

Jubilation, U.S.A.

G. L. Vandenburg

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JUBILATION, U.S.A.

By G. L. VANDENBURG

You've heard, I'm sure, about the two Martians who went into a bar, saw a jukebox flashing and glittering, and said to it, "What's a nice girl like you doing in a joint like this?" Well, here's one about two Capellans and a slot-machine....

TORYL pointed the small crypterpreter toward the wooden, horseshoe-shaped sign. The sign's legend was carved in bright yellow letters. Sartan, Toryl's companion, watched up and down the open highway for signs of life. In seconds the small cylindrical mechanism completed the translation.

The sign said:

JUBILATION, U.S.A.!!

The doggondest, cheeriest
little town in America!

The two aliens smiled at each other. Unaccustomed to oral conversation, they exchanged thoughts.

"The crypterpreter worked incredibly fast. The language is quite simple. It would seem safe to proceed. The sign indicates friendliness," thought Toryl, the older of the two Capellans.

"Very well, Brother," replied Sartan, *"though I still worry for the safety of the ship."*

"Sartan, our instruments tell us that anyone who discovers the ship," Toryl explained, a trifle impatient, *"will show a remarkable degree of curiosity before they display any hostility."*

Sartan agreed to dismiss his worries and the two aliens began to walk along the

barren highway. Before them, at a great distance, they could see a cluster of small frame buildings. When they had walked a hundred feet or more they encountered another sign.

JUBILATION, U.S.A.!!

WELCOME, STRANGER! See America
first and begin with
JUBILATION!

And several hundred feet further two more signs.

THE ROTARY CLUB of Jubilation
welcomes and extends the warm
hand of friendship to you!!!!
You are now entering Paradise, brother!

**HOWDY, STRANGER! COME RIGHT
ON IN, STAY AWHILE AND MAKE
YOURSELF TO HOME!**

—Jubilation Chamber of
Commerce—

As members of a peaceful race, Toryl and Sartan naturally found the signs encouraging. They walked at a sprightly pace.

A whirring noise behind them brought the two to a halt. They turned to discover a pre-war Chevy choking its way along the road. The aliens edged their way to a gully along the side of the road. They were confident of a friendly reception but, in the event their calculations had been wrong, they poised themselves to make a break in the direction of their ship.

The ancient Chevy sputtered by. The driver was almost as ancient as the car, a bearded fellow with a stogy stuck between his teeth and a crushed hat on his head.

The driver slowed down when he saw the aliens. "Howdy, strangers!" he yelled cheerily. "Say, ain't you fellers a mite warm in them coveralls?" He cackled merrily, put his foot to the floor and sped on by.

Sartan looked at his companion. "*I am sorry, I should not have doubted you, Brother. You were right. These people will welcome our visit. They seem very cordial.*"

"*Good, Sartan. Let us continue.*"

One hundred yards further they were confronted by still another brace of signs. They stopped once more.

CITY LIMITS

(Gambling allowed)

JUBILATION! Where troubles

never come due, 'cause the
Good Lord takes a likin' to **you!**

Where gloom and doom are outlawed
and there's never any sadness.

Where a smile lights up the midnight
sky and gives off only gladness!

(Gambling allowed)

The second sign was another in the shape of a horseshoe.

**Beyond This Point You Have 4372
Friends You Never Had Before!!!**

(Gambling allowed)

Suddenly Toryl stopped and played with several switches and dials on the crypterpreter.

"*What is wrong, Brother?*" asked the puzzled Sartan.

"I receive no direct translation for the term 'gambling'."

"What is the closest term the machine gives?"

"Fraternizing."

Sartan laughed. *"Now it is you who fret, Toryl. According to the signpost legends 'fraternizing' would seem to be accurate."*

A steady rolling sound of passionless one-armed bandits drowned out all other noise in Okie's Oasis Bar. As a result, Toryl and Sartan drew little attention when they entered. Except for their blue-metallic space suits they looked like and *were* ordinary humans.

They proceeded rather timidly toward the bar. Okie, the proprietor, was on duty readying the place for the night shift. Toryl held up his hand. The crypterpreter had already informed him that oral conversation was the manner of communication on the strange planet. Such conversation had long ago been abandoned on the planet Capella, but learned men such as Toryl and Sartan were familiar with how it was done, though when they spoke they sometimes had to halt between syllables.

"How-dy!" Toryl flashed a wide grin at the barkeep.

"Just hold your horses there, mister!" was Okie's sharp reply. "You ain't the only snake in this desert. There's four customers ahead of you!"

Sartan transmitted an admonishing thought to his companion. *"Toryl, you should have noticed that the man was busy. He has only two hands."*

"Forgive me, Brother, I was blinded by my own excitement."

The two Capellans waited and were soon attracted by the silver-handled machines that seemed to have most of the customers fascinated.

Sartan wandered over to where a small crowd of men was gathered around a single machine. A huge man, raw-boned and crimson-faced, wearing surplus army suntans, was operating the machine.

The big man dropped a large coin into a slot. He gave the silver handle a vicious snap. It made a discordant, bone-crushing sound. Three little wheels, visible under glass, spun dizzily. Anxious, screwed-up faces looked on as the first little

wheel stopped. *Bell Fruit.*

A collective gasp came from the small crowd. The second little wheel stopped. *Bell Fruit.*

Another gasp.

Sartan touched the arm of the man operating the gambling device. "I beg your pardon, but could you please tell me—"

The big man wheeled around like a bear aroused from hibernation. "Hands off, mister! You trying to jinx me?"

The third little wheel stopped. *Lemon.*

The crowd groaned. The big man turned on Sartan again, a wild and furious look in his eye. "You jinxed me! Damn you, I oughta' bust you one right in the snout!!"

"My humble apol-o-gies, sir," the bewildered Sartan began.

"I'll give you your humble apologies right back with my fist," roared the gambler.

Toryl quickly made his way through the small crowd which by now was itching to witness a fight. "Ex-cuse me, sir, but my friend did not real-ize—"

"The hell he didn't!" The gambler fumed. "He was trying to jinx me, by God! And I'm gonna teach him to keep his paws—"

"Okay, okay, you guys, break it up!!" It was Okie, massive and mean looking, using his barrel belly to push his way through to the two aliens and the unlucky gambler. "What's goin' on here, Smokey?" he inquired of the gambler.

"Okie, I had a jackpot workin' when this dumb jerk here ups and grabs my arm —"

Toryl interrupted with, "My friend is sorry for what he did, sir."

Okie stabbed a cigar into his mouth. "Who *are* you guys anyhow? Where'd you dig up them crazy coveralls?"

"Sure a queer way to dress in this heat," spoke a voice from the crowd.

This was the moment of pride that Toryl and Sartan had looked forward to. They both grinned confident grins. "We have come to you from Capella," he said with some exultation.

Okie's face went blank. "Capella! Where the hell is that?"

"Sounds like one of them damn hick towns in California," said Smokey, the gambler.

Toryl, somewhat deflated, but by no means defeated, hastened to elucidate. "Capella is lo-cat-ed in the con-stell-a-tion which you call Auriga."

"Anybody know what the hell he's talking about?" asked the annoyed saloonkeeper.

Toryl and Sartan exchanged troubled glances. Sartan took up the cudgel. "Auriga is a constellation, a star cluster, sir. It is forty-two million light years away."

"What in tarnation is a light year?" asked an old-timer in the group.

Another replied, "They must be from Alaska. They got light years up there, sometimes stays light the whole confounded year 'round."

"That must be it," agreed Okie, "and that's why they're wearin' them crazy suits." The saloonkeeper unloosed a grim laugh. "You can take them arctic pajamas off now, boys. Weather's kinda warm in these parts!"

"Hey, fellas!" a voice shot out, "didya bring any Eskimo babes down with you?"



The crowd roared approval at the witticism.

Toryl transmitted a depressing thought to his companion. "*I fear they do not believe us, Sartan.*"

Sartan did not get the opportunity to answer immediately.

"Listen, you guys," Okie pounded his fat finger into Sartan's chest. "I want you to behave yourselves, understand? Now that means lay off the customers while they're at the games. You wanna gamble there is plenty of machines available. I got a respectable place, I wanna keep it that way!" He turned and addressed the other men. "All right, boys, fun's over! No fight today! Drink up and gamble your money away. Let's get back to the games."

It was necessary for Toryl to use the crypterpreter to translate the various signs along the bar. Okie saw the small cylindrical machine sitting on the bar. His curiosity bested him. He gave it a more thorough examination than a dog gives a fireplug.

Some of the signs read: "**DOUBLE BOURBON—\$2.10**" "**COOL GIN RICKEY—\$1.25**" "**IN GOD WE TRUST, BUT NOBODY ELSE!**" "**RUM COLLINS—\$1**" "**A FRIEND IN NEED IS A FRIEND INDEED**" "**NO INDIANS SERVED HERE**" and "**SCOTCH—IMPORTED, \$1.50—DOMESTIC, \$1.30.**"

"Cool gin rick-ey," said Toryl.

"Comin' right up," Okie mumbled, his attention still wrapped around the crypterpreter. "Say, what is this gadget anyway?"

"It is a cryp-terp-reter," Toryl beamed with pride. "It en-ables us to un-der-stand and speak your lan-guage."

"Aw, go on!" Okie managed a fainthearted grin, uncertain of whether his leg was being pulled. "Come on now, tell me what it is."

"But I have just told you, sir."

The barkeep cursed under his breath. "Two gin rickeys, did you say?"

"Yes."

Okie brought the drinks.

Sartan smiled broadly. "Thank you ex-ceed-ing-ly."

"That'll be two-fifty."

Toryl raised his glass as though making a toast. "Two-fif-ty!" he repeated.

Okie caught his arm and brought the glass down.

"Two-fifty!" the barkeep said with grim insistence.

Sartan pursed his lips comprehendingly. He removed a large pentagonal piece of metal from his pocket and gave it to Okie.

Okie took the piece between his fingers, examined it and frowned. "I give up. What is it?"

Sartan had to glance at Toryl for an answer. Toryl threw a switch on the crypterpreter.

"*Money*," Toryl silently advised him.

"Money," said Sartan to Okie.

"You guys hold on and don't drink up yet," growled the barkeep. He then yelled in the direction of the blackjack table. "Hey, Nugget! Get on over here, I need you!!"

A wiry little man with a full, unkempt beard, hustled over to the bar. "Nugget McDermott at yer service, Okie! What's yer pleasure?" he asked with a sunny smile.

"Take a look at this." Okie handed him the piece of metal.

The old prospector turned it over in his hands, bit it and then held it in his palm as though to judge its weight. His expert opinion was, "It's gold, Okie," and was uttered without a shred of modesty.

"Are you sure?"

The old-timer was highly insulted. "Am I sure!! Why you lop-eared, sun-stroked jackass, of course I'm sure!!! Nugget McDermott is drawn to gold like nails to a magnet! Why when this here town was nothin' but a patch of cactus—"

"All right, all right," Okie waved him off, "don't get your gander up! Go on back to the blackjack table and tell Sam to give you a drink on the house."

"Much obliged, Okie, much obliged," said Nugget, doffing his hat and trotting back to the blackjack table.

The barkeep's face was pure sunshine when he turned to the aliens again. "Gentlemen, with this kind of a substitute you don't need money in my place. Drink up!"

"Thank you ex-ceed-ing-ly," said Sartan.

Okie arbitrarily judged the gold piece to be worth ten dollars. "The management invites you to try your luck, gentlemen. Go on give it a whirl."

Toryl and Sartan wore blank expressions as Okie slapped seven dollars and fifty cents change on the bar—four silver dollars, four half-dollars and six quarters.

"Don't be bashful, gentlemen. Okie's machines are friendly to one and all," said the barkeep.



Toryl removed the change and gave his companion two silver dollars, two half-dollars and three quarters.

"What is the purpose of the machines?" thought Sartan as they approached the one-armed bandits.

"I suppose that is what the one called Okie wishes us to learn."

"Perhaps it is some type of registration machine."

"It is doubtful. The gentleman you disturbed has been at the same machine since we arrived."

Sartan gripped the handle of a vacant machine. *"Do you think it might be a kind of intelligence test?"*

In lieu of an answer Toryl focused his attention on a small card, above the machine, which gave the winning combinations.

"There is that term again."

"What term?"

"Gambling." Toryl pointed to a line on the card warning minors not to gamble. A look of perplexity fell upon his face. *"I am no longer sure the term has anything to do with fraternizing,"* he observed mentally.

"Let us find out."

Sartan placed a quarter in the coin slot. The three little wheels went spinning. Cherry. Lemon. Lemon.

Nothing.

Toryl and Sartan looked at each other, their faces blanker than ever.

"Try it again."

Sartan disposed of another quarter. They waited. Lemon. Plum. Plum.

Nothing.

Toryl inspected the machine from every angle, like a man on the outside trying to figure a way in. *"Let me try it."*

He put a quarter in the slot.

Three lemons.

"It isn't very interesting, is it?" thought Sartan.

"Why don't we try the larger pieces?"

"A splendid idea, Brother."

The larger coins did not fit. Toryl proceeded to report this sad state of affairs to Okie and was amazed when, for the eight large coins, Okie rewarded him with twenty-four smaller ones. He went back to his companion at the one-armed bandit.

They then dropped twenty consecutive quarters into the appropriately named machine without getting so much as a single quarter in return.

"It is puzzling, is it not, Brother?"

"Yes, Sartan. From all indications it would seem to be a machine totally without purpose."

"It does consume money."

"But why would one build a machine whose sole purpose is to consume money?"

Sartan gave it some hard thought. *"I don't know!"*

"Remarkable!" Toryl concluded. *"But nothing is done without a purpose."*

"Obviously we've found something that is."

"No, I do not believe that. Let me have the electro-analyzer."



The aliens were so engrossed in their problem as to be unaware that Okie and two men at the bar were casting suspicious eyes on them.

Sartan fished around in his pocket and produced a small object in the shape of an irregular triangle. Toryl took the electro-analyzer from him, removed the cover and moved his finger around inside. He replaced the cover and slapped the electro-analyzer against the side of the one-armed bandit. When he took his hand away the small object stuck to the machine like a leech.

Okie scratched his head and addressed one of the two men at the bar. "What the hell you suppose they're doin', Sam? What's that gadget for?"

"Search me," replied Sam, a well dressed, stoop-shouldered gent, "but if you want my opinion it doesn't look legal."

"Hey, Nugget!" yelled the barkeep.

Again the little old prospector hustled himself over to the bar.

"Nugget McDermott at your service! What'll it be, Okie?"

"Go on over and get the sheriff. Tell him there's two queer characters here trying to jimmy one of my machines in broad daylight."

The old man's feet kicked up sawdust as he scampered out the door. Okie kept his attention riveted to the two aliens.

Toryl was busy adjusting the electro-analyzer to the best possible position.

"What if it does not respond to this machine?" Sartan wanted to know.

"I do not think the machine contains any type of metal with which we are unfamiliar. We will have a reading in one minute."

The aliens took a step backward and waited.

A sudden noise, like that of a television tube exploding, jolted everyone in the room, including Toryl and Sartan. The blackjack table emptied. Gamblers left their machines. A semi-circle of the curious formed around the two aliens. Okie lit out from behind the bar and elbowed his way through the crowd.

The aliens' concentration was unbroken by the attention they had aroused. With all the single mindedness of religious fanatics they continued to observe the strange mechanical device.

Okie was dumbfounded to find the machine still in one piece and doubly dumbfounded to discover it was behaving in a most unconventional manner. It was emitting a low steady gurgling sound and an occasional sputter or burp. The legs of the machine seemed unsteady. Its body shifted back and forth in herky-jerky motions like an old-fashioned washing machine. The three little Bell Fruit wheels were spinning at the speed of an airplane propellor. Okie thought they might never stop again.

"What the hell are you crazy galoots doing to my machine!" he bellowed.

Before the aliens could answer there was another explosive sound, causing the crowd to jump back several steps. Quarters fell from the mouth of the machine, slowly at first, then at an alarming rate. The coins fell, bounced and rolled all over the floor. The crowd gulped with fascination.

"Holy catfish!" said one of the men, "how long since that blasted thing's paid off?"

"Looks like this is the first time," said one of the others.

"You guys keep quiet!" yelled Okie.

The coins continued to fall for what seemed like a record time. The crowd was spellbound. Okie watched in silent fury.

And the aliens were more confused than they had been when the machine *wasn't* paying off.



The one-armed bandit finally coughed out its last quarter. The three Bell Fruit wheels came to an abrupt halt, as though an inner spring had snapped. The machine broke down. Certain observers later reported that the poor thing actually *looked* exhausted.

The sheriff burst in the door with Nugget McDermott close behind.

"Sheriff, I want you to arrest these two tinorns!" cried Okie.

"Tinorns??" Sartan's face was creased with bewilderment.

"What's wrong, Okie?" asked the sheriff.

"Take a look for yourself! These two bugged my machine and then broke it down! Look at that money all over the floor!"

Toryl smiled. "We meant no harm, sir—"

"The hell you didn't mean no harm! You were out to rob me!"

"We were only ex-per-i-ment-ing—"

"There's their crooked experimenting right there!" said Okie, pointing a finger at the deactivated one-armed bandit. "I want them locked up until that machine's paid for!"

"All right," said the sheriff, "you two better come with me."

"But, sir," Sartan protested, "we merely wanted to know how the machine functioned. You see, we are from Capella and—"

"Capella!" exclaimed the sheriff. "Where is that? I never heard of the place."

"Well, it is not a part of your Earth."

"Oh, well why didn't you say so before!" The sheriff winked at the crowd. "You mean you boys are from out of this world?"

"That is correct," Sartan grinned proudly.

"Well, well! That makes a big difference!" The sheriff turned to the crowd. "All right, boys, grab them and hustle them over to the jail house!"

A group of men slowly closed in on the two aliens.

Toryl and Sartan backed away toward the wall.

"I believe they are angry, Brother," thought Sartan.

"But why?" inquired Toryl.

"I do not know. Do you suppose the machine represented some form of religious deity?"

"Exceed-ing-ly possible," Toryl answered.

As the men came closer Okie yelled, "Just get them two crackpots! I'll plug the

first man that touches that money!"

The men were diverted by Okie's warning. They didn't notice, until it was almost too late, that the two strangers were halfway out the door.

"Get after them!!" the sheriff bellowed.

The aliens ran as though their lives were at stake, which was true, following the same route they had taken into town.



The crowd followed them as far as the edge of town. From there they hurled rocks.

Toryl and Sartan continued to run at breakneck speed, praying they would reach the safety of the ship. Once they looked behind them and saw that the crowd of angry men had given up the chase.

Halfway back to their ship they passed a sign, though they didn't bother to stop and read it.

**YOU ARE NOW LEAVING
JUBILATION, U.S.A.!!**

The doggondest, cheeriest little
town in America! Come back soon!!

THE END

Transcriber's Note:

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