and we're people. And if they learn how to handle the ship, and make ships of their own—"

"What do we care? The only thing we're interested in is keeping alive, isn't it?"

Kerman nodded uncertainly.

"In that case, there's only one thing to do. Tell them what they want to know. Keep on the good side of them."

"Okay, Captain," said Kerman resignedly. "Now, they've been asking about all this metal we got stored on the ship. They figure that if we want it, it's valuable to them too. They want us to show them how to get more."

"Show them. I thought I heard you yourself say, Kerman, that we'll show them."

Kerman grinned shamefacedly. "I didn't mean it that way, Captain. I meant the people back in the System. But we'll show these lizards too."

We make good slaves, thought Grayson, perfect slaves. Fortunately there is a bit of critical information that most of the men don't usually recall. I'll have to warn one or two of the technicians though, not to pass it on. As for the rest, we toil away with hand and brain, and day by day the A-race is learning most of the precious knowledge we have acquired, it is learning to work the machinery we have so painfully built. An invulnerable race can't be stopped, he told himself bitterly, it can't be harmed, and it can't be resisted.

You can only let them pick the treasures of your mind and take charge of the material treasures you came here to gather. Wonder if the human race will appreciate what I'm up against, he thought. Of course it will never know, but I wonder if it would appreciate if it *did* know.

Not likely. More likely every last one of them would damn me for what I've done. And they'd be right. I hated them, and I'm paying for my hatred. Strange that now I hate the A-race more. Here it is, concentrated in a few square miles around the ship, hemmed in by enemies on its own planet, prepared to play the role of galaxy-conqueror. If only there were time for a warning

There wasn't. There was no time to spread the news, and even if there had been, there would have been no time for a battle cruiser to arrive quickly enough to drop its atomic bomb and wipe out the core of the A-race.

Of course, if such a bomb could have been dropped—there would be the end of the ship that served the A-race as model, of the human beings who served them as teachers. Those of the A-race who had already acquired human knowledge would also be wiped out with them, and the scattered members left on the outposts would probably be helpless against the onslaughts of their smaller relatives.

A big *if*, an impossible *if*. Was it, though? If you toiled faithfully, if you got your men to work hard, and helped them concentrate and purify the precious metal, and collect it all in one spot, watching the quantity grow and grow, until—

He called his men together and they stood there silent. There they were, the surly ones, the, crazy ones, all those who had felt persecuted, and hated their own kind.

"Men," he said, "you've been taking it too easy. Remember, the sooner we do what these lizards want, the sooner we go back to our own System." A lie, of course. They would never go back. "I want you to stop loafing and get a move on."

"And turn the System over to these lizards? I'll see them in hell first. And you with them, Captain, you

with them. Boys—"

"All right, boys," said Grayson genially. "Back to work. And remember, speed it up now."

And now the layers of metal bars filled a small chamber in the ship, and the precious hoard he had been so helpfully collecting was almost complete. Three heaps with a space in the center they were now, three heaps, each below the critical stage, but already warm with the neutrons streaming through their slowly disintegrating atoms. He held the last bar of U235 in his hand, and he knew that he had only to place it in the spot reserved for it to make the mass exceed the critical size, to turn it into a nuclear bomb, to make it explode suddenly in an atomic blast whose fierceness would vaporize ship and slaves and masters with a roar never before heard or imagined on this planet.

His face wore almost the same happy smile that had once amused him on Kerman's face. "We'll show them," he said cheerfully. "We'll show them."

But it was a smile without hatred. He put the bar into place, and everything was gone at once. Where there had been a ship and hatred there was now only a vast hollow in the molten ground.