

Jackpot
Clifford D Simak

I found Doc in the dispensary. He had on quite a load. I worked him over some to bring him half awake.

"Get sobered up," I ordered curtly. "We made planet-fall. We've got work to do."

I took the bottle and corked it and set it high up on the shelf, where it wasn't right at hand.

Doc managed to achieve some dignity. "You needn't worry, Captain. As medic of this tub "

"I want all hands up and moving. We may have something out there."

"I know," Doc said mournfully. "When you talk like that, it's bound to be a tough one. An off-beat climate and atmosphere pure poison."

"It's Earth-type, oxygen, and the climate's fine so far.

Nothing to be afraid of. The analysers gave it almost perfect rating."

Doc groaned and held his head between his hands. "Those analysers of ours do very well if they tell us whether it is hot or cold or if the air is fit to breathe. We're a haywire outfit,

Captain."

"We do all right," I said.

"We're scavengers and sometimes birds of prey. We scour the Galaxy for anything that's loose."

I paid no attention to him. That was the way he always talked when he had a skin full.

"You get up to the galley," I told him, "and let Pancake pour some coffee into you. I want you on your feet and able to do your fumbling best."

But Doc wasn't ready to go just yet. "What is it this time?"

"A silo. The biggest thing you ever saw. It's ten or fifteen miles across and goes up clear out of sight."

"A silo is a building to store winter forage. Is this a farming planet ?"

"No," I said, "it's desert. And it isn't a silo. It just looks like one."

"Warehouse?" asked Doc. "City? Fortress? Temple--but that doesn't make any difference to us, does it, Captain ? We loot temples, too."

"Get up!" I yelled at him. "Get going."

He made it to his feet. "I imagine the populace has come out to greet us. Appropriately, I hope."

"There's no populace," I said. "The silo's just standing there alone."

"Well, well," said Doc. "A second-storey job."

He started staggering up the catwalk and I knew he'd be all right. Pancake knew exactly how to get him sobered up.

I went back to the port and found that Frost had everything all set. He had the guns ready and the axes and the sledges, the coils of rope and the canteens of water and all the stuff we'd need. As second in command, Frost was invaluable. He knew what to do and did it. I don't know what I'd have done without him.

I stood in the port and looked out at the silo. We were a mile or so away from it, but it was so big that it seemed to be much closer. This near to it, it seemed to be a wall. It was just Godawful big.

"A place like that", said Frost, "could hold a lot of loot."

"If there isn't someone or something there to stop us taking it. If we can get into it."

"There are openings along the base. They look like entrances.'"

"With doors ten feet thick."

I wasn't being pessimistic. I was being logical--I'd seen so many things that looked like billions turn into complicated headaches that I never allowed myself much hope until I had my hands on something I knew would bring us cash.

Hutch Murdock, the engineer, came climbing up the catwalk.

As usual, he had troubles. He didn't even stop to catch his breath.

"I tell you," he said to me, "one of these days those engines will just

simply fall apart and leave us hanging out in space light-years from nowhere. We work all the blessed time to keep them turning over."

I clapped him on the shoulder. "Maybe this is it. Maybe after this we can buy a brand-new ship."

But it didn't cheer him up. He knew as well as I did that I was talking to keep up my spirit as well as his.

"Someday," he said, "we'll have bad trouble on our hands."

Those boys of mine will drive a soap bubble across three hundred light-years if it's got an engine in it. But it's got to have an engine. And this wreck we got "

He would have kept right on, but Pancake blew the horn for breakfast.

Doc was already at the table and he seemed to be functioning. He had a moderate case of shudders and he seemed a little pale.

He was a little bitter, too, and somewhat poetic.

"So we gather glory," he told us. "We go out and lap it up."

We haunt the ruins and we track the dream and we come up dripping cash."

"Doc," I said, "shut up."

He shut up. There was no one on the ship I had to speak to twice.

We didn't dally with the food. We crammed it down and left.

Pancake left the dishes standing on the table and came along with us.

We got into the silo without any trouble. There were entrances all around the base and there weren't any doors.

There was not a thing or anyone to stop us walking in.

It was quiet and solemn inside--and unspectacular. It reminded me of a monstrous office building.

It was all cut up with corridors, with openings off the corridors leading into rooms. The rooms were lined with what looked like filing cases.

We walked for quite a while, leaving paint markers along the walls to lead us back to the entrance. Get lost inside a place like that and one could wander maybe a lifetime finding his way out.

We were looking for something--almost anything--but we didn't find a thing except those filing cases.

So we went into one of the rooms to have a look inside the files.

Pancake was disgusted. "There won't be nothing but records in those files. Probably in a lingo we can't even read."

"There couM be anything inside those files," said Frost.

"They don't have to be records."

Pancake had a sledge and he lifted it to smash one of the files, but I stopped him. There wasn't any use doing it messy if there was a better way.

We fooled around a while and we found the place where you had to wave your hand to make a drawer roll out.

The drawer was packed with what looked like sticks of dynamite. They were about two inches in diameter and a foot, or maybe a little more, in length, and they were heavy.

"Gold," said Hutch.

"I never saw black gold," Pancake said.

"It isn't gold," I told them.

I was just as glad it wasn't. If it had been, we'd have broken our backs hauling it away. Gold's all right, but you can't get rich on it. It doesn't much more than pay wages.

We dumped out a pile of the sticks and squatted on the floor, looking them over.

"Maybe it's valuable," said Frost, "but I wouldn't know."

What do you think it is?"

None of us had the least idea.

We found some sort of symbols on each end of the sticks and

the symbols on each stick seemed to be different, but it didn't help us any because the symbols made no sense.

We kicked the sticks out of the way and opened some more drawers. Every single drawer was filled with the sticks.

When we came out of the silo, the day had turned into a scorcher. Pancake climbed the ladder to stack us up some grub and the rest of us sat down in the shade of the ship and laid several of the sticks out in front of us and sat there looking at them, wondering what we had.

"That's where we're at a big disadvantage," said Hutch. "If a regular survey crew stumbled onto this, they'd have all sorts of experts to figure out the stuff. They'd test it a dozen different ways and they'd skin it alive almost and they'd have all sorts of ideas and they'd come up with some educated guesses. And pretty soon, one way or another, they'd know just what it was and if it was any use."

"Someday," I told them, "if we ever strike it rich, we'll have to hire us some experts. The kind of loot we're always turning up, we could make good use of them."

"You won't find any", said Doc, "that would team up with a bunch like us."

"Where do you get 'bunch like us' stuff?" I asked him, a little sore.

"Sure, we ain't got much education and the ship is just sort of glued together and we don't use any fancy words to cover up the fact that we're in this for all we can get out of it. But we're doing an honest job."

"I wouldn't call it exactly honest. Sometimes we're inside the law and sometimes outside it."

That was nonsense and Doc knew it. Mostly where we went, there wasn't any law.

"Back on Earth, in the early days," I snapped back, "it was folks like us who went into new lands and blazed the trails and found rivers and climbed the mountains and brought back word to those who stayed at home. And they went because they were looking for beaver or for gold or slaves or for anything else that wasn't nailed down tight. They didn't worry much about the law or the ethics of it and no one blamed them for it.

They found it and they took it and that was the end of it. If they killed a native or two or burned a village or some other minor thing like that, why, it was just too bad."

Hutch said to Doc: "There ain't no sense in you going holy on us. Anything we done, you're in as deep as we are."

"Gentlemen," said Doe, in that hammy way of his, "I wasn't trying to stir up any ruckus. I was just pointing out that you needn't set your heart on getting any experts."

"We could get them," I said, "if we offered them enough.

They got to live, just like anybody else."

"They have professional pride, too. That's something you've forgotten."

"We got you."

"We//, now," said Hutch, "I'm not too sure Doc is professional. That time he pulled the tooth for me"

"Cut it out," I said. "The both of you."

This wasn't any time to bring up the matter of the tooth. Just a couple of months ago, I'd got it quieted down and I didn't want it breaking out again.

Frost picked up one of the sticks and turned it over and over, looking at it.

"Maybe we could rig up some tests," he suggested.

"And take the chance of getting blown up?" asked Hutch.

"It might not go off. You have a better than fifty-fifty chance that it's not explosive."

"Not me," said Doe. "I'd rather just sit here and guess. It's less tiring and a good deal safer."

"You don't get anywhere by guessing," protested Frost.

"We might have a fortune right inside our mitts if we could only find out what these sticks are for. There must be tons of them stored in the building. And there's nothing in the world to stop us from taking them."

"The first thing", I said, "is to find out if it's explosive. I don't think it is. It looks like dynamite, but it could be almost anything. For instance, it might be food."

"We'll have Pancake cook us up a mess," said Doe.

I paid no attention to him. He was just needling me.

"Or it might be fuel," I said. "Pop a stick into a ship engine that was built to use it and it would keep it going for a year or two."

Pancake blew the chow horn and we all went in.

After we had eaten, we got to work.

We found a flat rock that looked like granite and above it we set up a tripod made out of poles that we had to walk a mile to cut and then had to carry back. We rigged up a pulley on the tripod and found another rock and tied it to the rope that went up to the pulley. Then we paid out the rope as far as it would go and there we dug a foxhole.

By this time, the sun was setting and we were tuckered out, but we decided to go ahead and make the test and set our minds at rest.

So I took one of the sticks that looked like dynamite and while the others back in the foxhole hauled up the rock tied to the rope, I put the stick on the first rock underneath the second and then I ran like hell. I tumbled into the foxhole and the others let go of the rope and the rock dropped down on the stick.

Nothing happened.

Just to make sure, we pulled up and dropped the rock two or three times more and there was no explosion.

We climbed out of the foxhole and went over to the tripod and rolled the rock off the stick, which wasn't even dented.

By this time, we were fairly well convinced that the stick couldn't be set off by concussion, although the test didn't rule out a dozen other ways it might blow us all up.

That night, we gave the sticks the works. We poured acid on them and the acid just ran off. We tried a cold chisel on them and we ruined two good chisels. We tried a saw and t~ stripped the teeth clean off.

We wanted Pancake to try to cook one of them, but Panc~ refused.

"You aren't bringing that stuff into my galley," he said. you do, you can cook for yourselves from now on. I keel good clean galley and I try to keep you guys well fed and I aij having you mess up the place."

"All right, Pancake," I said. "Even with you cooking it, probably wouldn't be fit to eat."

We wound up sitting at a table, looking at the sticks piled the centre of it. Doc brought out a bottle and we all had a dri or two. Doc must have been considerably upset to share k liquor with us.

"It stands to reason", said Frost, "that the sticks are go~ for something. If the cost of that building is any indication their value, they're worth a fortune."

"Maybe the sticks aren't the only things in there," Hut, pointed out. "We just covered part of the first floor. The might be a lot of other stuff in there. And there are all tho~ other floors. How many would you say there were?"

"Lord knows,~" said Frost. "When you're on the ground, yr can't be sure you see to the top of it. It just sort of fades aw~ when you look up at it."

"You notice what it was built of?" asked Doc.

"Stone," said Hutch.

"I thought so, too," said Doc. "But it isn't. You rememb{ those big apartment mounds we ran into in that insect cultm out on Suud?"

We all remembered them, of course. We'd spent days tryi~ to break into them because we had found a handful of beaut fully carved jade scattered around the entrance of one of the~ and we figured there might be a lot of it inside. Stuff like th~ brings money. Folks back in civilization are nuts about an kind of alien art and that jade sure enough was alien.

We'd tried every trick that we could think of and we got nowhere. Breaking into those mounds was like punching a feather pillow. You could dent the surface plenty, but you couldn't break it because the strength of the material built up as pressure compressed the atoms. The harder you hit, the tougher it

became. It was the kind of building material that would last forever and never need repair and those insects must have known they were safe from us, for they went about their business and never noticed us. That's what made it so unfuriating.

And material like that, I realized, would be just the ticket for a structure like the silo. You could build as big or as high as you had a mind to; the more pressure you put on the lower structure, the stronger it would be.

"It means", I said, "that the building out there could be much older than it seems to be. It could be a million years or older."

"If it's that old," said Hutch, "it could really be packed. You can store away a lot of loot in a million years."

Doc and Frost drifted off to bed and Hutch and I sat there alone, looking at the sticks.

I got to thinking about some of the things that Doc was always saying, about how we were just a bunch of cut-throats, and I wondered if he might be right. But think on it as hard and as honest as I could, I couldn't buy it.

On every expanding frontier, in all of history, there had been three kinds of men who went ahead and marked out the trails for other men to follow--the traders and the missionaries and the hunters.

We were the hunters in this case, hunting not for gold or slaves or furs, but for whatever we could find. Sometimes we came back with empty hands and sometimes we made a haul.

Usually, in the long run, we evened out so we made nothing more than wages. But we kept on going out, hoping for that lucky break that would make us billionaires.

It hadn't happened yet, and perhaps it never would. But someday it might. We touched the ghostly edge of hope just often enough to keep us thinking that it would. Although, I admitted to myself, perhaps we'd have kept going out even if there'd been no hope at all. Seeking for the unknown gets into your blood.

When you came right down to it, we probably didn't do a bit more harm than the traders or the missionaries. What we took, we took; we didn't settle down and change or destroy the civilizations of people we pretended we were helping. I said as much to Hutch. He agreed with me.

"The missionaries are the worst," he said. "I wouldn't be a missionary no matter what they paid me."

We weren't doing any good just sitting there, so I got up to start for bed.

"Maybe tomorrow we'll find something else," I said.

Hutch yawned. "I sure hope we do. We have been wasting our time on these sticks of dynamite."

He picked them up and on our way up to bed, he heaved them out the port.

The next day, we did find something else.

We went much deeper into the silo than we had been before, following the corridors for what must have been two miles or more.

We came to a big room that probably covered ten or fifteen acres and it was filled from wall to wall with rows of machines, all of them alike.

They weren't much to look at. They resembled to some extent a rather ornate washing machine, with a bucket seat attached and a dome on top. They weren't bolted down and you could push them around and when we tipped one of them up to look for hidden wheels, we found instead a pair of runners fixed on a swivel so they'd track in any direction that one pushed. The runners were made of metal that was greasy to the touch, but when you rubbed your fingers on them, no grease came off.

There was no power connection.

"Maybe it's a self-powered unit," said Frost. "Come to think of it, I haven't noticed any power outlets in the entire building."

We hunted for some place where we could turn on the power and there wasn't any place. That whole machine was the smoothest, slickest hunk of metal you

ever saw. We looked for a way to get into its innards, so we could have a look at them, but there wasn't any way. The jacket that covered the works seemed to be one solid piece without an apparent seam or a sign of a bolt or rivet.

The dome looked as though it ought to come off and we tried to get it off, but it remained stubbornly in place.

The bucket seat, however, was something else again. It was lousy with all sorts of attachments to accommodate the sitting surface of almost any conceivable kind of being. We had a lot of fun adjusting it in different ways and trying to figure out what kind of animal could have a seat like that. We got a bit obscene about it, I remember, and Hutch was doubled up laughing.

But we weren't getting anywhere and we were fairly sure we wouldn't until we could get a cutting tool and open up one of the machines to find out what made it tick.

We picked out one of them and we skidded it down the corridors. When we got to the entrance, we figured we would have to carry it, but we were mistaken. It skidded along over the ground and even loose sand almost as well as it did in the corridors.

After supper, Hutch went down to the engine room and came back with a cutting tool. The metal was tough, but we finally got at least some of the jacket peeled away.

The innards of that machine were enough to drive you crazy.

It was a solid mass of tiny parts all hooked together in the damndest jumble. There was no beginning and no end. It was like one of those puzzle mazes that go on and on forever and get no place.

Hutch got into it with both hands and tried to figure out how to start taking it apart.

After a while, he sat back on his heels and growled a little at it. "There's nothing holding them together. Not a bolt or rivet, not even so much as a cotter pin. But they hang together somehow."

"Just pure cussedness," I said.

He looked at me kind of funny. "You might be right, at that."

He went at it again and bashed a couple of knuckles and sat there sucking at them.

"If I didn't know that I was wrong," he said, "I'd say that it was friction."

"Magnetism," Doc offered.

"I tell you what Doc," said Hutch. "You stick to what little medicine you know and let me handle the mechanics."

Frost dived in quick to head off an argument. "That frictional idea might not be a bad one. But it would call for perfect machining and surface polish. Theoretically, if you place two perfectly polished surfaces together, the molecules will attract one another and you'll have permanent cohesion."

I don't know where Frost got all that stuff. Mostly he seemed to be just like the rest of us, but occasionally he'd come out with something that would catch you by surprise. I never asked him anything about himself; questions like that were just plain bad manners.

We messed around some more and Hutch bashed another knuckle and I sat there thinking how we'd found two items in the silo and both of them had stopped us in our tracks. But that's the way it is. Some days you can't make a dime.

Frost moved around and pushed Hutch out of the way. "Let me see what I can do."

Hutch didn't protest any. He was licked.

Frost started pushing and pulling and twisting and fiddling away at that mess of parts and all at once there was a kind of whooshing sound, like someone had let out their breath sort of slow and easy, and all the parts fell in upon themselves. They came unstuck, in a kind of slow-motion manner, and they made a metallic thump along with tinkling sounds and they were just a heap inside the jacket that had protected them. "Now see what you done !" howled Hutch.

"I didn't do a thing," said Frost. "I was just seeing if I could bust one loose and one did and the whole shebang caved in."

He held up his fingers to show us the piece that had come loose.

"You know what I think?" asked Pancake. "I think whoever made that machine made it so it would fall apart if anyone tried to tinker with it. They didn't want no one to find out how it was put together."

"That makes sense," said Doc. "No use getting peeved at it."

After all, it was their machine."

"Doc," I said, "you got a funny attitude. I never noticed you turning down your share of anything we find."

"I don't mind when we confine ourselves to what you might call, in all politeness, natural resources. I can even stomach the pillaging of art-forms. But when it comes to stealing brains-- and this machine is brains "

Frost let out a whoop.

He was hunkered down, with his head inside the jacket of the machine, and I thought at first he'd got caught and that we'd have to cut him out, but he could get out, all right.

"I see now how to get that dome off the top," he said.

It was a complicated business, almost like a combination on a safe. The dome was locked in place by a lot of grooves and you had to know just how to turn it to lift it out of place.

Frost kept his head inside the jacket and called out directions to Hutch, who twisted the dome first this way and then that, sometimes having to pull up on it and other times press down to engage the slotted mechanism that held it locked in place.

Pancake wrote down the combinations as Frost called them off and finally the dome came loose in Hutch's hands.

Once it was off, there was no mystery to it. It was a helmet, all rigged out with adjustable features so it could be made to fit any type of head, just as the seat was adjustable to fit any sitting apparatus.

The helmet was attached to the machine with a retractable cable that reeled out far enough to reach someone sitting in the seat.

And that was fine, of course. But what was it? A portable electric chair? A permanent-wave machine? Or what?

So Frost and Hutch poked around some more and in the top of the machine, just under where the dome had nested, they found a swivel trap door and underneath it a hollow tube extending down into the mass of innards--only the innards weren't a mass any more, but just a basket of loose parts.

It didn't take any imagination to figure what that hollow tube was for. It was just the size to take one of the sticks of dynamite.

Doc went and got a bottle and passed it around as a sort of celebration and after a drink or two, he and Hutch shook hands and said there were no hard feelings. But I didn't pay much attention to that. They'd done it many times before and then been at one another's throats before the night was over.

Just why we were celebrating was hard to figure. Sure, we knew the machine fitted heads and that the dynamite fitted the machine--but we still had no idea what it was all about.

We were, to tell the truth, just a little scared, although you couldn't have gotten one of us to admit it. We did some guessing, naturally.

"It might be a mechanical doctor," said Hutch. "Just sit in that seat and put the helmet on your head and feed in the proper stick and you come out cured of whatever is wrong with you. It would be a blessing, I can tell you. You wouldn't ever need to worry if your doctor knew his business or not."

I thought Doc was going to jump right down Hutch's throat, but he must have remembered how they had shaken hands and he didn't do it.

"As long as you're thinking along that line," said Doc, "let's think a little bigger. Let's say it is a rejuvenation machine and the stick is crammed with vitamins and hormones and such that turn you young again. Just take the treatment every twenty years or so and you stay young forever."

"It might be an educator," Frost put in. "Those sticks might be packed

full of knowledge. Maybe a complete college subject inside of each of them."

"Or it might be just the opposite," said Pancake. "Those sticks might soak up everything you know. Each of those sticks might be the story of one man's whole life."

"Why record life stories?" asked Hutch. "There aren't many men or aliens or what-not that have life stories important enough to rate all that trouble."

"If you're thinking of it being some sort of communications deal," I said, "it might be anything. It might be propoganda or religion or maps or it might be no more than a file of business records."

"And", said Hutch, "it might kill you deader than a mack- erel.'" "

"I don't think so," Doc replied. "There are easier ways to kill a person than to sit him in a chair and put a helmet on him."

And it doesn't have to be a communicator." "There's one way to find out," I said.

"I was afraid", said Doc, "we'd get around to that."

"It's too complicated," argued Hutch. "No telling what trouble it may get us into. Why not drop it cold? We can blast off and hunt for something simple."

"No!" shouted Frost. "We can't do that!"

"I'd like to know why not," said Hutch.

"Because we'd always wonder if we passed up the jackpot."

We'd figure that maybe we gave up too quick--a day or two too quick. That we got scared out. That if we'd gone ahead, we'd be rolling in money."

We knew Frost was right, but we batted it around some more before we would admit he was. All of us knew what we had to do, but there were no volunteers.

Finally we drew straws and Pancake was unlucky.

"Okay," I said. "First thing in the morning "

"Morning, nothing!" wailed Pancake. "I want to get it over with. I wouldn't sleep a wink."

He was scared, all right, and he had a right to be. He felt just the way I would have if I'd drawn the shortest straw.

I didn't like barging around on an alien planet after dark, but we had to do it. It wouldn't have been fair to Pancake to have done otherwise. And, besides, we were all wrought up and we'd have no rest until we'd found out what we had.

So we got some flashes and went out to the silo. We tramped down the corridors for what seemed an endless time and came to the room where the machines were stored.

There didn't seem to be any difference in the machines, so we picked one at random. While Hutch got the helmet off, I adjusted the seat for Pancake and Doe went into an adjoining room to get a stick.

When we were all ready, Pancake sat down in the seat.

I had a sudden rush of imbecility.

"Look," I said to Pancake, "you don't need to do this."

"Someone has to," said Pancake. "We got to find out some. how and this is the quickest way." "I'll take your place."

Pancake called me a dirty name and he had no right to do that, for I was only being helpful. But I called him another and we were back to normal.

Hutch put the helmet on Pancake's head and it came down so far you couldn't see his face. Doc popped the stick into the tube and the machine purred a little, starting up, then set back into silence. Not exactly silence, either--when you laid your ear against the jacket, you could hear it running.

Nothing seemed to happen to Pancake. He sat there cool and relaxed and Doc got to work on him at once, checking him over.

"His pulse has slowed a little," Doc reported, "and his heart action's sort of feeble, but he seems to be in no danger."

His breathing is a little shallow, but not enough to worry about."

It might not have meant a thing to Doc, but it made the rest of us uneasy. We stood around and watched and nothing happened. I don't know what we thought might happen. Funny as it sounds, I had thought that something would.

Doc kept close watch, but Pancake got no worse.

We waited and we waited. The machine kept running and Pancake sat slumped in the seat. He was as limp as a dog asleep and when you picked up his hand, you'd think his bones had melted plumb away. All the time we got more nervous. Hutch wanted to jerk the helmet off Pancake, but I wouldn't let him.

No telling what might happen if we stopped the business in the middle.

It was about an hour after dawn that the machine stopped running. Pancake began to stir and we removed the helmet.

He yawned and rubbed his eyes and sat up straight. He looked a bit surprised when he saw us and it seemed to take a moment for him to recognize us.

"What happened?" Hutch asked him.

Pancake didn't answer. You could see him pulling himself together, as if he were remembering and getting his bearings once again.

"I went on a trip," he said.

"A travelogue!" said Doc, disgusted.

"Not a travelogue. I was there. It was a planet, way out at the rim of the Galaxy, I think. There weren't many stars at night because it was so far out--way out where the stars get thin and there aren't many of them. There was just a thin strip of light that moved overhead."

"Looking at the Galaxy edge on," said Frost, nodding. "Like you were looking at a buzz-saw's cutting edge."

"How long was I under?" asked Pancake.

"Long enough," I told him. "Six or seven hours. We were getting nervous."

"That's funny," said Pancake. "I'll swear I was there for a year or more."

"Now let's get this straight," Hutch said. "You say you were there. You mean you saw this place."

"I mean I was there?" yelled Pancake. "I lived with those people and I slept in their burrows and I talked with them and I worked with them. I got a blood blister on my hand from hoeing in a garden. I travelled from one place to another and I saw a lot of things and it was just as real as sitting here."

We bundled him out of there and went back to the ship.

Hutch wouldn't let Pancake get the breakfast. He threw it together himself and since Hutch is a lousy cook, it was a miserable meal. Doc dug up a bottle and gave Pancake a drink, but he wouldn't let any of the rest of us have any of it. Said it was medicinal, not social.

That's the way he is at times. Downright hog-selfish.

Pancake told us about this place he had been to. It didn't seem to have much, if any, government, mostly because it didn't seem to need one, but was a humble sort of planet where rather dim-witted people lived in a primitive agricultural state. They looked, he said, like a cross between a human and a groundhog, and he drew a picture of them, but it didn't help a lot, for

Pancake is no artist.

He told us the kind of crops they raised, and there were some screwy kinds, and what kind of food they ate, and we gagged at some of it, and he even had some of the place names down pat and he remembered shreds of the language and it was out-landish-sounding.

We asked him all sorts of questions and he had the answers to every one of them and some were the kind he could not have made up from his head. Even Doc, who had been sceptical to start with, was ready to admit that Pancake had visited the planet.

After we ate, we hustled Pancake off to bed and Doc checked him over and he was all right.

When Pancake and Doc had left, Hutch said to me and

Frost: "I can feel those dollars clinking in my pocket right this minute."

We both agreed with him.

We'd found an entertainment gadget that had anything yet known backed clear off the map.

The sticks were recordings that packed in not only sight and sound, but stimuli for all the other senses. They did the job so well that anyone

subjected to their influence felt that he was part of the environment they presented. He stepped into the picture and became a part of it. He was really there.

Frost already was planning exactly how we'd work it.

"We could sell the stuff," he said, "but that would be rather foolish. We want to keep control of it. We'll lease out the machines and we'll rent the sticks and since we'll have the sole supply, we can charge anything we wish."

"We can advertise year-long vacations that take less than half a day," said Hutch. "They'll be just the thing for executives and other busy people. Why, in a single week-end you could spend four or five years' time on several different planets."

"Maybe it's not only planets," Frost went on. "There might be concerts or art galleries and museums. Maybe lectures on history and literature and such."

We were feeling pretty good, but we were tuckered out, so we trailed off to bed.

I didn't get into bed right away, however, but hauled out the log. I don't know why I ever bothered with it. It was a hit-and-miss affair at best. There would be months I'd not even think about it and then all at once I'd get all neat and orderly and keep a faithful record for several weeks or so. There was no real reason to make an entry in it now, but I was somewhat excited and had a feeling that perhaps what had just happened should be put down in black and white.

So I crawled under the bunk and pulled out the tin box I kept it and the other papers in, and while I was lifting it to the bunk, it slipped out of my hands. The lid flew open. The log and all the papers and the other odds and ends I kept there scattered on the floor.

I cursed a bit and got down on my hands and knees to pick up the mess. There was an awful lot of it and most of it was junk. 'Someday, I told myself, I'd have to throw a lot of it away.

There were clearance papers from a hundred different ports and medical certificates and other papers that were long outdated.

But among it I found also the title to the ship.

I sat there thinking back almost twenty years to the day I'd bought the ship for next to nothing and towed it from the junkyard and I recalled how I'd spent a couple of years' spare time and all I could earn getting it patched up so it could take to space again. No wonder, I told myself, that it was a haywire ship. It had been junk to start with, and during all those years, we'd just managed to keep it glued together. There had been many times when the only thing that got it past inspection had been a fast bribe slipped quietly to the man. No one in the Galaxy but Hutch could have kept it flying.

I went on picking up the papers, thinking about Hutch and all the rest of them. I got a little sentimental and thought a lot of things I'd have clobbered anyone for if they had dared to say them to me. About how we had stuck together and how any one of them would have died for me and I for any one of them.

There had been a time, of course, when it had not been that way, back in the days when they'd first signed on and had been nothing but a crew. But that day was long past; now they were more than just a crew. There had been no signing on for years, but just staying on as men who had a right to stay. And I sat there, flat on the floor, and thought how we'd finally done the thing we'd always hoped to do, how we'd caught up with the dream--us, the ragamuffin crew in the glued-together ship--and I felt proud and happy, not for myself alone, but for Hutch and Pancake and Doc and Frost and all the rest.

Finally I got the papers all picked up and back in the box again and tried to write up the log, but was too tired to write, so I went to bed, as I should have done in the first place.

But tired as I was, I lay there and thought of how big the silo was and tried to estimate how many sticks might be cached away there. I got up into the trillions and I saw it was no use; there was no way to keep the figures straight.

The whole deal was big--bigger than anything we'd ever found before. It would take a group of men like us at least five lifetimes of steady hauling to empty the silo. We'd have to set up a corporation and get a legal staff (preferably one with the lowest kind of ethics) and file a claim on this planet and go through a lot of other red tape to be sure we had it all sewed up.

We couldn't take a chance of letting it slip through our fingers because of any lack of foresight. We'd have to get it all doped out before we went ahead.

I don't know about the rest of them, but I dreamed that night of wading knee-deep through a sea of crisp, crinkly banknotes.

When morning came, Doc failed to show up for breakfast. I went hunting him and found he hadn't even gone to bed. He was sprawled in his rickety old chair in the dispensary and there was one empty bottle on the floor and he trailed another, almost empty, alongside the chair, keeping a rather flimsy hold upon its neck. He still was conscious, which was about the most that could be said of him.

I was plenty sore. Doc knew the rules. He could get paralysed as soon or as often or as long as he wanted to when we were in space, but when we were grounded and there was work to do and planet ailments to keep an eye out for, he was expected to stay sober.

I kicked the bottle out of his fist and I took him by the collar with one hand and by the scat of his britches with the other and frog-walked him to the galley.

Plunking him down in a chair, I yelled for Pancake to get another pot of coffee going.

"I want you sobered up," I told Dec, "so you can go out with us on the second trip. We need all the manpower we have."

Hutch had rounded up his gang and Frost had got the crew together and had rigged up a block and tackle so we could start loading. Everyone was ready to begin bringing in the cargo excep-Doc and I swore to myself that, before the day was over,

I'd work the tail right off him.

As soon as we had breakfast, we started out. We planned to get aboard as many of the machines as we could handle and to fill in the space between them with all the sticks we could find room for.

We went down the corridors to the room that held the machines and we paired off, two men to the machine and started out.

Everything went fine until we were more than half-way across the stretch of ground between the building and the ship.

Hutch and I were in the lead and suddenly there was an explosion in the ground about fifty feet ahead of us. We skidded to a halt.

"It's Dec!" yelled Hutch, grabbing for his belt-gun.

I stopped him just in time. "Take it easy, Hutch."

Dec stood up in the port and waved a rifle at us.

"I could pick him off," Hutch said.

"Put back that gun," I ordered.

I walked out alone to where Dec had placed his bullet.

He lifted his rifle and I stopped dead still. He'd probably miss, but even so, the kind of explosive charge he 'was firing could cut a man in two if it struck ten feet away.

"I'm going to throw away my gun," I called out to him. "I want to talk with you."

Dec hesitated for a moment. "All right. Tell the rest of them to pull back a way."

I spoke to Hutch over my shoulder. "Get out of here. Take the others with you."

"He's crazy drunk," said Hutch. "No telling what he'll do."

"I can handle him," I said, sounding surer than I felt.

Doe let loose another bullet off to one side of us.

"Get moving, Hutch." I didn't dare look back. I had to keep an eye on Doc.
"All right," Doc finally yelled at me. "They're back. Throw away your gun."

Moving slow so he wouldn't think I was trying to draw on him, I unfastened the buckle of the gun belt and let it fall to the ground. I walked forward, keeping my eyes on Doc, and all the time my skin kept trying to crawl up my back.

"That's far enough," Doc said when I'd almost reached the ship. "We can talk from here."

"You're drunk," I told him. "I don't know what this is all about, but I know you're drunk."

"Not nearly drunk enough. Not drunk enough by half. If I were drunk enough, I simply wouldn't care." "What's eating you?"

"Decency," said Doc, in that hammy way of his. "I've told you many times that I can stomach looting when it involves no more than uranium and gems and other trash like that. I can even shut my eyes when you gut a culture, because you can't steal a culture--even when you get through looting it, the culture still is there and can build back again. But I balk at robbing knowledge. I will not let you do it, Captain." "I still say you're drunk."

"You don't even know what you've found. You are so blind and greedy that you don't recognize it."

"Okay, Doc," I said, trying to smooth his feathers, "tell me what we've found."

"A library. Perhaps the greatest, most comprehensive library in all the Galaxy. Some race spent untold years compiling the knowledge that is in that building and you plan to take it and sell it and scatter it. If that happens, in time it will be lost and what little of it may be left will be so out of context that half its meaning will be lost. It doesn't belong to us. It doesn't even belong to the human race alone. A library like that can belong only to all the peoples of the Galaxy."

"Look, Doc," I pleaded, "we've worked for years, you and I and all the rest of them. We've bled and sweated and been disappointed time and time again. This is our chance to make a killing. And that means you as well as the rest of us. Think of it,

Doe---more money than you can ever spend--enough to keep you drunk the rest of your life !"

Doc swung the rifle around at me and I thought my goose was cooked. But I never moved a muscle. I stood and bluffed it out.

At last he lowered the gun. "We're barbarians. History is full of the likes of us. Back on Earth, the barbarians stalled human progress for a thousand years when they burned and scattered the libraries and the learning of the Greeks and Romans. To them, books were just something to start a fire with or ivipe their weapons on. To you, this great cache of accumulated knowledge means nothing more than something to make a quick buck on. You'll take a scholarly study of a vital social problem and retail it as a year's vacation that can be experienced in six hours' time and you'll take "

"Spare me the lecture, Doc," I said wearily. "Tell me what you want."

"Go back and report this find to the Galactic Commission.

It will help wipe out a lot of things we've done."

"So help me, Doc, you've gone religious on us."

"Not religious. Just decent."

"And if we don't?"

"I've got the ship," said Doe. "I have the food and water."

"You'll have to sleep."

"I'll close the port. Just try getting in."

He had us and he knew he did. Unless we could figure out a way to grab him, he had us good and proper.

I was scared, but mostly I was burned. For years, we'd listened to him run off at the mouth and never for a moment had any of us thought he meant a word of it. And now suddenly he did--he meant every word of it.

I knew there was no way to talk him out of it. And there was no compromise. When it came right down to it, there was no agreement possible, for any agreement or compromise would have to be based on honour and we had no honour--not a one of us, not even among ourselves. It was stalemate, but Doc didn't know that yet. He'd realize it once he got a little sober and thought about it some. What he had done had been done on alcoholic impulse, but that didn't mean he wouldn't see it through.

One thing was certain: As it stood, he could outlast us.

"Let me go back," I said. "I'll have to talk this over with the others."

I think that Doc right then began to suspect how deeply he had become committed~ began to see for the first time the impossibility of us trusting one another.

"When you come back," he told me, "have it all thought out.

I'll want some guarantees." "Sure, Doc," I said.

"I mean this, Captain. I'm in deadly earnest. I'm not just fooling."

"I know you aren't, Doc."

I went back to where the others were clustered just a short distance from the building. I explained what was up.

"We'll have to spread out and charge him," Hutch decided.

"He may get one or two of us, but we can pick him off."

"He'll simply close the port," I said. "He can starve us out.

In a pinch, he could try to take the ship up. If he ever managed to get sober, he could probably do it."

"He's crazy," said Pancake. "Just plain drunken crazy."

"Sure he is," I said, "and that makes him twice as deadly.

He's been brooding on this business for a long, long time. He built up a guilt complex that's three miles high. And worst of all, he's got himself out on a limb and he can't back down."

"We haven't got much time," said Frost. "We've got to think of something. A man can die of thirst. You can get awfully hungry in just a little while."

The three of them got to squabbling about what was best to do and I sat down on the sand and leaned back against one of the machines and tried to figure Doc.

Doc was a failure as a medic; otherwise he'd not have tied up with us. More than likely, he had joined us as a gesture of defiance or despair--perhaps a bit of both. And besides being a failure, he was an idealist. He was out of place with us, but there'd been nowhere else to go, nothing else to do. For years, it had eaten at him and his values got all warped and there's no place better than deep space to get your values warped.

He was crazy as a coot, of course, but a special kind o: crazy. If it hadn't been so ghastly, you might have called i glorious crazy.

You wanted to laugh him off or brush him to one side, fol that was the kind of jerk he was, but he wouldn't laugh or brush

I don't know if I heard a sound--a footstep, maybe- or if I just sensed another presence, but all at once I knew we'd beet joined by someone.

I half got up and swung around toward the building an> there, just outside the entrance, stood what looked at first to be a kind of moth made up in human size.

I don't mean it was an insect--it just had the look of one. Itt face was muffled up in a cloak it wore and it was not a humar face and there was a ruff rising from its head like those crest,, you see on the helmets in the ancient plays.

Then I saw that the cloak was not a cloak at all, but a part of the creature and it looked like it might be folded wings, but il wasn't wings.

"Gentlemen," I said as quietly as I could, "we have a visitor."

I walked toward the creature soft and easy and alert, not wanting to frighten it, but all set to take evasive action if it tried to put the finger on me.

"Be ready, Hutch," I said.

"I'm covering you," Hutch assured me and it was a comfort to know that he

was there. A man couldn't get into too much trouble with Hutch backing him.

I stopped about six feet from the creature and he didn't look as bad close up as he did at a distance. His eyes seemed to be kind and gentle and his funny face, alien as it was, had a sort of peacefulness about it. But even so, you can't always tell with aliens.

We stood there looking at one another. The both of us understood there was no use in talking. We just stood and sized one another up.

Then the creature took a couple of steps and reached out a hand that was more like a claw than hand. He took my hand in his and tugged for me to come.

There were just two things to do--either snatch my hand away or go. I went.

I didn't stop to get it figured out, but there were several factors that helped make up my mind. First off, the creature seemed to be friendly and intelligent. And Hutch and all the others were there, just behind me. And over and above all, you don't get too far with aliens if you act stand-offish. So I went.

We walked into the silo and behind me I heard the tramping feet of the others and it was a sound that was good to hear.

I didn't waste any time wondering where the creature might have come from. I admitted to myself, as I walked along, that I had been half-expecting something just like this. The silo was so big that it could hold many things, even people or creatures, we could not know about. After all, we'd explored only one small corner of the first floor of it. The creature, I figured, must have come from somewhere on the upper floors as soon as he learned about us. It might have taken quite a while, one way or another, for the news to reach him.

He led me up three ramps to the fourth floor of the building and went down a corridor for a little way, then went into a room.

It was not a large room. It held just one machine, but this one was a double model; it had two bucket seats and two helmets.

There was another creature in the room.

The first one led me over to the machine and motioned for me to take one of the seats.

I stood there for a while, watching Hutch and Pancake and

Frost and all the others crowd into the place and line up against the wall.

Frost said: "A couple of you boys better stay outside and watch the corridor."

Hutch asked me: "You going to sit down in that contraption, Captain?"

"Why not?" I said. "They seem to be all right. There's more of us than them. They don't mean us any harm." "It's taking a chance," said Hutch.

"Since when have we stopped taking chances?"

The creature I had met outside had sat down in one of the seats, so I made a few adjustments in the other. While I was doing this, the second creature went to a file and got out two sticks, but these sticks were transparent instead of being black.

He lifted off the helmets and inserted the two sticks. Then he fitted one of the helmets on his fellow-creature's head and held out the other to me.

I sat down and let him put it on and suddenly I was squatting on the floor across a sort of big coffee-table from the gent I had met outside.

"Now we can talk," said the creature, "which we couldn't do before."

I wasn't scared or flustered. It seemed just as natural as if it had been Hutch across the table.

"There will be a record made of everything we say," said the creature. "When we are finished, you will get one copy and I will get the other for our files. You might call it a pact or a contract or whatever term seems to be most applicable."

"I'm not much at contracts," I told him. "There's too much legal flypaper tied up with most of them."

"An agreement, then," the creature suggested. "A gentlemen's agreement."

"Good enough," I said.

Agreements are convenient things. You can break them any time you want. Especially gentlemen's agreements.

"I suppose you have figured out what this place is," he said.

"Well, not for sure," I replied. "Library is the closest that we have come."

"It's a university, a galactic university. We specialize in extension or home-study courses."

I'm afraid I gulped a bit. "Why, that's just fine."

"Our courses are open to all who wish to take them. There are no entrance fees and there is no tuition. Neither are there any scholastic requirements for enrolment. You yourself can see how difficult it would be to set up such requirements in a galaxy where there are many races of varying viewpoints and abilities."

"You bet I can."

"The courses are free to all who can make use of them," he said. "We do expect, of course, that they make proper use of them and that they display some diligence in study."

"You mean anyone at all can enrol?" I asked. "And it don't cost anything?"

After the first disappointment, I was beginning to see the possibilities. With bona fide university educations for the taking, it would be possible to set up one of the sweetest rackets that anyone could ask for.

"There's one restriction," the creature explained. "We cannot, obviously, concern ourselves with individuals. The paper-work would get completely out of hand. We enrol cultures."

You, as a representative of your culture--what is it you >all yourselves?"

"The human race, originally of the planet Earth, now covering some half million cubic light-years. I'd have to see your chart "

"That's not necessary at the moment. We would be quite happy to accept your application for the entrance of the human race."

It took the wind out of me for a minute. I wasn't any representative of the human race. And if I could be, I wouldn't.

This was my deal, not the human race's. But I couldn't let him know that, of course. He wouldn't have done business with me.

"Now not so fast," I pleaded. "There's a question or two I'd like to have you answer. What kind of courses do you offer?"

What kind of electives do you have?"

"First there is the basic course," the creature said. "It is more or less a familiarization course, a sort of orientation. It includes those subjects which we believe can be of the most use to the race in question. It is, quite naturally, tailored specifically for each student culture. After that, there is a wide field of electives, hundreds of thousands of them."

"How about final exams and tests and things like that?" I wanted to know.

"Oh, surely," said the creature. "Such tests are conducted every--tell me about your time system."

I told him the best I could and he seemed to understand.

"I'd say", he finally said, "that about every thousand years of your time would come fairly close. It is a long-range programme and to conduct tests any oftener would put some strain upon our resources and might be of little value."

That decided me. What happened a thousand years from now was no concern of mine.

I asked a few more questions to throw him off the track--just in case he might have been suspicious--about the history of the university and such.

I still can't believe it. It's hard to conceive of any race working a million years to set up a university aimed at the eventual education of an entire galaxy, travelling to all the planets to assemble data, compiling the

records of countless cultures, correlating and classifying and sorting out that mass of information to set up the study courses. It was just too big for a man to grasp.

For a while, he had me reeling on the ropes and faintly starry-eyed about the whole affair. But then I managed to snap back to normal

"All right, Professor," I said, "you can sign us up. What am I supposed to do ?"

"Not a thing," he said. "The recording of our discussion will supply the data. We'll outline the course of basic study and you then may take such electives as you wish."

"If we can't haul it all in one trip, we can come back again?"

I asked.

"Oh, definitely. I anticipate you may wish to send a fleet to carry all you need. We'll supply sufficient machines and as many copies of the study recordings as you think you will need."

"It'll take a lot," I said bluntly, figuring I'd start high and haggle my way down. "An awful lot."

"I am aware of that," he told me. "Education for an entire culture is no simple matter. But we are geared for it."

So there we had it--all legal and airtight. We could get anything we wanted and as much as we wanted and we'd have a right to it. No one could say we stole it. Not even Doe could say that.

The creature explained to me the system of notation they used on the recording cylinders and how the courses would be boxed and numbered so they could be used in context. He promised to supply me with recordings of the electives so I could pick out what we wanted.

He was real happy about finding another customer and he proudly told me of all the others that they had and he held forth at length on the satisfaction that an educator feels at the opportunity to pass on the torch of knowledge. He had me feeling like a heel.

Then we were through and I was sitting in the seat again and the second creature was taking the helmet off my head.

I got up and the first creature rose to his feet and faced me.

We couldn't talk any more than we could to start with. It was a weird feeling, to face a being you've just made a deal with and not be able to say a single word that he can understand.

But he held out both his hands and I took them in mine and he gave my hands a friendly squeeze.

"Why don't you go ahead and kiss him ?" asked Hutch. "Me and the boys will look the other way."

Ordinarily, I'd have slugged Hutch for a crack like that, but I didn't even get sore.

The second creature took the two sticks out of the machine and handed one to me. They'd gone in transparent, but they came out black.

"Let's get out of here," I said.

We got out as fast as we could and still keep our dignity--if you could call it that.

Outside the silo, I got Hutch and Pancake and Frost together and told them what had happened.

"We got the universe by the tail," I said, "with a downhill pull."

"What about Doe ?" asked Frost.

"Don't you see ? It's just the kind of deal that would appeal to him. We can let on we're noble and big-hearted and acting in good faith. All I need to do is get close enough to grab him.~

"He won't even listen to you," said Pancake. "He won't believe a word you say."

"You guys stay right here," I said. "TII handle Doe."

I walked back across the stretch of ground between the building and the ship. There was no sign of Doc. I was all set to holler for him, then thought better of it. I took a chance and started up the ladder. I reached the port

and there was still no sign of him.

I moved warily into the ship. I thought I knew what had become of him, but there was no need to take more chances than I had to.

I found him in his chair in the dispensary. He was stiffer than a goat. The gun lay on the floor. There were two empty bottles beside the chair.

I stood and looked at him and knew what had happened.

After I had left, he had got to thinking about the situation and had run into the problem of how he'd climb down off that limb and he had solved it the way he'd solved most of his problems all his life.

I got a blanket and covered him. Then I rummaged around and found another bottle. I uncorked it and put it beside the chair, where he could reach it easy. Then I picked up the gun and went to call the others in.

I lay in bed that night and thought about it and it was beautiful.

There were so many angles that a man didn't know quite where to start.

There was the university racket which, queerly enough, was entirely legitimate, except that the professor out in the silo never meant it to be sold.

And there was the quickie vacation deal, offering a year or two on an alien planet in six hours of actual time. All we'd need to do was pick a number of electives in geography or social science or whatever they might call it.

There could be an information bureau or a research agency, charging fancy prices to run down facts on any and all subjects.

Without a doubt, there'd be some on-the-spot historical recordings and with those in hand, we could retail adventure, perfectly safe adventure, to the stay-at-homes who might hanker for it.

I thought about that and a lot of other things which were not quite so sure, but at least probable and worth investigating, and I thought, too, about how the professors had finally arrived at what seemed to me a sure-fire effective medium for education.

You wanted to know about a thing, so you up and lived it; you learned it on the ground. You didn't read about it or hear about it or even see it in plain three-dimension--you experienced it. You walked the soil of the planet you wanted to know about; you lived with the beings that you wished to study; you saw as an eye-witness, and perhaps as a participant, the history that you sought to learn.

And it could be used in other ways as well. You could learn to build anything, even a spaceship, by actually building one.

You could learn how an alien machine might operate by putting it together, step by simple step. There was no field of knowledge in which it would not work--and work far better than standard educational methods.

Right then and there, I made up my mind we'd not release a single stick until one of us had previewed it. No telling what a man might find in one of them that could be put to practical use.

I fell asleep dreaming about chemical miracles and new engineering principles, of better business methods and new philosophic concepts. And I even figured out how a man could make a mint of money out of a philosophic concept.

We were on top of the universe for sure. We'd set up a corporation with more angles than you could shake a stick at.

We would be big time. In a thousand years or so, of course, there'd be a reckoning, but none of us would be around to take part in it.

Doe sobered up by morning and I had Frost heave him in the brig. He wasn't dangerous any longer, but I figured that a spell in pokey might do him a world of good. After a while, I intended to talk to him, but right at the moment I was much too busy to be bothered with him.

I went over to the silo with Hutch and Pancake and had another session with the professor on the double-seat machine and picked out a batch of electives and settled various matters.

Other professors began supplying us with the courses, all boxed and

labelled, and we set the crew and the engine gang to work hauling them and the machines aboard and stowing them away.

Hutch and I stood outside the silo and watched the work go on.

"I never thought", said Hutch, "that we'd hit the jackpot this way. To be downright honest with you, I never thought we'd hit it. I always thought we'd just go on looking. It goes to show how wrong a man can be."

"Those professors are soft in the head," I said. "They never asked me any questions. I can think of a lot they could have asked that I couldn't answer."

"They're honest and think everyone's the same. That's what comes of getting so wrapped up in something you have time for nothing else."

And that was true enough. The professor race has been busy for a million years doing a job it took a million years to do-- and another million and a million after that--and that never would be finished.

"I can't figure why they did it," I said. "There's no profit in it."

"Not for them," said Hutch, "but there is for us. I tell you, Captain, it takes brains to work out the angles."

I told him what I had figured out about previewing every- thing before we gave it out, so we would be sure we let nothing slip away from us.

Hutch was impressed. "I'll say this for you, Captain--you don't miss a bet. And that's the way it should be. We might as well milk this deal for every cent it's worth."

"I think we should be methodical about' this previewing business," I said. "We should start at the beginning and go straight through to the end."

Hutch said he thought so, too. "But it will take a lot of time," he warned me.

"That's why we should start right now. The orientation course is on board already and we could start with that. All we'd have to do is set up a machine and Pancake could help you with it."

"Help me!" yelled Hutch. "Who said anything about me doing it ? I ain't cut out for that stuff. You know yourself I never do any reading "

"It isn't reading. You just live it. You'll be having fun while we're out here slaving." "I won't do it."

"Now look," I said, "let's use a little sense. I should be out here at the silo seeing everything goes all right and close at hand so I can hold a pow-wow with the professor if there's any need of it. We need Frost to superintend the loading. And Doc is in the clink. That leaves you and Pancake. I can't trust Pancake with that previewing job. lie's too scatterbrained. He'd let a fortune glide right past him without recognizing it. Now you're a fast man with a buck and the way I see it "

"Since you put it that way," said Hutch, all puffed up, "I suppose I am the one who should be doing it."

That evening, we were all dog-tired, but we felt fine. We had made a good start with the loading and in a few more days would be heading home.

Hutch seemed to be preoccupied at supper. He fiddled witt his food. He didn't talk at all and he seemed like a man witt something on his mind.

As soon as I could, I cornered him.

"How's it going, Hutch ?"

"Okay," he said. "Just a lot of gab. Explaining what it's al! about. Gab."

"Like what ?"

"Some of it's hard to tell. Takes a lot of explaining I haven't got the words for. Maybe one of these days you'll find the time to run through it yourself."

"You can bet your life I will," I said, somewhat sore at him.

"There's nothing worth a dime in it so far," said Hutch.

I believed him on that score. Hutch could spot a dollar twenty miles away. I went down to the brig to see Doc. He was sober. Also unrepentant.

"You outreached yourself this time," he said. "That stuff isn't yours to sell. There's knowledge in that building that belongs to the Galaxy--for free."

I explained to him what had happened, how we'd found the silo was a

university and how we were taking the courses on board for the human race after signing up for them all regular and proper. I tried to make it sound as if we were being big, but

Doc wouldn't buy a word of it.

"You wouldn't give your dying grandma a drink of water unless she paid you in advance," he said. "Don't give me any of that gruff about service to humanity."

So I left him to stew in the brig a while and went up to my cabin. I was sore at Hutch and all burned up at Doc and my tail was dragging. I fell asleep in no time.

The work went on for several days and we were almost finished.

I felt pretty good about it. After supper, I climbed down the ladder and sat on the ground beside the ship and looked across at the silo. It still looked big and awesome, but not as big as that first day--because now it had lost some of its strangeness and even the purpose of it had lost some of its strangeness, too.

Just as soon as we got back to civilization, I promised myself, we'd seal the deal as tight as possible. Probably we couldn't legally claim the planet because the professors were intelligent and you can't claim a planet that has intelligence, but there were plenty of other ways we could get our hooks into it for keeps.

I sat there and wondered why no one came down to sit with me, but no one did, so finally I clambered up the ladder.

I went down to the brig to have a word with Doc. He was still unrepentant, but he didn't seem too hostile.

"You know, Captain," he said, "there have been times when

I've not seen eye to eye with you, but despite that I've respected you and sometimes even liked you."

"What are you getting at?" I asked him. "You can't soft-talk yourself out of the spot you're in."

"There's something going on and maybe I should tell you.

You are a forthright rascal. You don't even take the trouble to deny you are. You have no scruples and probably no morals, and that's all right, because you don't pretend to have. You are "

"Spit it out! If you don't tell me what's going on, I'll come in there and wring it out of you."

"Hutch has been down here several times," said Doc,

"inviting me to come up and listen to one of those recordings he is fooling with. Said it was right down my alley. Said I'd not be sorry. But there was something wrong about it. Something sneaky." He stared round-eyed through the bars at me. "You know, Captain, Hutch was never sneaky." "Well, go on!"

"Hutch has found out something, Captain. If I were you, I'd be finding out myself."

I didn't even wait to answer him. I remembered how Hutch had been acting, fiddling with his food and preoccupied, not talking very much. And come to think of it, some of the others had been acting strangely, too. I'd just been too busy to give it much attention.

Running up the catwalks, I cursed with every step I took. A captain of a ship should never get so busy that he loses touch-- he has to stay in touch all the blessed time. It had all come being in a hurry, of wanting to get loaded up and out of there before something happened.

And now something had happened. No one had come down to sit with me. There'd not been a dozen words spoken at the supper table. Everything felt deadly wrong.

Pancake and Hutch had rigged up the chart room for the previewing chore and I busted into it and slammed the door and stood with my back against it.

Not only Hutch was there, but Pancake and Frost as well and, in the machine's bucket seat, a man I recognized as one of the engine gang.

I stood for a moment without saying anything, and the three of them stared

back at me. The man with the helmet on his head didn't notice--he wasn't even there.

"All right, Hutch," I said, "come clean. What is this all about? Why is that man previewing? I thought just you and "

"Captain," said Frost, "we were about to tell you."

"You shut up! I am asking Hutch."

"Frost is right," said Hutch. "We were all set to tell you. But you were so busy and it came a little hard"

"What's hard about it ?"

"Well, you had your heart all set to make yourself a fortune.

We were trying to find a way to break it to you gentle." I left the door and walked over to him.

"I don't know what you're talking about," I said, "but we still make ourselves a killing. There never was a time of day or night, Hutch, that I couldn't beat your head in and if you don't want me to start, you better talk real fast."

"We'll make no killing, Captain," Frost said quietly. "We're taking this stuff back and we'll turn it over to the authorities."

"All of you are nuts !" I roared. "For years, we've slaved and sweated, hunting for the jackpot. And now that we have it in our mitts, now that we can walk barefooted through a pile of thousand-dollar bills, you're going chicken on me. What's "

"It's not right for us to do it, sir," said Panoake.

And that "sir" scared me more than anything that had happened so far. Pancake had never called me that before.

I looked from one to the other of them and what I saw in their faces chilled me to the bone. Every single one of them thought just the same as Pancake.

"That orientation course !" I shouted.

Hutch nodded. "It explained about honesty and honour."

"What do you scamps know about honesty and honour ?" I raged. "There ain't a one of you that ever drew an honest breath."

"We never knew about it before," said Pancake, "but we know about it now."

"It's just propoganda! It's just a dirty trick the professors played on us!"

And it was a dirty trick. Although you have to admit the professors knew their onions. I don't know if they figured us humans for a race of heels or if the orientation course was just normal routine. But no wonder they hadn't questioned me. No wonder they'd made no investigation before handing us their knowledge. They had us stopped before we could even make a move.

"We felt that since we had learned about honesty," said

Frost, "it was only right the rest of the crew should know. It's an awful kind of life we've been living, Captain."

"So", said Hutch, "we been bringing in the men, one by one, and orienting them. We figured it was the least that we could do. This man is about the last of them."

"A missionary," I said to Hutch. "So that is what you are.

Remember what you told me one night ? You said you wouldn't be a missionary no matter what they paid you."

"There's no need of that," Frost replied coldly. "You can't shame us and you can't bully us. We know we are right."

"But the money I What about the corporation ? We had it all planned out!"

Frost said: "You might as well forget it, Captain. When you take the course."

"I'm not taking any course." My voice must have been as deadly as I felt, for not a one of them made a move toward me.

"If any of you mealy-mouthed missionaries feel an urge to make me, you can start trying right now."

They still didn't move. I had them bluffed. But there was no point in arguing with them. There was nothing I could do against that stone wall of

honesty and honour.

I turned my back on them and walked to the door. At the door, I stopped. I said to Frost: "You better turn Doc loose and give him the cure. Tell him it's all right with me. He has it coming to him. It will serve him right."

Then I shut the door behind me and went up the cat-walk to my cabin. I locked the door, a thing I'd never done before.

I sat down on the edge of the bunk and stared at the wall and thought.

There was just one thing they had forgotten. This was my ship, not theirs. They were just the crew and their papers had run out long ago and never been renewed.

I got down on my hands and knees and hauled out the tin box I kept the papers in. I went through it systematically and sorted out the papers that I needed--the title to the ship and the registry and the last papers they had signed.

I laid the papers on the bunk and shoved the box out of the way and sat down again.

I picked up the papers and shuffled them from one hand to the other.

I could throw them off the ship any time I wished. I could take off without them and there was nothing, absolutely nothing, they could do about it.

And what was more, I could get away with it. It was legal, of course, but it was a rotten thing to do. Now that they were honest men and honourable, though, they'd bow to the legality and let me get away with it. And in such a case, they had no one but themselves to thank.

I sat there for a long time thinking, but my thoughts went round and round and mostly had to do with things out of the pastuhow Pancake had gotten tangled up in the nettle patch out in the Coonskin System and how Doc had fallen in love with (of all things) a tri-sexual being that time we touched at

Siro and how Hutch had cornered the liquor supply at Munko, then lost it in a game that was akin to craps except the dice were queer little living entities that you had no control of, which made it tough on Hutch.

A rap came at the door.

It was Doe.

"You all full of honesty?" I asked him.

He shuddered. "Not me. I turned down the offer."

"It's the same kind of swill you were preaching at me just a couple of days ago."

"Can't you see", asked Doc, "what it would do to the human race?"

"Sure. It'll make them honourable and honest. No one will ever cheat or steal again and it will be cosy "

"They'll die of complicated boredom," said Doc. "Life will become a sort of cross between a Boy Scout jamboree and a ladies' sewing circle. There'll be no loud and unseemly argu-ment and they'll be polite and proper to the point of stupe- faction."

"So you have changed your mind."

"Not really, Captain. But this is the wrong way to go about it. Whatever progress the race has ever made has been achieved by the due process of social evolution. In any human advance, the villains and the rascals are as important as the forward- looking idealist. They are man's consciences and man can't get along without them."

"If I were you, Doe," I said, "I wouldn't worry so much about the human race. It's a pretty big thing and it can take a lot of bumps. Even an overdose of honesty won't hurt it permanently."

Actually, I didn't give a damn. I had other things on my mind right then.

Doc crossed the room and sat down on the bunk beside me. He leaned over and tapped the papers I still held in my hand.

"You got it all doped out," he said.

I nodded bleakly. "Yeah."

"I thought you would."

I shot a quick glance at him. "You were way ahead of me."

That's why you switched over."

Doe shook his head emphatically. "No. Please believe me, Captain, I feel as bad as you do."

"It won't work either way." I shuffled the papers. "They acted in good faith. They didn't sign aboard, sure. But there was no reason that they should have. It was all understood.

Share and share alike. And that's the way it's been for too long to repudiate it now. And we can't keep on. Even ff we agreed to dump the stuff right here and blast off and never think of it again, we'd not get rid of it. It would always be there. The past is dead, Doe. It's spoiled. It's smashed and it can't be put back together."

I felt like bawling. It had been a long time since I had felt that full of grief.

"They are different kind of men now," I said. "They went and changed themselves and they'll never be the same. Even if they could change back, it wouldn't be the same."

Doe mocked me a little. "The race will build a monument to you. Maybe actually on Earth itself, with all the other famous humans, for bringing back this stuff. They'd be just blind enough to do it."

I got up and paced the floor. "I don't want any monument.

I'm not bringing it in. I'm not having anything more to do with it."

I stood there, wishing we had never found the silo, for what had it done for me except to lose me the best crew and the best friends a man had ever had ?

"The ship is mine," I said. "That is all I want. I'll take the cargo to the nearest point and dump it there. Hutch and the rest of them can carry on from there, any way then can. They can have the honesty and honour. I'll get another crew."

Maybe, I thought, some day it would be almost the way it had been. Almost, but not quite.

"We'll go on hunting," I said. "We'll dream about the jackpot. We'll do our best to find it. We'll do anything to find it. We'll break all the laws of God or man to find it. But you know something, Doc ?"

"No, I don't," said Doc.

"I hope we never find it. I don't want to find another. I just want to go on hunting."

We stood there in the silence, listening to the fading echoes of those days we hunted for the jackpot.

"Captain," said Doc, "will you take me along?"

I nodded. What was the difference ? He might just as well.

"Captain, you remember those insect mounds on Suud ?"

"Of course. How could I forget them ?"

"You know, I've figured out a way we might break into them. Maybe we should try it. There should be a billion "

I almost clobbered him.

I'm glad now that I didn't.

Suud is where we're headed.

If Doc's plan works out, we may hit that jackpot yet !