

sely proud of their fresh water sharks. At least one person is killed each year by this ferocious fish, but that does not matter; it renders admiration rather than resentment.

The waters of these lakes have quite a varied fauna; there are as many as thirty-five species with different environmental habits. The southern part of the Gran Lago, where the shore is lost in the rainy forest, is one of the rainiest places in the world with an annual average of two hundred and fifty inches. Here alligators, sea snakes and heavy turtles make their nests and breed their young.

The mountains spread north and west of the lake where spider monkeys practice their flying among the bending twigs and where the great "guanacastes," each with a trunk large enough to make a dugout to float a hundred men, rise to the blue sky for brighter sun, and where the jaguars come down to the open beach and dig up the turtles' eggs and eat them peacefully. From the islands of the Lake the volcanoes roar, and the tropic lives its life.

—William Pfaeffle, *Sci. So.*



Some catoidoid breed

JESS GARVEY made out that he thought lightly of me, calling me no more than a cosmic crap shooter, a blind gambler in the infinite casino of space, a feather blown by the lips of those old, old sisters, the fates. He mocked me now as I stood in my control room, before my digamma lever, saying that I was for all the worlds like an idiot before a dekadred slot machine, and that I had traveled a long way for the simple sake of putting my hand to a lever and taking a chance. Himself, he maintained, being in charge of the Dosfando's nuclear jets, and being concerned with such things as the setting and following of courses, leaving nothing to chance and depending altogether on his cleverness, was to be compared to a chess player, the very antithesis of the gambler.

Jess Garvey was right, and he was not right. For in those flashing instants when I pulled down my digamma lever the Dosfando changed position, but she followed no course. She simply dropped out of the continuum that we call space-time and re-entered with absolutely equal probability at any point where the gravity field was the same as what we had left.

Ninety-nine times out of a hundred we found ourselves circling a sun barren of habitable planets, as we were doing now, and had no choice but to repeat the process, for Garvey's puny jets, limited as they were to speeds below that of light, were only good for maneuvering within the narrow bounds of the solar system.

Yet it was not without labor and precision on the part of myself and my crew that these instants of effortless imprecision were ever reached. In the entrails of what Garvey called my slot machine were roughly three tons of transistors, were superconducting bus bars the thickness of a man's body; were the four tuned horuntodes that we cleaned after each use in bosun's chairs suspended from a gantry, speaking in whispers to escape the mournful booming of our echoes; were the banks of two farad condensers (a man shorted one once and was vaporized—I suppose we are still breathing his atoms in our air); were ten or twenty acres of fragile printed circuits; were more branched feedback servo-tubulators than in West Nome and New Zimbabwe together.

That this was all so, Garvey well knew, and his taunting of me was but the token of our long togetherness. All those who had left earth with us twelve years before had had but two things in common, the knowing that wherever in space they would ever be, they would never be home again, and the idea that that was how they wanted it. There had been those like ourselves who went for the sheer call of the differentness and the loneliness that was less lonely than the crowds of our home, a few who bought trade goods, hoping for a planet where they could be sold for ten or a hundred or a thousand times their cost, and by far the most offered no reason for their need to leave, nor were ever asked. Some had grown tired of our changeless change, some had found planets to their liking, many had been killed over money, or over creatures that were almost women, or other matters; finally myself and Jess Garvey were all from earth that were still on the Dosfando when she left Uyalamba, our last planetfall.

Most of our crew were Uyalambans, decently humoid and musical of speech and no worse people than any of our other crews, but they did not know, as only Garvey and I did, what it was to see through branches of leafless trees the moon among clouds, or to sit in the sun with three hundred thousand others and watch motopolo in the great arena of Passhogan,

listed men to sit down, yet if I choose I can do so myself. When on certain watches, I can have coffee brought me from the wardroom, but yet do not dare offer even the man who fetched it one little sip. On no watch may I permit the men to read material other than that pertaining to the job they are on, even if they have no duty other than to stand.

If I were the Executive Officer or the Captain I would have an orderly who follows me like a puppy dog. As long as I remained in one place the orderly would have to stand at parade rest; if I were to take a two or three-hour nap and not tell the orderly to "take off" he would have to stand that time outside my cabin, in one spot! Even Procrustes was no crueller!

If I should somehow become possessed with a super-human will, I could remain humane in spite of the navy's medieval customs. But not possessing that will, I can scarcely hope to do more than keep my actions from becoming flagitious.

Recognizing the need to change the Navy Regulations and to abolish these unwritten customs which allow such a system of tyranny is all that I, as an officer, can do. I cannot compel the Navy Department to change. It will take nothing less than an act of Congress. As a naval officer I dare not even write such thoughts as these to my Congressman, much less go out and recruit followers! The only hope for your son or daughter to fight for democracy in a democratic military service is for you as a citizen to do the crusading.



Soliloquy

I walk through the house in darkness.

My aunt asks, "Who is it?"

"Me, Flo," I reply.

But is it me or someone else who walks at night?

For who is me?

I do not know.

are not to be repaired with chewing gum and thumbtacks. There would be only the creeping along on Garvey's nuclear jets and the starvation in six months or so, or a little longer if we ate one another.

"Here kittyoid, here kittyoid," I called while Garvey withdrew into the control room, and Gustave took no notice save only to switch his tails with more impatience.

I made haste to the galley, returned with a bowl of the warm milkoid which Gustave and his brothers and sisters downed with such relish. Gustave now would have none of it, he was not to be turned aside from his prey, and his meat-hungry eyes sneered at me and the warm green fluid high above him on the catwalk.

Was there then no way to stave off this leap, to save this creature and the rest of us from himself? I thought of roping him or of a net perhaps, but there was no way in all the worlds that I could see of getting such a thing through the spiderwebs of glass and wire between myself and Gustave.

Then I thought myself of Sarmdugu the Uyalamban and his little blowpipe. I did not know what Sarmdugu put on the darts that he used in it but I had seen him use them, and I knew that whatever they hit did not move again.

I wanted to stand there and watch Gustave. Painful as it was, it was less so than being out of his sight, not knowing his progress, not knowing the instant of his leap that would mean an end of leaping for the Ship Dosfando. But I drove myself back slowly along the catwalk, keeping Gustave in sight, then, reaching the hatch, leapt down the ladder and ran for Sarmdugu's quarters.

His room was foul with the odor of the schi root, and he and the other Uyalambans there were far gone in the chewing of the cursed plant. That was the way of these folk. They helped me well enough in preparing my machinery for operation, but they had no love for machines for their own sake, and so soon as their duty was over they were back to their quarters and into the vices of their people, the schi root and the endless game of atsanac. Now on the floor in one corner five or six of them were squatting, arguing in fuzzy fashion about the score and speaking of cheating and making threats, but too befuddled to be of any danger. One of these was Sarmdugu. Only with trouble and shaking did I make him aware of me.

"Sarm," I cried, "where is your little blowpipe, where are your darts?"

"None . . . a' yer . . . darn buisness, Ennish," he answered thickly and between chews.

"Hear me, Sarm! Do you want to die out here in this void of voids? There is a beast in the Kandaki triggers. One false move and they are done forever!"

Sarmdugu was a little aroused by this, and seemed to perceive what I meant. He arose, and tottering followed me to the control room and out onto the catwalk. Most of the others followed behind, hardly knowing what was afoot. "An' I still say it was seven cloober, four bobsnik I had on that last round, you farn," someone muttered. I tried to shush them, but it seemed not necessary, for Gustave still ignored us. He had scarcely moved, and the little mousoid seemed rooted with fright where she crouched.

I pointed out Gustave, and saw Sarmdugu stiffen and turn pale.

"Give me the blowpipe, Sarm,"

"I cannot, Ennis."

You sweet murdering dopefiend, I thought to myself, did you really then leave the blowpipe back in the room, to cost us minutes that mean forever? But aloud I said, "Then we must go back and get it."

"It is here, Ennis."

"Then if you are so steeped in the schi root that you cannot even give it to me (and God knows I did not expect you to be able to hit any target with it yourself), tell me where you are wearing it."

"You do not understand, Ennis. The creature is sacred. It is a sin to harm him."

"Sin? Oh merciful God, Sarm, this is no time for good or evil. You have bragged to us enough in the past. Did you think of sin when you burned the orphanage for the sake of one child rumored to wear an aluminum ear charm? Or did you think of sin when you sank ships in shallow seas so that you could skin dive to loot the corpses and save the bother of prisoners?"

"You still do not understand, Ennis. This is different. This is death to the soul. I cannot kill Gustave." There was no more thickness in his voice, and I could see that the blasphemy of my proposals had shaken them all loose from the spell of the schi root.

"Will one of you others kill the beast then?"

But they were of the same mind as Sarmdugu. As bloody

a batch as any in space they had been a moment before, but on this they held fast, that they would not see their darling catoid killed; sooner would they starve here where the nearest inhabited worlds invisibly circled suns that were pin-points of light.

And so we sat and kept vigil over Gustave and his quarry. With all my heart I looked death at Gustave, but he did not quiver. Time swept onward, but some bitter syrup, distilled of my dread and despair, arose and entered the works of my watch, gumming them so that they lied and called the hours that passed mere minutes. My mind struggled and shuddered in this same morass, and could focus itself on no plan of salvation, on nothing but the bitterness of ending.

It was then with relief that this sudden silence was broken by the yowl of a catoid and the cursing of Garvey in the control room. At least the doubly distilled idiot would bring a quick death on himself, I thought. The Uyalambans turned to meet him as he appeared on the catwalk. At arm's length he carried by the tails the infuriatedly scratching Theodosia, the tabbyoid mother of Gustave. For the second time I saw the Uyalambans stars in fixity and pale silence. Then they began to relax, and some of them broke into nervous laughter while others began to weep, and Sarmdugu produced his blowpipe, put it to his lips for an instant, then grinned like a spoiled child who has gotten its way. Gustave seemed to stretch, quivered ever so slightly, and lay down in absolute stillness. The mousoid perceived her chance, moved tentatively at first, then was off in a blur of orange.

As I trailed the others back into the control room it was as though it was myself that had been chewing of schi root.

Seeing me too numb for questions, and unable to contain his cleverness, Jess Garvey waited only until the last of the Uyalambans, headed back for their atsanac game, was out of earshot. "Ennis, my boy, did you not know that those catoids were most sacred? I'd never left you alone if I had dreamed that you knew no more than to try to kill Gustave outright."

There was silence from me.

"Since I know that in your stubbornness you will never ask me about my taking Theodosia by the tails," he went on, "I will tell you that all Uyalambans know well that no catoid can be picked up by the tails. They have known from their cradles that carrying a catoid in this fashion is starkly im-

possible. They are so sure of this fact that they have never wasted time in vain attempts to pick one of the beasts up in that fashion. And so when they saw me carrying Theodosia by the tails they could not at first believe their eyes, then began to look for an explanation. And, from their premises they proceeded with perfect logic. Since I was doing with Theodosia what could be done with no catoid, then Theodosia was no catoid at all, and neither was her child Gustave. They were mere imposters, some catoidoid breed picked up from some odd corner of space, and no more sacred than you or I."

—George Cowgill, *Sci. Grad.*

The willow

SHE FELT she must lift her head neatly and take a deep, noiseless breath and relax her eyes here for a moment, for all the aching it suddenly brought up inside her. Maybe turn her palms upward on her lap to hold it, almost, or at least make some cry, some trillish, silly sound just to realize where she was now.

But Jim was right there in the car beside her.

She sank down into the car seat and fitted her neck back against the curve of the seat and placed her eyes on the clock in the dashboard, the glove compartment door, the foggy corner of the windshield on her side.

To look beyond these, outside, to the trees, the scrub along the creek, would really only be foolish of her, because it bothered her, and Jim wouldn't stop the car just for such a wave of silliness.

But in a few seconds she spoke out loud.

"Are you tired, dear?"

"No. We've got to make Spencer City tonight."

"I thought you might be tired."

The slippery afternoon light flickered now because the road was deeply shaded through here. They moved on through it. Like putting on a habit, she thought. Like moving inside a secret.

"Jim, let's stop a minute. There's a small road up here beyond that sign that was never used very much. I'd like to stretch my legs a bit."