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It was a big joke on all concerned. When you look back, the whole thing really began because his father had a sense of humor. Oh, the name fit all right, but can you imagine naming your son....

NOBLE REDMAN

By J. F. BONE

ILLUSTRATED by GRAYAM

A

pair of words I heartily detest are *noble* and *redman*, particularly when they occur together. Some of my egghead friends from the Hub tell me that I shouldn't, since they're merely an ancient colloquialism used to describe a race of aborigines on the American land mass.

The American land mass? Where? Why—on Earth, of course—where would ancestors come from? Yes—I know it's not nice to mention that word. It's an obscenity. No one likes to be reminded that his ancestors came from there. It's like calling a man a son of a sloat. But it's the truth. Our ancestors came from Earth and nothing we can do is going to change it. And despite the fact that we're the rulers of a good sized segment of the galaxy, we're nothing but transplanted Earthmen.

I suppose I'm no better than most of the citizens you find along the peripheral strips of Martian dome cities. But I might have been if it hadn't been for Noble

Redman. No—not *the* noble redman—just Noble Redman. It's a name, not a description, although as a description his surname could apply, since he *was* red. His skin was red, his hair was red, his eyes had reddish flecks in their irises, and their whites were red like they were inflamed. Even his teeth had a reddish tinge. Damndest guy I ever saw. Redman was descriptive enough—but Noble! Ha! that character had all the nobility of a Sand Nan—.

I met him in Marsport. I was fairly well-heeled, having just finished guiding a couple of Centaurian tourists through the ruins of K'nar. They didn't believe me when I told them to watch out for Sand Nans. Claimed that there were no such things. They were kinda violent about it. Superstition—they said. So when the Nan heaved itself up out of the sand, they weren't ready at all. They froze long enough for it to get in two shots with its stingers. They were paralyzed of course, but I wasn't, and a Nan isn't quick enough to hit a running target. So I was out of range when the Nan turned its attention to the Centaurians and started to feed. I took a few pictures of the Nan finishing off the second tourist—the female one. It wasn't very pretty, but you learn to keep a camera handy when you're a guide. It gets you out of all sorts of legal complications later. The real bad thing about it was that the woman must have gotten stuck with an unripe stinger because she didn't go quietly like her mate. She kept screaming right up to the end. I felt bad about it, but there wasn't anything I could do. You don't argue with a Nan without a blaster, and the Park Service doesn't allow weapons in Galactic Parks.



Despite the fact that I had our conversation on tape and pictures to prove what happened, the Park cops took a dim view of the whole affair. They cancelled my license, but what the hell—I wasn't cut out for a guide. So when I got back to Marsport, I put in a claim for my fee, and since their money had gone into the Nan with them, the Claims Court allowed that I had the right to garnishee the deceaseds' personal property, which I did. So I was richer by one Starflite class yacht, a couple of hundred ounces of industrial gold, and a lot of personal effects which I sold to Abe Feldstein for a hundred and fifty munits.

Abe wasn't very generous, but what's a Martian to do with Centaurian gear? Nothing those midgets use is adaptable to us. Even their yacht, a six passenger job, would barely hold three normal-sized people and they'd be cramped as kampas in a can. But the hull and drives were in good shape and I figured that if I sunk a couple of thousand munits into remodelling, the ship'd sell for at least

twenty thousand—if I could find someone who wanted a three passenger job. That was the problem.

Abe offered me five thousand for her as she stood—but I wasn't having any—at least not until I'd gotten rid of the gold in her fuel reels. That stuff's worth money to the spacelines—about fifty munits per ounce. It's better even than lead as fuel—doesn't clog the tubes and gives better acceleration.

Well—like I said—I was flusher than I had been since Triworld Freight Lines ran afoul of the cops on Callisto for smuggling tekla nuts. So I went down to Otto's place on the strip to wash some of that Dryland dust off my tonsils. And that's where I met Redman.

He came up the street from the South airlock—a big fellow—walking kinda unsteady, his respirator hanging from his thick neck. He was burned a dark reddish black from the Dryland sun and looked like he was on his last legs when he turned into Otto's. He staggered up to the bar.

"Water," he said.

Otto passed him a pitcher and damned if the guy didn't drink it straight down!

"That'll be ten munits," Otto said.

"For water?" the man asked.

"You're on Mars," Otto reminded him.

"Oh," the big fellow said, and jerked a few lumps of yellow metal out of a pocket and dropped it on the bar. "Will this do?" he asked.



Otto's eyes damn near bulged out of their sockets. "Where'd you get that stuff?" he demanded. "That's gold!"

"I know."

"It'll do fine." Otto picked out a piece that musta weighed an ounce. "Have another pitcher."

"That's enough," the big fellow said. "Keep the change."

"Yes, sir!" You'da thought from Otto's voice that he was talking to the Prince Regent. "Just *where* did you say you found it."

"I didn't say. But I found it out there." He waved a thick arm in the direction of the Drylands.

By this time a couple of sharpies sitting at one of the tables pricked up their ears, removed their pants from their chairs and began closing in. But I beat them to it.

"My name's Wallingford," I said. "Cyril Wallingford."

"So what?" he snaps.

"So if you don't watch out you'll be laying in an alley with all that nice yellow stuff in someone else's pocket."

"I can take care of myself," he said.

"I don't doubt it," I said, looking at the mass of him. He was sure king-sized. "But even a guy as big as you is cold meat for a little guy with a Kelly."

He looked at me a bit more friendly. "Maybe I'm wrong about you, friend. But you look shifty."

"I'll admit my face isn't my fortune," I said sticking out what little chin I had and looking indignant. "But I'm honest. Ask anyone here." I looked around. There were three men in the place I didn't have something on, and I was faster than they. I was a fair hand with a Kelly in those days and I had a reputation. There was a chorus of nods and the big fellow looked satisfied. He stuck out a hamsized hand.

"Me name's Redman," he said. "Noble Redman. My father had a sense of humor." He grinned at me, giving me a good view of his pink teeth.

I grinned back. "Glad to know you," I replied. I gave the sharpies a hard look and they moved off and left us alone. The big fellow interested me. Fact is—anyone with money interested me—but I'm not stupid greedy. It took me about three minutes to spot him for a phony. Anyone who's lived out in the Drylands knows that there just *isn't* any gold there. Iron, sure, the whole desert's filthy with it, but if there is anything higher on the periodic table than the rare earths, nobody had found it yet—and this guy with his light clothes, street boots and low capacity respirator—Hell! he couldn't stay out there more than two days if

he wanted to—and besides, the gold was refined. The lumps looked like they were cut off something bigger—a bar, for instance.

A bar!—a bar of gold! My brain started working. K'nar was about two days out, and there had always been rumors about Martian gold even though no one ever found any. Maybe this tourist had come through. If so, he was worth cultivating. For he was a tourist. He certainly wasn't a citizen. There wasn't a Martian alive with a skin like his. Redman—the name fitted all right. But what was his game? I couldn't figure it. And the more I tried the less I succeeded. It was a certainty he was no prospector despite his burned skin. His hands gave him away. They were big and dirty, but the pink nails were smooth and the red palms soft and uncalloused. There wasn't even a blister on them. He could have been fresh from the Mercury Penal Colony—but those guys were burned black—not red, and he didn't have the hangdog look of an ex-con.

He talked about prospecting on Callisto—looking for heavy metals. Ha! There were fewer heavy metals on Callisto than there were on Mars. But he had listeners. His gold and the way he spent it drew them like honey draws flies. But finally I got the idea. Somehow, subtly, he turned the conversation around to gambling which was a subject everyone knew. That brought up tales of the old games, poker, faro, three card monte, blackjack, roulette—and crapshooting.

"I'll bet there isn't a dice game in town." Redman said.

"You'd lose," I answered. I had about all this maneuvering I could take. Bring it out in the open—see what this guy was after. Maybe I could get something out of it in the process. From the looks of his hands he was a pro. He could probably make dice and cards sing sweet music, and if he could I wanted to be with him when he did. The more I listened, the more I was sure he was setting something up.

"Where is this game?" he asked incuriously.

"Over Abie Feldstein's hock-shop," I said. "But it's private. You have to know someone to get in."

"You steering for it?" He asked.

I shook my head, half puzzled. I wasn't quite certain what he meant.

"Are you touting for the game?" he asked.

The light dawned. But the terms he used! Archaic was the only word for them!

"No," I said, "I'm not fronting for Abie. Fact is, if you want some friendly advice, stay outa there."

"Why—the game crooked?"

There it was again, the old fashioned word. "Yes, it's bowed," I said. "It's bowed like a sine wave—in both directions. Honesty isn't one of Abie's best policies."

He suddenly looked eager. "Can I get in?" he asked.

"Not through me. I have no desire to watch a slaughter of the innocent. Hang onto your gold, Redman. It's safer." I kept watching him. His face smoothed out into an expressionless mask—a gambler's face. "But if you're really anxious, there's one of Abie's fronts just coming in the door. Ask him, if you want to lose your shirt."

"Thanks," Redman said.

I didn't wait to see what happened. I left Otto's and laid a courseline for Abie's. I wanted to be there before Redman arrived. Not only did I want an alibi, but I'd be in better position to sit in. Also I didn't want a couple of Abie's goons on my neck just in case Redman won. There was no better way to keep from getting old than to win too many munits in Abie's games.



I'd already given Abie back fifty of the hundred and fifty he'd paid me for the Centaurians' gear, and was starting in on the hundred when Redman walked in flanked by the frontman. He walked straight back to the dice table and stood beside it, watching the play. It was an oldstyle table built for six-faced dice, and operated on percentage—most of the time. It was a money-maker, which was the only reason Abie kept it. People liked these old-fashioned games. They were part of the Martian tradition. A couple of local citizens and a dozen tourists were crowded around it, and the diceman's flat emotionless voice carried across the intermittent click and rattle of the dice across the green cloth surface.

I dropped out of the blackjack game after dropping another five munits, and headed slowly towards the dice table. One of the floormen looked at me curiously since I didn't normally touch dice, but whatever he thought he kept to himself. I joined the crowd, and watched for awhile.

Redman was sitting in the game, betting at random. He played the field, come and don't come, and occasionally number combinations. When it came his turn at the dice he made two passes, a seven and a four the hard way, let the pile build and crapped out on the next roll. Then he lost the dice with a seven after an eight. There was nothing unusual about it, except that after one run of the table I noticed that he won more than he lost. He was pocketing most of his winnings—but I was watching him close and keeping count. That was enough for me. I got into the game, followed his lead, duplicating his bets. And I won too.

People are sensitive. Pretty quick they began to see that Redman and I were winning and started to follow our leads. I gave them a dirty look and dropped out, and after four straight losses, Redman did likewise.

He went over to the roulette wheel and played straight red and black. He won there too. And after awhile he went back to the dice table. I cashed in. Two thousand was fair enough and there was no reason to make myself unpopular. But I couldn't help staying to watch the fun. I could feel it coming—a sense of something impending.

Redman's face was flushed a dull vermilion, his eyes glittered with ruby glints, and his breath came faster. The dice had a grip on him just like cards do on me. He was a gambler all right—one of the fool kind that play it cozy until they're a little ahead and then plunge overboard and drown.

"Place your bets, ladies and gentlemen," the diceman droned. "Eight is the point." His rake swept over the board collecting a few munit plaques on the wrong spots. Redman had the dice. He rolled. Eight—a five and a three. "Let it ride," he said,—and I jumped nervously. He should have said, "Leave it." But the diceman was no purist. Another roll—seven. The diceman looked inquiringly at Redman. The big man shook his head, and rolled again—four. Three rolls later he made his point. Then he rolled another seven, another seven, and an eleven. And the pile of munits in front of him had become a respectable heap.

"One moment, sir," the diceman said as he raked in the dice. He rolled them in his hands, tossed them in the air, and handed them back.

"That's enough," Redman said. "Cash me in."

"But—"

"I said I had enough."

"Your privilege, sir."

"One more then," Redman said, taking the dice and stuffing munits into his jacket. He left a hundred on the board, rolled, and came up with a three. He grinned. "Thought I'd pushed my luck as far as it would go," he said, as he stuffed large denomination bills into his pockets.



I sidled up to him. "Get out of here, buster," I said. "That diceman switched dice on you. You're marked now."

"I saw him," Redman replied in a low voice, not looking at me. "He's not too clever, but I'll stick around, maybe try some more roulette."

"It's your funeral," I whispered through motionless lips.

He turned away and I left. There was no reason to stay, and our little talk just might have drawn attention. They could have a probe tuned on us now. I went down the strip to Otto's and waited. It couldn't have been more than a half hour later that Redman came by. He was looking over his shoulder and walking fast. His pockets, I noted, were bulging. So I went out the back door, cut down the serviceway to the next radius street, and flagged a cab.

"Where to, mister?" the jockey said.

"The strip—and hurry."

The jockey fed propane to the turbine and we took off like a scorched zarth. "Left or right?" he asked as the strip leaped at us. I crossed my fingers, estimated the speed of Redman's walk, and said, "Right."

We took the corner on two of our three wheels and there was Redman, walking fast toward the south airlock, and behind him, half-running, came two of Abie's goons.

"Slow down—*fast!*" I yapped, and was crushed against the back of the front seat as the jock slammed his foot on the brakes. "In here!" I yelled at Redman as I swung the rear door open.

His reflexes were good. He hit the floor in a flat dive as the purple streak of a stat blast flashed through the space where he had been. The jockey needed no further stimulation. He slammed his foot down and we took off with a screech of polyprene, whipped around the next corner and headed for the hub, the cops, and safety.

"Figured you was jerking some guy, Cyril," the jockey said over his shoulder. "But who is he?"



Redman picked himself off the floor as I swore under my breath. The jockey *would* have to know me. Abie'd hear of my part in this by morning and my hide wouldn't be worth the price of a mangy rat skin. I had to get out of town—fast! And put plenty of distance between me and Marsport. This dome—this planet—wasn't going to be healthy for quite a while. Abie was the most unforgiving man I knew where money was concerned, and if the large, coarse notes dripping from Redman's pockets were any indication, there was lots of money concerned.

"Where to now, Cyril?" the jockey asked.

There was only one place to go. I damned the greed that made me pick Redman up. I figured that he'd be grateful to the tune of a couple of kilomunits but what was a couple of thousand if Abie thought I was mixed up in this? Lucky I had a spaceship even if she was an unconverted Centaurian. I could stand the cramped quarters a lot better than I could take a session in Abie's back room. I'd seen what happened to guys who went in there, and it wasn't pretty. "To the spaceport," I said, "and don't spare the hydrocarbons."

"Gotcha!" the jock said and the whine of the turbine increased another ten decibels.

"Thanks, Wallingford," Redman said. "If you hadn't pulled me out I'd have had to shoot somebody. And I don't like killing. It brings too many lawmen into the picture." He was as cool as ice. I had to admire his nerve.

"Thanks for nothing," I said. "I figured you'd be grateful in a more solid manner."

"Like this?" he thrust a handful of bills at me. There must have been four thousand in that wad. It cheered me up a little.

"Tell me where you want to get off," I said.

"You said you have a spaceship," he countered.

"I do, but it's a Centaurian job. I might be able to squeeze into it but I doubt if you could. About the only spot big enough for you would be the cargo hold, and the radiation'd fry you before we even made Venus."

He grinned at me. "I'll take the chance," he said.

"Okay, sucker," I thought. "You've been warned." If he came along he'd damn well go in the hold. I could cut the drives after we got clear of Mars and dump him out—after removing his money, of course. "Well," I said aloud, "it's your funeral."

"You're always saying that," he said with chuckle in his voice.



We checked out at the airlock and drove out to the spaceport over the sand-filled roadbed that no amount of work ever kept clean. We cleared the port office, drew spacesuits from Post Supply, and went out to my yacht. Redman looked at her, his heart in his eyes. He seemed overwhelmed by it.

"Lord! she's beautiful!" he breathed, as he looked at the slim polished length standing on her broad fins, nose pointed skyward.

"Just a Starflite-class yacht," I said.

"Look, Cyril," he said. "Will you sell her?"

"If we get to Venus alive and you still want to buy her, she'll cost you—" I hesitated, "twenty-five thousand."

"Done!" he said. It came so fast that I figured I should have asked for fifty.

"The fuel will be extra," I said. "Fifty munits an ounce. There's maybe ten

pounds of it."

"How far will that take me?"

"About ten light-years at cruising speed. Gold is economical."

"That should be far enough," he said with a faint smile.

We drew the boarding ladder down and prepared to squeeze aboard. As I figured it, we had plenty of time, but I hadn't counted on that nosy guard at the check station, or maybe that character at the south airlock of the dome, because I was barely halfway up the ladder to the hatch when I heard the howl of a racing turbine and two headlights came cutting through the night over the nearest dune. The speed with which that car was coming argued no good.

"Let's go," I said, making with the feet.

"I'm right behind you," Redman said into my left heel. "Hurry! Those guys are out for blood!"

I tumbled through the lock and wiggled up the narrow passageway. By some contortionist's trick Redman came through the hatch feet first, an odd looking gun in his hand. Below us the turbo screeched to a stop and men boiled out, blasters in hand. They didn't wait—just started firing. Electrostatic discharges leaped from the metal of the ship, but they were in too much of a hurry. The gun in Redman's fist steadied as he took careful aim. A tiny red streak hissed out of the muzzle—and the roof fell in! A thunderous explosion and an eye-wrenching burst of light filled the passageway through the slit in the rapidly closing hatch. The yacht rocked on her base like a tree in a gale, as the hatch slammed shut.

"What in hell was *that*?" I yelled.

"Just a low yield nuclear blast," Redman said. "About two tons. Those lads won't bother us any more."

"You fool!—you stupid moronic abysmal fool!" I said dully. "You're not content to get Abie on our heels. Now you've triggered off the whole Galactic Patrol. Don't you know that nuclear weapons are banned—that they've been banned ever since our ancestors destroyed Earth—that their use calls for the execution of the user? Just where do you come from that you don't know the facts of life?"

"Earth," Redman said.

It left me numb. Any fool knew that there was no life on that radioactive hell. Even now, spacers could see her Van Allen bands burning with blue-green fire. Earth was a sterile world—a horrible example, the only forbidden planet in the entire galaxy, a galactic chamber of horrors ringed with automatic beacons and patrol ships to warn strangers off. We Martians, Earth's nearest neighbor, had the whole history of that last suicidal war drummed into us as children. After all, we *were* the cradle of Galactic civilization even though we got that way by being driven off Earth—and feeling that almost any place would be better than Mars. Mars iron built the ships and powered the atomics that had conquered the galaxy. But we knew Earth better than most, and to hear those words from Redman's lips was a shock.

"You're a damn liar!" I exploded.

"You're entitled to your opinion," Redman said, "but you should know the truth when it is told to you. I *am* from Earth!"

"But—" I said.

"You'd better get out of here," Redman said, "your Patrol will be here shortly."

I was thinking that, too. So I wiggled my way up to the control room, braced myself against the walls and fired the jets. Acceleration crushed me flat as the ship lifted and bored out into space.

As quickly as I could, I cut the jets so the Patrol couldn't trace us by our ion trail, flipped the negative inertia generator on and gave the ship one minimal blast that hurled her out of sight. We coasted at a few thousand miles per second along the plane of the ecliptic while we took stock.

Redman had wedged himself halfway into the control room and eyed my cramped body curiously. "It's a good thing you're a runt," he said. "Otherwise we'd be stuck down there." He laughed. "You look like a jack in the box—all coiled up ready to spring out."

But I was in no mood for humor. Somehow I felt that I'd been conned. "What do I get out of this?" I demanded.

"A whole skin—at least for awhile."

"That won't do me any good unless I can take it somewhere."

"Don't worry," Redman said. "They don't give a damn about you. It's me they want, turn on your radio and see."

I flipped the switch and a voice came into the control room—"remind you that this is a Galactic emergency! The Patrol has announced that an inhabitant of Earth has been on Mars! This individual is dangerously radioactive. A reward of one hundred thousand Galactic munits will be paid to the person who gives information leading to his death or capture. I repeat,—*one hundred thousand munits!* The man's description is as follows: Height 180 centimeters, weight 92 kilograms, eyes reddish brown, hair red. A peculiarity which makes him easily recognized is the red color of his skin. He is armed with a nuclear weapon and is dangerous. When last seen he was leaving Marsport spacefield. Starflite class yacht, registration number CY 127439. He has a citizen with him, probably a hostage. If seen, notify the nearest Patrol ship."



I looked at Redman. The greed must have shone from me like a beacon. "A hundred grand!" I said softly.

"Try and collect," Redman said.

"I'm not going to," I said and turned three separate plans to capture him over in my head.

"They won't work," Redman said. He grinned nastily. "And don't worry about radioactivity. I'm no more contaminated than you are."

"Yeah?—and just how do you live on that hotbox without being contaminated?" I asked.

"Simple. The surface isn't too hot in the first place. Most of the stuff is in the Van Allen belts. Second, we live underground. And third we're protected."

"How?"

"Where do you think this red skin comes from? It isn't natural. Even you should know that. Actually we had the answer to protection during the Crazy Years before the blowup when everybody talked peace and built missiles. A

bacteriologist named Anderson discovered it while working with radiation sterilized food. He isolated a whole family of bacteria from the food that not only survived, but lived normally in the presence of heavy doses of radiation. The microbes all had one thing in common—a peculiar reddish pigment that protected them.

"Luckily, the military of his nation—the United States, I think they called it, thought that this pigment might be a useful protective shield for supplies. Extracts were made and tested before the Blowup came, and there was quite a bit of it on hand.

"But the real hero of protection was a general named Ardleigh. He ordered every man and woman in his command inoculated with the extract right after the Blowup—when communications were disorganized and commanders of isolated units had unchallengeable power. He was later found to be insane, but his crazy idea was right. The inoculations killed ten per cent of his command and turned those who lived a bright red, but none of the living showed a sign of radiation sickness after they received the extract.

"By this time your ancestors—the Runners—had gone, and those who stayed were too busy trying to remain alive to worry much about them. The "Double A" vaccine—named for Anderson and Ardleigh—was given to every person and animal that could be reached, but it was only a small fraction of the population that survived. The others died. But enough men and animals remained to get a toe-hold on their ruined world, and they slowly rebuilt.

"We had forgotten about you Runners—but it seems you didn't forget us. You sealed us off—forced us to remain on Earth. And by the time we were again ready for space, you were able to prevent us. But we will not be denied forever. It took an entire planet working together to get me on Mars to learn your secrets. And when I got here, I found that I wouldn't have time to learn. We had forgotten one simple thing—my skin color. It isn't normal here and there is no way of changing it since the extract combines permanently with body cells. So I had to do the next best thing—obtain a sample of your technology and bring it to Earth. I planned at first to get enough money to buy a ship. But those creeps in Marsport don't lose like gentlemen. I damn near had to beat my way out of that joint. And when a couple of them came after me, I figured it was all up. I could kill them of course, but that wouldn't solve anything. Since I can't fly one of your ships yet, I couldn't steal one—and I wouldn't have time to buy one because I was pretty sure the Patrol would be after me as soon as the rumors of a red man

got around. You see—*they* know what we look like and its their job to keep us cooped up—"

"Hmm," I said.

"Why do they do it?" Redman asked. "We're just as human as you are." He shrugged. "At any rate," he finished, "I was at the end of my rope when you came along. But you have a ship—you can fly—and you'll take me back to Earth."

"I will?" I asked.



He nodded. "I can make it worth your while," he said.

"How?" I asked.

"Money. You'll do anything for money." Redman looked at me soberly. "You're a repulsive little weasel, Cyril, and I would distrust you thoroughly except that I know you as well as you know me. That's the virtue of being human. We understand each other without words. You are a cheap, chiseling, doublecrossing, money-grabbing heel. You'd kick your mother's teeth out for a price. And for what I'm going to offer you, you'll jump at the chance to help us—but I don't have to tell you that. You know already."

"What do you mean—know already?" I said. "Can I read your mind?"

"Do you mean to tell me—" Redman began. And then a peculiar smile crossed his face, a light of dawning comprehension. "Why no," he said, "why should you be telepathic—why should you? And to think I kept hiding—" he broke off and looked at me with a superior look a man gives his dog. Affectionate but pitying. "No wonder there were no psych fields protecting that dice game—and I thought —" he started to laugh.



And I knew then why the Patrol had sealed Earth off. Mutated by radiation, speeded up in their evolution by the effects of the Blowup, Earthmen were as far ahead of us mentally as we were ahead of them technologically. To let these

telepaths, these telekinetics—and God knows what else—loose on the Galaxy would be like turning a bunch of hungry kelats loose in a herd of fat sloats. My head buzzed like it was filled with a hive of bees. For the first time in years I stopped thinking of the main chance. So help me, I was feeling *noble*!

"Just take it easy, Cyril," Redman said. "Don't get any bright ideas."

Bright ideas! Ha! I should be getting bright ideas with a character who could read me like a book. What I needed was something else.

"If you cooperate," Redman said, "you'll be fixed for life."

"You're not kidding," I said. "I'd be fixed all right. The Patrol'd hound me all the way to Andromeda if I helped you. And don't think they wouldn't find out. While we can't read minds, we can tell when a man's lying."

"Have you ever heard of Fort Knox?" Redman asked.

Fort Knox—Fort Knox—*fourknocks*! the thought staggered me.

"The gold I had came from there," Redman said.

Fourknocks! Sure, I'd heard of it. What citizen hadn't? They still tell stories of that fabulous hoard of gold. Tons of it buried on Earth waiting for someone with guts enough to go in and find it.

"All your ship will hold," Redman said. "After we analyze its principles."

Five tons of gold! Six million munits! So much money! It staggered me. I'd never dreamed of that much money. Redman was right. I *would* kick my mother's teeth out if the price was right. And the price—I jumped convulsively. My arm brushed the control board, kicking off the negative inertia and slapping the axial correction jets.

The ship spun like a top! Centrifugal force crushed me against the control room floor. Redman, an expression of pained surprise on his face before it slammed against the floor, was jammed helplessly in the corridor. I had time for one brief grin. The Patrol would zero in on us, and I'd have a hundred thousand I could spend. What could I do with six million I couldn't use?

Then hell broke out. A fire extinguisher came loose from its fastenings and started flying around the room in complete defiance of artificial gravity. Switches on the control board clicked on and off. The ship bucked, shuddered

and jumped. But the spin held. Redman, crushed face down to the floor, couldn't see what he was doing. Besides—he didn't know what he was doing—but he was trying. The fire extinguisher came whizzing across the floor and cracked me on the shin. A scream of pure agony left my lips as I felt the bone snap.

"Got you!" Redman grunted, as he lifted his head against the crushing force and sighted at me like a gunner. The extinguisher reversed its flight across the room and came hurtling at my head.

"Too late!" I gloated mentally. Then the world was filled with novae and comets as the extinguisher struck. The cheerful thought that Redman was trapped because he didn't—couldn't—know how to drive a hypership was drowned in a rush of darkness.



When I came to, my leg was aching like a thousand devils and I was lying on a rocky surface. Near—terribly near—was a jagged rock horizon cutting the black of space dotted with the blazing lights of stars. I groaned and rolled over, wincing at the double pain in leg and head. Redman was standing over me, carrying a couple of oxygen bottles and a black case. He looked odd, standing there with a load in his arms that would have crushed him flat on Mars. And then I knew. I was on an asteroid.

"But how did I get here?"

"Easy," Redman's voice came over my headphone. "Didn't anyone ever tell you an unconscious mind is easier to read than a conscious one?" He chuckled. "No," he continued, "I don't suppose they did—but it is. Indeed it is." He laid the bottles down, and put the box beside them. "I learned how to operate the ship, stopped the spin, and got her back into negative inertia before the Patrol found me. Found this place about an hour ago—and since you began to look like you'd live, I figured you should have a chance. So I'm leaving you a communicator and enough air to keep you alive until you can get help. But so help me—you don't deserve it. After I played square with you, you try to do this to me."

"Square!" I yelled. "Why you—" The rest of what I said was unprintable.

Redman grinned at me, his face rosy behind the glassite of his helmet—and turned away. I turned to watch him picking his way carefully back to where the

yacht rested lightly on the naked rock. At the airlock he turned and waved at me. Then he squeezed inside. The lock closed. There was a brief shimmer around the ship—a briefer blast of heat, and the yacht vanished.

I turned on the communicator and called for help. I used the Patrol band. "I'll keep the transmitter turned on so you can home in on me," I broad-casted, "but get that Earthman first! He's got my money and my ship. Pick me up later, but get him now!"

I didn't know whether my message was received or not, because Redman didn't leave me any receiver other than the spacesuit intercom in my helmet. It was, I suspected, a deliberate piece of meanness on his part. So I kept talking until my voice was a hoarse croak, calling the Patrol, calling—calling—calling, until a black shark shape blotted out the stars overhead and a couple of Patrolmen in jetsuits homed in on me.

"Did you get him?" I asked.

The Patrolman bending over me shrugged his shoulders. "They haven't told me," he said.



They hauled me back to Marsport, put my leg in a cast, ran me through the lie detector, and then tossed me in jail for safekeeping. I beefed about the jail, but not too loud. As I figured it I was lucky to be out of Abie's hands.

Two days later, a Patrolman with the insignia of a Commander on his collar tabs showed up at my cell. He was apologetic. I was a hero, he said. Seems like the Patrol caught Redman trying to sneak through the asteroid belt on standard drive and blasted him out of space.

So they gave me the reward and turned me loose.

But it didn't do me any good. After taxes, it only came to twenty thousand, and Abie grabbed that before I could get out of town. Like I said, Abie's unforgiving where money's concerned, and Redman had taken him for over thirty kilos, which, according to Abie was my fault for lifting him and getting him out of town. After he got my twenty kilos he still figured I owed him twelve—and so I've never made it back. Every time I get a stake he grabs it, and what with the

interest, I still owe him twelve.

But I still keep trying, because there's still a chance. You see, when Redman probed around in my mind to learn how to run the spaceship, he was in a hurry. He must have done something to my brain, because when he left me on that asteroid, as he turned and waved at me, I could hear him thinking that the Patrol would not be able to stop hyperships, and if he made it to Earth his people could emigrate to some clean world and stop having to inject their kids, and while they couldn't make the grade themselves, their kids could crash the Galaxy without any trouble. I got the impression that it wouldn't be too much trouble to empty Earth. Seems as though there wasn't many more than a million people left. The red color wasn't complete protection apparently.

And there's another thing. About a month after I got the reward, there was a minor complaint from Centaurus V about one of their officials who disappeared on a vacation trip to Mars. His ship was a Starflite class, Serial CY 122439. Get the idea?

So I keep watching all the incoming tourists like you. Someday I figure I'm going to run into a decolorized Earthman. They won't be able to stay away any more than the other peoples of the Galaxy. Old Mother Earth keeps dragging them back even though they've been gone for over a thousand years. Don't get the idea they want to see Mars. It's Earth that draws them. And it'll draw an Earthman's kids. And I figure that if I could read Redman's mind, I can read theirs, too even though I haven't read a thought since. It figures, does it not?

Hey! Hold on! There's no need to run. All I want to do is collect a fifty year old bill—plus interest. Your folks owe me that much.

THE END

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