

JACK WILLIAMSON

If your father read science fiction, he very likely counted Jack Williamson high among his favorite writers—as you very likely do today. Young enough to have served with the Air Force in the South Pacific in World War II, Williamson is old enough, and has been writing excellent science fiction stories often enough, to have attained an almost unique status as combination revered old master and bright new star. For more than thirty years his stories have been the delight of hundreds of thousands of readers. Such consistent loyalty demonstrates the existence of talent; such talent implies the ability to create so bright a bit as—

The Happiest Creature

The collector puffed angrily into the commandant's office in the quarantine station, on the moon of Earth. He was a heavy hairless man with shrewd little ice-green eyes sunk deep in fat yellow flesh. He had a genial smile when he was getting what he wanted. Just now he wasn't.

"Here we've come a good hundred light-years, and you can see who I am." He riffled his psionic identification films under the commandant's nose. "I intend to collect at least one of those queer anthropoids, in spite of all your silly red tape."

The shimmering films attested his distinguished scientific attainments. He was authorized to gather specimens for the greatest zoo in the inhabited galaxy, and the quarantine service had been officially requested to expedite his search.

"I see." The commandant nodded respectfully, trying to conceal a weary frown. The delicate business of safe guard-ing Earth's embryonic culture had taught him to deal cautiously with such unexpected threats. "Your credentials are certainly impressive, and we'll give you whatever help we can. Won't you sit down?"

The collector wouldn't sit down. He was thoroughly annoyed with the commandant. He doubted loudly that the quarantine regulations had ever been intended to apply to such a backward planet as Earth, and he proposed to take his specimen without any further fiddle-faddle.

The commandant, who came from a civilization which valued courtesy and reserve, gasped in spite of himself at the terms that came through his psionic translator, but he attempted to restrain his mounting impatience.

"Actually, these creatures are human," he answered firmly. "And we are stationed here to protect them."

"Human?" The collector snorted. "When they've never got even this far off their stinking little planet!"

"A pretty degenerate lot," the commandant agreed regretfully. "But their human origins have been well established, and you'll have to leave them alone."

The collector studied the commandant's stern-lipped face and modified his voice.

"All we need is a single specimen, and we won't injure that." He recovered his jovial smile. "On the contrary, the creature we pick up will be the luckiest one on the planet. I've been in this game a good many centuries, and I know what I'm talking about. Wild animals in their native environments are invariably diseased. They are in constant physical danger, generally undernourished, and always more or less

frustrated sexually. But the beast we take will receive the most expert attention in every way."

A hearty chuckle shook his oily yellow yowls.

"Why, if you allowed us to advertise for a specimen, half the population would volunteer."

"You can't advertise," the commandant said flatly. "Our first duty here is to guard this young culture from any outside influence that might cripple its natural development."

"Don't upset yourself." The fat man shrugged. "We're undercover experts. Our specimen will never know that it has been collected, if that's the way you want it."

"It isn't." The commandant rose abruptly. "I will give your party every legitimate assistance, but if I discover that you have tried to abduct one of these people I'll confiscate your ship."

"Keep your precious pets," the collector grunted un-graciously. "We'll just go ahead with our field studies. Live specimens aren't really essential, anyhow. Our technicians have prepared very authentic displays, with only animated replicas."

"Very well." The commandant managed a somewhat sour smile. "With that understanding, you may land."

He assigned two inspectors to assist the collector and make certain that the quarantine regulations were re-spected. Undercover experts, they went on to Earth ahead of the expedition, and met the interstellar ship a few weeks later at a rendezvous on the night side of the planet.

The ship returned to the moon, while the outsiders spent several months traveling on the planet, making psionic records and collecting specimens from the unprotected species. The inspector reported no effort to violate the Covenants, and everything went smoothly until the night when the ship came back to pick up the expedition.

Every avoidable hazard had been painstakingly avoided. The collector and his party brought their captured specimens to the pickup point in native vehicles, traveling as Barstow Brothers' Wild Animal Shows. The ship dropped to meet them at midnight, on an uninhabited desert plateau. A thousand such pickups had been made without an incident, but that night things went wrong.

A native anthropoid had just escaped from a place of confinement. Though his angered tribesmen pursued, he had outrun them in a series of stolen vehicles. They blocked the roads, but he got away across the desert. When his last vehicle stalled, he crossed a range of dry hills on foot in the dark. An unforeseen danger, he blundered too near the waiting interstellar ship.

His pursuers discovered his abandoned car, and halted the disguised outsiders to search their trucks and warn them that a dangerous convict was loose. To keep the natives away from the ship, the inspectors invented a tale of a frightened man on a horse, riding wildly in the opposite direction.

They guided the native officers back to where they said they had seen the imaginary horseman, and kept them occupied until dawn. By that time, the expedition was on the ship, native trucks and all, and safely back in space.

The natives never recaptured their prisoner. Through that chance-in-a-million that can never be eliminated by even the most competent undercover work, he had got

aboard the interstellar ship.

The fugitive anthropoid was a young male. Physically, he appeared human enough, even almost handsome. Lean from the prison regime, he carried himself defiantly erect. Some old injury had left an ugly scar across his cheek and his thin lips had a snarling twist, but he had a poised alertness and a kind of wary grace.

He was even sufficiently human to possess clothing and a name. His filthy garments were made of twisted animal and vegetable fibers and the skins of butchered animals. His name was Casey James.

He was armed like some jungle carnivore, however, with a sharpened steel blade. His body, like his whole planet, was contaminated with parasitic organisms. He was quivering with fear and exhaustion, like any hunted animal, the night he blundered upon the ship. The pangs of his hunger had passed, but a bullet wound in his left arm was nagging him with unalleviated pain.

In the darkness, he didn't even see the ship. The trucks were stopped on the road, and the driver of the last had left it while he went ahead to help to adjust the loading ramp. The anthropoid climbed on the unattended truck and hid himself under a tarpaulin before it was driven aboard.

Though he must have been puzzled and alarmed to find that the ship was no native conveyance, he kept hidden in the cargo hold for several days. With his animal craftiness, he milked one of the specimen animals for food, and slept in the cab of an empty truck. Malignant organisms were multiplying in his wounded arm, however, and pain finally drove him out of hiding.

He approached the attendants who were feeding the animals, threatened them with his knife, and demanded medical care. They disarmed him without difficulty and took him to the veterinary ward. The collector found him there, already scrubbed and disinfected, sitting up in his bed.

"Where're we headed for?" he wanted to know.

He nodded without apparent surprise when the collector told him the mission and the destination of the ship.

"Your undercover work ain't quite so hot as you seem to think," he said. "I've seen your flying saucers myself."

"Flying saucers!" The collector sniffed disdainfully, "They aren't anything of ours. Most of them are nothing but refracted images of surface lights, produced by atmospheric inversions. The quarantine people are getting out a book to explain that to your fellow creatures."

"A good one for the cops!" The anthropoid grinned. "I bet they're still scratching their dumb skulls, over how I dodged 'em." He paused to finger his bandaged arm, in evident appreciation of the civilized care he had received. "And when do we get to this wonderful zoo of yours?"

"You don't," the collector told him. "I did want exactly such a specimen as you are, but those stuffy bureaucrats wouldn't let me take one."

"So you gotta get rid of me?"

The psionic translator revealed the beast's dangerous desperation, even before his hard body stiffened.

"Wait!" The collector retreated hastily. "Don't alarm yourself. We won't hurt you. We couldn't destroy you, even to escape detection. No civilized man can destroy a

human life."

"Nothing to it," the creature grunted. "But if you ain't gonna toss me out in space, then what?"

"You've put us in an awkward situation." The yellow man scowled with annoyance. "If the quarantine people caught us with you aboard, they'd cancel our permits and seize everything we've got. Somehow, we'll have to put you back."

"But I can't go back." The anthropoid licked his lips nervously. "I just gut-knifed a guard. If they run me down this time, it's the chair for sure."

The translator made it clear that the chair was an elaborate torture machine in which convicted killers were put to a ceremonial death, according to a primitive tribal code of blood revenge.

"So you gotta take me wherever you're going." The creature's dark, frightened eyes studied the collector cunningly. "If you put me back, you'll be killing me."

"On the contrary." The collector's thick upper lip twitched slightly, and a slow smile oozed across his wide putty face, warming everything except his frosty little eyes. "Human life is sacred. We can arrange to make you the safest creature of your kind—and also the hap-piest—so long as you are willing to observe two necessary conditions."

"Huh?" The anthropoid squinted. "Whatcha mean?"

"You understand that we violated the quarantine in allowing you to get aboard," the collector explained patiently. "We, and not you, would be held responsible in case of detection, but we need your help to conceal the violation. We are prepared to do everything for you, if you will make and keep two simple promises."

"Such as?"

"First, promise you won't talk about us."

"Easy enough." The beast grinned. "Nobody'd believe me, anyhow."

"The quarantine people would." The collector's cold eyes narrowed. "Their undercover agents are alert for rumors of *any* violation."

"Okay, I'll keep my mouth shut." The creature shrugged. "What else?"

"Second, you must promise not to kill again." The anthropoid stiffened. "What's it to you?"

"We can't allow you to destroy any more of your fellow beings. Since you are now in our hands, the guilt would fall on us." The collector scowled at him. "Prom-ise?"

The anthropoid chewed thoughtfully on his thin lower lip. His hostile eyes looked away at nothing. The collector caught a faint reflection of his thoughts, through the translator, and stepped back uneasily.

"The cops are hot behind me," he muttered. "I gotta take care of myself."

"*Don't worry.*" The collector snapped his fat fingers. "We can get you a pardon. Just say you won't kill again."

"No." Lean muscles tightened in the anthropoid's jaws. "There's one certain man I gotta knock off. That's the main reason I busted out the pen."

"Who is this enemy?" The collector frowned. "Why is he so dangerous?"

"But he ain't so dangerous," the beast grunted. "I just hate his guts."

"I don't understand."

"I always wanted to kick his face in." The creature's thin lips snarled. "Ever since

we was kids together, back in Las Verdades."

"Yet you have never received any corrective treatment for such a monstrous obsession?" The collector shook his head incredulously, but the anthropoid ignored him.

"His name is Gabriel Melendez," the creature muttered. "Just a dirty greaser, but he makes out he's just as good as me. I had money from my rich aunt and he was hungry half the time, but he'd never stay in his place. Even when he was just a snotty-nosed kid, and knew I could beat him because I was bigger, he was always trying to fight me." The beast bared his decaying teeth. "I aim to kill him, before I'm through."

"Killing is never necessary," the collector protested un-easily. "Not for civilized men."

"But I ain't so civilized." The anthropoid grinned bleakly. "I aim to gut-knife Gabe Melendez, just like I did that dumb guard."

"An incredible obsession!" The collector recoiled from the grim-lipped beast and the idea of such raw violence. "What has this creature done to you?"

"He took the girl I wanted." The beast caught a rasping breath. "And he put the cops on me. At least I think it was him, because I got caught not a month after I stuck up the filling station where he works. I think he recognized me, and I aim to get him."

"No--"

"But I will!" The anthropoid slipped out of bed and stood towering over the fat man defiantly, his free hand clenched and quivering. "You can't stop me, not with all your fancy gadgets."

The beast glared down into the collector's bright little eyes. They looked back without blinking, and their lack of brows or lashes made them seem coldly reptilian. Abruptly, the animal subsided.

"Okay, okay!" He spat deliberately on the spotless floor and grinned at the collector's involuntary start. "What's it worth, to let him live?"

The collector shook off his shocked expression.

"We're undercover experts and we know your planet." A persuasive smile crept across his gross face. "Our resources are quite adequate to take care of anything you can demand. Just give your word not to kill again, or talk about us, and tell me what you want."

The anthropoid rubbed his hairy jaw, as if attempting to think.

"First, I want the girl," he muttered huskily. "Carmen Quintana was her name, before she married Gabe. She may give you a little trouble, because she don't like me a bit. Nearly clawed my eyes out once, even back before I shot her old man at the filling station." His white teeth flashed in a wolfish grin. "Think you can make her go for me?"

"I think we can." The collector nodded blandly. "We can arrange nearly anything."

"You'd better arrange that." The anthropoid's thin brown hand knotted again. "And I'll make her sorry she ever looked at Gabe!"

"You don't intend to injure her?"

"That's my business." The beast laughed. "Just take me to Las Verdades. That's a

little 'dobe town down close to the border."

The anthropoid listed the rest of his requirements, and crossed his heart in a ritual gesture of his tribe to solemnize his promises. He knew when the interstellar craft landed again, but he had to stay aboard a long time afterwards, living like a prisoner in a sterile little cell, while he waited for the outsiders to complete their underground arrangements for his return. He was fuming with impatience, stalking around his windowless room like a caged carnivore, when the collector finally unlocked his door.

"You're driving me nuts," he growled at the hairless out-sider. "What's the holdup?"

"The quarantine people." The collector shrugged. "We had to manufacture some new excuse for every move we made, but I don't think they ever suspected anything. And here you are!"

He dragged a heavy piece of primitive luggage into the room and straightened up beside it, puffing and mopping at his broad wet face.

"Open it up," he wheezed. "You'll see that we intend to keep our part of the bargain. Don't forget yours."

The anthropoid dropped on his knees to burrow eagerly through the garments and the simple paper documents in the bag. He looked up with a scowl.

"Where is it?" he snapped.

"You'll find everything," the fat man panted. "Your pardon papers. Ten thousand dollars in currency. Forty thousand in cashier's checks. The clothing you speci-fied—"

"But where's the gun?"

"Everything has been arranged so that you will never need it." The collector shifted on his feet uncomfortably. "I've been hoping you might change your mind about—"

"I gotta protect myself."

"You'll never be attacked."

"You said you'd give me a gun."

"We did." The collector shrugged unhappily. "You may have it, if you insist, when you leave the ship. Better get into your new clothing now. We want to take off again in half an hour."

The yellow Cadillac convertible he had demanded was waiting in the dark at the bottom of the ramp, its chrome trim shimmering faintly. The collector walked with him down through the airlock to the car, and handed him a heavy little package.

"Now don't turn on the headlamps," the yellow man cautioned him. "Just wait here for daylight. You'll see the Albuquerque highway then, not a mile east. Turn right to Las Verdades. We have arranged everything to keep you very happy there, so long as you don't attempt to betray us."

"Don't worry." He grinned in the dark. "Don't worry a minute."

He slid into the car and clicked on the parking lights. The instrument panel lit up like a Christmas tree. He settled himself luxuriously at the wheel, appreciatively sniffing the expensive new-car scents of leather and rubber and enamel.

"Don't you worry, butter-guts," he muttered. "You'll never know."

The ramp was already lifting back into the interstellar ship when he looked up. The

bald man waved at him and vanished. The airlock thudded softly shut. The great disk took off into the night, silently, like something falling upward.

The beast sat grinning in the car. Quite a deal, he was thinking. Everything he had thought to ask for, all for just a couple of silly promises they couldn't make him keep. He already had most of his pay, and old clabber-guts would soon be forty thousand miles away, or however far it was out to the stars.

Nobody had ever been so lucky.

They had fixed his teeth, and put him in a hundred-dollar suit, and stuffed his pockets with good cigars. He unwrapped one of the cigars, bit off the end, lit it with the automatic lighter, and inhaled luxuriously. He had everything.

Or did he?

A sudden uncertainty struck him, as dawn began to break. The first gray shapes that came out of the dark seemed utterly strange, and he was suddenly afraid the outsiders had double-crossed him. Maybe they hadn't really brought him back to Earth, after all. Maybe they had marooned him on some foreign planet, where he could never find Carmen and Gabe Melendez.

With a gasp of alarm, he snapped on the headlights. The wide white beams washed away all that terrifying strangeness, and left only a few harmless clumps of yucca and mesquite. He slumped back against the cushions, laughing weakly.

Now he could see the familiar peaks of Dos Lobos jutting up like jagged teeth, black against the green glass sky. He switched off the headlights and started the motor and eased the swaying car across the brown hummocks toward the dawn. In a few minutes he found the highway.

JOSE'S OASIS, ONE STOP SERVICE, 8 MILES AHEAD

He grimaced at the sign, derisively. What if he had got his twenty years for sticking up the Oasis and shooting down old Jose. Who cared now if his mother and his aunt had spent their last grubby dimes, paying the lawyers to keep him out of the chair? And Carmen, what if she had spat in his face at the trial? The outsiders had taken care of everything.

Or what if they hadn't?

Cautiously, he slowed the long car and pulled off the pavement where it curved into the valley. The spring rains must have already come, because the rocky slopes were all splashed with wild flowers and tinted green with new grass. The huge old cottonwoods along the river were just coming into leaf, delicately green.

The valley looked as kind as his old mother's face, when she was still alive, and the little town beyond the river seemed clean and lovely as he remembered Carmen. Even the sky was shining like a blue glass bowl, as if the outsiders had somehow washed and sterilized it. Maybe they had. They could do anything, except kill a man.

He chuckled, thinking of the way old baldy had made him cross his heart. Maybe the tallow-gutted fool had really thought that would make him keep his promises. Or was there some kind of funny business about the package that was supposed to be a gun?

He ripped it open. There in the carton was the auto-matic he had demanded, a .45, with an extra cartridge clip and two boxes of ammunition. It looked all right, flat and black and deadly in his hand. He loaded it and stepped out of the car to test it.

He was aiming at an empty whisky bottle beside the pavement when he heard a

mockingbird singing in the nearest cottonwood. He shot at the bird instead, and grinned when it dissolved into a puff of brown feathers.

"That'll be Gabe." His hard lips curled sardonically. "Coming at me like a mad dog, if anybody ever wants to know, and I had to stop him to save my own hide."

He drove on across the river bridge into Las Verdades. The outsiders had been here, he knew, because the dirt streets were all swept clean, and the wooden parts of all the low adobe buildings were bright with new paint, and all he could smell was the fragrances of coffee and hot bread, when he passed the Esperanza Cafe.

Those good odors wet his dry mouth with saliva, but he didn't stop to eat. With the automatic lying ready beside him on the seat, he pulled into the Oasis. The place looked empty at first and he thought for a moment that everybody was hiding from him.

As he sat waiting watchfully, crouched down under the wheel, he had time to notice that all the shattered glass had been neatly replaced. Even the marks of his bullets on the walls had been covered with new plaster, and the whole station was shining with fresh paint, like everything else in town.

He reached for the gun when he saw the slight dark boy coming from the grease rack, wiping his hands on a rag. It was Carmen's brother Tony, smiling with an envious adoration at the yellow Cadillac. Tony had always been wild about cars.

"Yes, sir! Fill her up?" Tony recognized him then, and dropped the greasy rag. "Casey James!" He ran out across the driveway. "Carmen told us you'd be home!"

He was raising the gun to shoot when he saw that the boy only wanted to shake his hand. He hid the gun hastily; it wasn't Tony that he had come to kill.

"We read all about your pardon." Tony stood grinning at him, caressing the side of the shining car lovingly. "A shame the way you were framed, but we'll all try to make it up to you now." The boy's glowing eyes swept the long car. "Want me to fill her up?"

"No!" he muttered hoarsely. "Gabe Melendez—don't he still work here?"

"Sure, Mr. James," Tony drew back quickly, as if the car had somehow burned his delicate brown hands. "Eight to five, but he isn't here yet. His home is that white stucco beyond the *acequia madre*."

"I know."

He gunned the car. It lurched back into the street, roared across the *acequia* bridge, skidded to a screaming stop in front of the white stucco. He dropped the gun into the side pocket of his coat and ran to the door, grinning expectantly.

Gabe would be taken by surprise. The outsiders had set it up for him very cleverly, with all their manufactured evidences that he had been innocent of any crime at all, and Gabe wasn't likely to be armed.

The door opened before he could touch the bell, but it was only Carmen. Carmen, pale without her makeup but beautiful anyhow, yawning sleepily in sheer pink pajamas that were half unbuttoned. She gasped when she saw him.

"Casey!" Strangely, she was smiling. "I knew you'd come!"

She swayed toward him eagerly, as if she expected him to take her in his arms, but he stood still, thinking of how she had watched him in the courtroom, all through his trial for killing her father, with pitiless hate in her dark eyes. He didn't understand it, but old puffy-guts had somehow changed her.

"Oh!" She turned pink and buttoned her pajamas hastily. "No wonder you were staring, but I'm so excited. I've been longing for you so. Come on in, darling. I'll get something on and make us some breakfast."

"Wait a minute!"

He shook his head, scowling at her, annoyed at the out-siders. They had somehow cheated him. He wanted Carmen, but not this way. He wanted to fight Gabe to take her. He wanted her to go on hating him, so that he would have to beat and frighten her. Old blubber-belly had been too clever and done too much.

"Where's Gabe?" He reached in his pocket to grip the cold gun. "I gotta see Gabe."

"Don't worry, darling." Her tawny shoulders shrugged becomingly. "Gabriel isn't here. He won't be here any more. You see, dear, the state cops talked to me a lot while they were here digging up the evidence to clear you. It came over me then that you had always been the one I loved. When I told Gabriel, he moved out. He's living down at the hotel now, and we're getting a divorce right away, so you don't have to worry about him."

"I gotta see him, anyhow."

"Don't be mean about it, darling." Her pajamas were coming open again, but she didn't seem to care. "Come on in, and let's forget about Gabriel. He has been so good about everything, and I know he won't make us any trouble."

"I'll make the trouble." He seized her bare arm. "Come along."

"Darling, don't!" She hung back, squirming. "You're hurting me!"

He made her shut up, and dragged her out of the house. She wanted to go back for a robe, but he threw her into the car and climbed over her to the wheel. He waited for her to try to get out, so that he could slap her down, but she only whimpered for a Kleenex and sat there sniffing.

Old balloon-belly had ruined everything.

He tried angrily to clash the gears, as he started off, as if that would damage the outsiders, but the Hydramatic transmission wouldn't clash, and anyhow the saucer ship was probably somewhere out beyond the moon by now.

"There's Gabriel," Carmen sobbed. "There, crossing the street, going to work. Don't hurt him, please!"

He gunned the car and veered across the pavement to run him down, but Carmen screamed and twisted at the wheel. Gabriel managed to scramble out of the way. He stopped on the sidewalk, hatless and breathless but grin-ning stupidly.

"Sorry, mister. Guess I wasn't looking—" Then Gabriel saw who he was. "Why, Casey! We've been expecting you back. Seems you're the lucky one, after all." Gabriel had started toward the car, but he stopped when he saw the gun. His voice went shrill as a child's. "What are you doing?"

"Just gut-shooting another dirty greaser, that's all."

"Darling!" Carmen snatched at the gun. "Don't—" He slapped her down.

"Don't strike her!" Gabriel stood gripping the door of the car with both hands. He looked sick. His twitching face was bright with sweat, and he was gasping hoarsely for his breath. He was staring at the gun, his wide eyes dull with horror.

"Stop me!"

He smashed the flat of the gun into Carmen's face, and grinned at the way Gabriel

flinched when she screamed.

This was more the way he wanted everything to be. "Just try and stop me!"

"I—I won't fight you," Gabriel croaked faintly. "After all, we're not animals. We're civilized humans. I know Carmen loves you. I'm stepping out of the way. But you can't make me fight—"

The gun stopped Gabriel.

Queerly, though, he didn't fall. He just stood there like some kind of rundown machine, with his stiffened hands clutching the side of the car.

"Die, damn you!"

Casey James shot again; he kept on shooting till the gun was empty. The bullets hammered into the body, but somehow it wouldn't fall. He leaned to look at the wounds, at the broken metal beneath the simulated flesh of the face and the hot yellow hydraulic fluid running out of the belly, and recoiled from what he saw, shaking his head, shuddering like any trapped and frightened beast.

"That—thing!"

With a wild burst of animal ferocity, he hurled the gun into what was left of its plastic face. It toppled stiffly backward then, and something jangled faintly inside when it struck the pavement.

"It—it ain't human!"

"But it was an excellent replica." The other thing, the one he had thought was Carmen, gathered itself up from the bottom of the car, speaking gently to him with what now seemed queerly like the voice of old barrel-belly. "We had taken a great deal of trouble to make you the happiest one of your breed." It looked at him sadly with, Carmen's limpid dark eyes. "If you had only kept your word."

"Don't—" He cowered back from it, shivering. "Don't k-k-kill me!"

"We never kill," it murmured. "You need never be afraid of that."

While he sat trembling, it climbed out of the car and picked up the ruined thing that had looked like Gabe and carried it easily away toward the Oasis garage.

Now he knew that this place was only a copy of Las Verdades, somewhere not on Earth. When he looked up at the blue crystal sky, he knew that it was only some kind of screen. He felt the millions of strange eyes beyond it, watching him like some queer monster in a cage.

He tried to run away.

He gunned the Cadillac back across the *acequia* bridge and drove wildly back the way he had come in, on the Albuquerque highway. A dozen miles out, an imitation construction crewman tried to flag him down, pointing at a sign that said the road was closed for repairs. He whipped around the barriers and drove the pitching car on across the imitation desert until he crashed into the bars.