

row, lad, we will consider some aspects of Income Tax Eva-sion as a Path to Damnation."

"Yes *sir*," Morton said eagerly.

And with another sharp look at the Dees, The Accountant vanished.

For long seconds there was silence. Then Dee turned to his wife.

"Well," Dee said, "if the boy wants to be an accountant *that* badly, I'm sure I'm not going to stand in his way."

Hunting Problem

It was the last troop meeting before the big Scout and all the patrols had turned out. Patrol 22—the Scout Patrol—was camped in a shady hollow, holding a meeting. The Brave Bison Patrol, number 31, was moving down the stream. The Bisons were practicing their skill at dodging and laughing excitedly at the odd sensation.

And the Charging Mirash Patrol, number 19, was late. Scouter Drog, who was late as usual.

Drog hurtled down from the ten-thousand-foot mountain, solid, and hastily crawled into the circle of scouters. He said, "I'm sorry. I didn't realize what time—"

The Patrol Leader glared at him. "You're out of order."

"Sorry, sir," Drog said, hastily extruding a tentative apology forgotten.

The others giggled. Drog blushed a dim orange. He knew he was invisible.

But it wouldn't be proper right now.

"I will open our meeting with the Scouter Creed," the Patrol Leader said. He cleared his throat. "We, the Young Scouts of planet Elbonai, pledge to perpetuate the skills and traditions of our pioneering ancestors. For that purpose, we Scouters will shape our forebears were born to when they came to this virgin wilderness of Elbonai. We hereby resolve—"

Scouter Drog adjusted his hearing receptors. He listened to the Leader's soft voice. The Creed always thrilled him. He could believe that his ancestors had once been earthbound. But Elbonai were aerial beings, maintaining only the

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minimum of body, fueling by cosmic radiation at the twenty-thousand-foot level, 482-W, and he came upon a pride of three Mirash, sensing by direct perception, coming down only for sentimental or sacramental therefore huntable. I want you, Drog, to track them for purposes. They had come a long way since the Age of Pioneering. The modern stalk them, using Forest and Mountain Lore. The world had begun with the Age of Submolecular Control, which was followed by the only pioneering tools and methods, I want you to use the present age of Direct Control.

"... honesty and fair play," the Leader was saying. "And we further resolve to" "I know I can, sir!" "Go at once," the Leader said. "We will fasten tools and methods."

The invocation completed, the youngsters scattered around the plain. The Patrol Jam-boree." "Yes, sir!" Drog hastily gathered up his equipment.

"This is the last meeting before the Jamboree," the Leader said. "I know," Drog said. A few minutes later, he had levitated himself to the canteen with liquid, packed a lunch of solid food, and was on his way.

"And you are the only second-class scouter in the Charging Mirash Patrol. All area of S-233 by 482-W. It was a wild and romantic world, the others are first-class, or at least Junior Pioneers. What will people think about jagged rocks and scrubby trees, thick undergrowth and valleys, snow on the peaks. Drog looked around him.

Drog squirmed uncomfortably. "It isn't entirely my fault," he said. "I know I'm troubled. He had told the Patrol Leader a slight untruth. He failed the tests in swimming and bomb making, but those just aren't my skills. The fact of the matter was, he wasn't particularly good at them. He isn't fair to expect me to know everything. Even among the pioneers there were specialists. No one was expected to know all—"

"And just what are your skills?" the Leader interrupted. "Forest and Mountain Lore," Drog answered eagerly. "Tracking and hunting." "Hours among the clouds at the five-thousand-foot level."

The Leader studied him for a moment. Then he said slowly, "Drog, how would it be if he failed to find a Mirash? What if the Mirash was the only one like one last chance to make first class, and win an achievement badge as first?"

"I'd do anything!" Drog cried. "But that couldn't happen, he assured himself. He could always gestibulize. Who would ever know?"

"Very well," the Patrol Leader said. "What is the name of our patrol." "In another moment he picked up a faint trace of the Mirash. And then he saw a slight movement about twenty feet away. Near a curious T-shaped formation of rock."

"The Charging Mirash Patrol." "And what is a Mirash?" "Was it really going to be this easy? How nice! Drog adopted an appropriate camouflage and edged forward. The mountain trail became steeper, and the sun was low in the sky. Paxton was sweating, even in his airtight coverall. And he was heartily sick of being a good scout. "Just when are we leaving this place?" he asked.

"A large and ferocious animal," Drog answered promptly. "Once they inhabited large parts of Elbonai, and our ancestors fought many savage battles with them. Now they are extinct." "Herrera slapped him genially on the shoulder. "Wanna get rich?"

"Not quite," the Leader said. "A scouter was exploring the woods five hundred miles north of here, coordinates S-233 by 482-W. Paxton was sweating, even in his airtight coverall. And he was heartily sick of being a good scout. "Just when are we leaving this place?" he asked. "We're rich already," Paxton said.

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"We're rich already," Paxton said. "We're rich already," Paxton said.

"But not rich enough," Herrera told him, his long brown face creasing into a brilliant grin. "We found no intelligent beings, no dangerous poisonous plants, remember? All we found were mountains and gold and lakes and emeralds and diamonds. If there were something here, would it have attacked us long before?"

Stellman came up, puffing under the weight of his testing equipment. He set it down carefully on the path and sat down. "You gentlemen interested in a short diamonds?" he asked. "I'm telling you I saw it move," Paxton insisted. "This tree?" he asked Paxton.

"Why not?" Herrera said. "All the time in the world." He sat down with his back against a T-shaped formation of rock. "Yes. See, it doesn't even look like the other trees here. In a single synchronized movement, Herrera pulled a blaster from a side holster and fired three charges. The tree and all underbrush for ten yards around it were gone and crumpled.

"Relax, you're outvoted," Stellman said. "We formed this company as three equal partners." "All gone now," Herrera said. "All using *my* money," Paxton said. "I heard it scream when you shot it. Sure. But it's dead now," Herrera said. "Some more little emeralds, huh?"

"Of course. That's why we took you in. Herrera had the practical mining experience. I had the theoretical knowledge and a pilot's license. You had the money." Paxton and Stellman lifted their packs and followed the trail. Stellman said in a low, amused voice, "That fellow, isn't he?"

"But we've got plenty of stuff on board now," Paxton said. "The storage compartments are completely filled. Why can't we go to some civilized place now and start spending?" Slowly Drog returned to consciousness. "Herrera and I don't have your aristocratic attitude toward wealth," Stellman said with exaggerated patience. "Herrera and I have the childish desire to fill every nook and cranny with treasure. Gold nuggets in the fuel tanks, emeralds in the flour cans, diamonds a foot deep on deck. And this is just the place for it. All happened. There had been no premonitory manner of costly baubles are lying around just begging to be picked up. We want snorting, no snarling, no warning whatsoever. They attacked with blind suddenness, without waiting to see if he was friend or foe.

"Herrera burst into laughter. "Monsters, I suppose," he sneered. "At last Drog understood the nature of the beast," he said. "Against."

"Be calm," Stellman said mournfully. "My boy, I am a middle-aged man, overweight and easily frightened. Do you think I'd stay here if there were the slightest danger?" He waited until the hoofbeats of the three bulls faded into the distance. Then, painfully, he tried to use his visual receptor. Nothing happened. He had a moment of panic. If his central nervous system was damaged, he was end.

"There! It moved again!" He tried again. This time, a piece of rock slid off the ground. He was able to reconstruct. "We surveyed this planet three months ago," Stellman said. Quickly he performed an internal scan. He sighed.

relief. It had been a close thing. Instinctively he had quondicated at the flash moment and it had saved his life.

He tried to think of another course of action, but the shock of that sudden, contemplating certain gaudy ways of spending a vicious, unpremeditated assault had driven all Hunting Lore out of his mind. He before settling down to the serious business of r

found that he had absolutely no desire to encounter the savage Mirash again. Stellman was already phrasing his Ph.D.

Suppose he returned without the stupid hide? He could tell the Patrol Leader extraterrestrial mineral deposits.

that the Mirash were all females, and therefore unhuntable. A Young Scouter's They were all in a pleasant, relaxed mood

word was honored, so no one would question him, or even check up. re-covered completely from his earlier attack of n

But that would never do. How could he even consider it? wished an alien monster *would* show up—a g

Well, he told himself gloomily, he could resign from the Scouters, put an end to preference—chasing a lovely, scantily clad woman

the whole ridiculous business; the campfires, the singing, the games, the "Home again," Stellman said as they ap

comradeship . . . en-trance of the cave. "Want beef stew tonight

This would never do, Drog decided, taking himself firmly in hand. He was acting turn to cook.

as though the Mirash were antagonists capable of planning against him. But the "With onions," Paxton said, starting into

Mirash were not even intelligent beings. No creature without tentacles had ever jumped back abruptly. "What's that?"

devel-oped true intelligence. That was Etlib's Law, and it had never been disputed. A few feet from the mouth of the cave was a sn

In a battle between intelligence and instinctive cunning, intelligence always still steaming hot, four large diamonds, and a bottl

won. It had to. All he had to do was figure out how. "That's odd," Stellman said. "And a trifle unnervin

Drog began to track the Mirash again, following their odor. What colonial Paxton bent down to examine a diamond. Herr

weapon should he use? A small atomic bomb? No, that would more than likely ruin back.

the hide. "Might be booby-trapped."

He stopped suddenly and laughed. It was really very simple, when one applied "There aren't any wires," Paxton said.

oneself. Why should he come into direct and dangerous contact with the Mirash? Herrera stared at the roast beef, the diamonds,

The time had come to use his brain, his understanding of animal psychology, bis whiskey. He looked very unhappy.

knowl-edge of Lures and Snares. "I don't trust this," he said.

Instead of tracking the Mirash, he would go to their den. "Maybe there *are* natives here," Stellman said

And there he would set a trap. ones. This might be their goodwill offering."

Their temporary camp was in a cave, and by the time they arrived there it was "Sure," Herrera said. "They sent to Terra for a

sunset. Every crag and pinnacle of rock threw a precise and sharp-edged shadow. Space Ranger just for us."

The ship lay five miles below them on the valley floor, its metallic hide glisten-ing "What are we going to do?" Paxton asked.

red and silver. In their packs were a dozen emeralds, small, but of an excellent color. "Stand clear," Herrera said. "Move 'way back."

long branch from a nearby tree and poked g

diamonds.

"Nothing's happening," Paxton said.

The long grass Herrera was standing on w

around his ankles. The ground beneath him surge

neat disk fifteen feet in diameter and, trailing roc

to lift itself into the air. Herrera tried to jump free,

held him like a thousand green tentacles.

"Hang on!" Paxton yelled idiotically, rushed forward and grabbed a corner of the rising disk of earth. It dipped steeply, stopped for a moment, and began to rise again. By then Herrera had his knife out, and was slashing the grass around his ankles. Stellman came unfrozen when he saw Paxton rising past his head.

Stellman seized him by the ankles, arresting the flight of the disk once more. Herrera wrenched one foot free and threw himself over the edge. The other ankle was held for a moment, then the tough grass parted under his weight. He dropped head-first to the ground, at the last moment ducking his head and landing on his shoulders. Paxton let go of the disk and fell, landing on Stellman's stomach.

The disk of earth, with its cargo of roast beef, whiskey and diamonds, continued to rise until it was out of sight.

The sun had set. Without speaking, the three men entered their cave, blasters drawn. They built a roaring fire at the mouth and moved back into the cave's interior.

"We'll guard in shifts tonight," Herrera said.

Paxton and Stellman nodded.

Herrera said, "I think you're right, Paxton. We've stayed here long enough."

"Too long," Paxton said.

Herrera shrugged his shoulders. "As soon as it's light, we return to the ship and get out of here."

"If," Stellman said, "we are able to reach the ship."

Drog was quite discouraged. With a sinking heart he had watched the premature springing of his trap, the struggle, and the escape of the Mirash. It had been such a splendid Mirash, too. The biggest of the three!

He knew now what he had done wrong. In his eagerness, he had overbaited his trap. Just the minerals would have been sufficient, for

were notoriously mineral-tropic. But no, he had to improve on pioneer

methods, he had to use food stimuli as well. No wonder they had reacted

suspiciously, with their senses so overburdened.

Now they were enraged, alert, and decidedly dangerous.

And a thoroughly aressed Mirash was one of the most fearsome sights in the Galaxy.

Was a Mirash hide really worth all this trouble?

Drog decided that he would much rather be floating

level, sculpturing cloud formations

He wanted to sop up radiation instead of eating

For a moment he almost had himself convinced. And

True, the Elbonaiaans had outgrown their

would come, what new dangers the race might have

And how could they meet them if the hunting instinct was

No, the old ways had to be preserved, to serve as patterns

in an unfriendly Universe.

He was going to get that Mirash hide, or die trying!

The most important thing was to get them out of the

Now his hunting knowledge had returned to him.

Quickly, skillfully, he shaped a Mirash horn.

"Did you hear that?" Paxton asked.

"I thought I heard something," Stellman said, and

listened intently.

The sound came again. It was a voice crying, "Oh, help

"Please, help me," the girl's voice wailed. "I can't

much longer. Is there anyone who can help me?"

Blood rushed to Paxton's face. In a flash he saw her

exquisite, standing beside her wrecked sports-spacer (w

foolhardy trip it had been!) with monsters, green and slimy, closing in on her. And then *he* arrived, a foul alien beast.

Paxton picked up a spare blaster. "I'm going out there," he said coolly. "Sit down, you moron!" Herrera ordered. "But you heard her, didn't you?"

"That can't be a girl," Herrera said. "What would a girl be doing on this planet?"

"I'm going to find out," Paxton said, brandishing two blast-ers. "Maybe a spaceliner crashed, or she could have been out joyriding, and —"

"Siddown!" Herrera yelled.

"He's right," Stellman tried to reason with Paxton. "Even if a girl *is* out there, which I doubt, there's nothing we can do."

"Oh, help, help, it's coming after me!" the girl's voice screamed.

"Get out of my way," Paxton said, his voice low and dangerous.

"You're really going?" Herrera asked incredulously.

"Yes! Are you going to stop me?"

"Go ahead," Herrera gestured at the entrance of the cave.

"We can't let him!" Stellman gasped.

"Why not? His funeral," Herrera said lazily.

"Don't worry about me," Paxton said. "I'll be back in fifteen minutes—with her!" He turned on his heel and started toward the entrance. "Suppose your compass is off?"

Herrera leaned forward and, with considerable precision, clubbed Paxton behind the ear with a stick of firewood. Stellman caught him as he fell.

..

They stretched Paxton out in the rear of the cave and returned to their vigil. The lady in distress moaned and pleaded for the next five hours.

Much too long, as Paxton had to agree, even for a movie serial.

A gloomy, rain-splattered daybreak found Drag still camped a hundred yards from the cave. He saw the Mirash emerge in a tight group, weapons ready, eyes watching warily for any movement.

Why had the Mirash horn failed? The Scouter Manual said it was an infallible means of attracting the bull Mirash. But perhaps this wasn't mating season.

They were moving in the direction of a metallic ovoid Drag recognized as a primitive spatial conveyance. crude, but once inside it the Mirash were safe from him.

He could simply trevest them, and that would end it. wouldn't be very humane. Above all, the ancient Elbo had been gentle and merciful, and a Young Scouter tried like them. Besides, trevestment wasn't a true pioneering m

That left ilitrocy. It was the oldest trick in the book, and have to get close to work it. But he had nothing to lose.

And luckily, climatic conditions were perfect for it.

It started as a thin ground-mist. But, as the water climbed the gray sky, fog began forming.

Herrera cursed angrily as it grew more dense. "Keep together now. Of all the luck!"

Soon they were walking with their hands on each shoulders, blasters ready, peering into the impenetrable f

"Herrera?"

"Yeah?"

"Are you sure we're going in the right direction?"

"Sure. I took a compass course before the fog closed in."

"Don't even think about it."

They walked on, picking their way carefully over rock-strewn ground.

"I think I see the ship," Paxton said.

"No, not yet," Herrera said.

Stellman stumbled over a rock, dropped his blaster, picked up again and fumbled around for Herrera's shoulder. He f

and walked on.

"I think we're almost there," Herrera said.

"I sure hope so," Paxton said. "I've had enough."

"Think your girl friend's waiting for you at the ship?"

"Don't rub it in."

"Okay," Herrera said. "Hey, Stellman, you better grab my shoulder again. No sense getting separated."

"I am holding your shoulder," Stellman said.

"You're not."

"I am, I tell you!"

the clearing of the land on Elbonai. The Brave Biscuits, 31, were in full pioneer dress.

"Am I holding your shoulder, Paxton?"

"No," Paxton said.

"That's bad," Stellman said, very slowly. "That's bad, in-deed."

"Why?"

"Because I'm definitely holding *someone's* shoulder."

Herrera yelled, "Get down, get down quick, give me room to shoot!" But it was too late. A sweet-sour odor was in the air. Stellman and Paxton smelled it and collapsed. Herrera ran forward blindly, trying to hold his breath. He stumbled and fell over a rock, tried to get back on his feet—

The fog lifted suddenly and Drog was standing alone, smiling triumphantly. He pulled out a long-bladed skinning knife and bent over the nearest Mirash.

The spaceship hurtled toward Terra at a velocity which threatened momentarily to burn out the overdrive. Herrera, hunched over the controls, finally regained his self-control and cut the speed down to normal. His usually tan face was still ashen, and his hands shook on the instruments.

Stellman came in from the bunkroom and flopped wearily in the co-pilot's seat. "How's Paxton?" Herrera asked.

"I dosed him with Drona-3," Stellman said. "He's going to be all right."

"He's a good kid," Herrera said.

"It's just shock, for the most part," Stellman said. "When he comes to, I'm going to put him to work counting diamonds. Counting diamonds is the best of therapies, I understand."

Herrera grinned, and his face began to regain its normal color. "I feel like doing a little diamond-counting myself, now that it's all turned out okay." Then his long face became seri-ous. "But I ask you, Stellman, who could figure it? I still don't understand!"

The Scouter Jamboree was a glorious spectacle. The Soaring Falcon Patrol, number 22, gave a short pantomime showing