



Illustrated by Paul Orban

High Dragon Bump

BY DON THOMPSON

*If it took reduction or torch
hair, the Cirissins wanted a
bump. Hokum, thistle, gluck.*

A YOUNG and very beautiful girl with golden blond hair and smooth skin the color of creamed sweet potatoes floated in the middle of the windowless metal room into which Wayne Brighton drifted. The girl was not exactly naked,

but her few filmy clothes concealed nothing.

Wayne cleared his throat, his apprehension changing rapidly to confusion.

"You are going to *reduce* me?" he asked.

"The word is seduce, mister," the girl said. "They told me reduce, too, but they don't talk real good, and I think I'm supposed to seduce you so you'll tell 'em something, and then they'll let me go. I guess. I hope. What is it they wantcha to tell 'em?"

Wayne cleared his throat again, striving merely to keep a firm grip on his sanity. Things had been happening much too fast for him to have retained anything like his customary composure.

He said, "Well, they want me to get them a, uh—well, a high dragon bump." He pronounced the words carefully.

"So why dontcha?" the girl asked.

Wayne's voice rose. "I don't even know what it is. I told them and they don't believe me. Now you're here! I suppose if I can't be reduced—seduced—into getting them one, it will wind up with torch hair. Believe me, I never heard of a high dragon bump."

"Now, don't get panicky!" the girl pleaded. "After all, I'm scared too."

"I am not scared!" Wayne replied indignantly. But he realized that he was.

So far, in the hour or so he'd been a captive of the Cirissins, he'd managed to keep his fright pretty well subdued. He'd understood almost at once what had happened, and his first reaction had not been terror or even any great degree of surprise.

He was a scientist and he had a scientist's curiosity.

And at first the Cirissins—or the one that had done all the talking—had been cooperative in answering his questions. But then, when he wasn't able to comprehend what they meant by high dragon bump, they'd started getting impatient.

"What's your name?" he asked the girl. She was making gentle swimming motions with her hands and feet, moving gradually closer to him.

"Sheilah," she said. "Sheilah Ralue. I'm a model. I pose for pitchers. You know—for sexy magazines and calendars and stuff like that."

"I see. You were posing when—?"

"When they snatched me, yeah. Couple hours ago, I guess. The flash bulb went off and blinded me for a second like it always does, and I seemed to be falling. Then I was here. Only I still don't even know where here is. Do you? How come we don't weigh nothing? It's ghastly!"

"We're in a space ship," Wayne told her. "In free fall, circling earth a thousand miles or so out. I thought you at least knew we were in a space ship."

The girl said, "Oh, bull. We can't be in no space ship. How'd we get here so fast?"

"They have a matter transmitter, but I haven't the slightest idea of how it works. Obviously it's limited to living creatures or they could just as well have taken whatever it is they want instead of ... You don't happen to know what a high dragon bump is, do you?"

"Don't be dumb. Of course I ... well, unless it's a dance or something. I use to be a dancer, ya know. Sort of."

"With bubbles, I imagine," Wayne said.

"Tassels. They was my specialty. But there's more money in posing for pitchers, and the work ain't quite so—"

"I doubt that a high dragon bump is a dance," Wayne said.

Then he rubbed his chin. High dragon bump? Bumps and grinds? Highland fling? Chinese dragon dances? Hell, why not?

The idea of space travelers visiting earth to learn a new dance was no more fantastic than the idea of them being here at all.

Wayne turned his face to the door and shouted, "Hey, is that it? A dance? You want us to teach you a dance called the high dragon bump?"

A muffled metallic voice from the other side said, "Nod danz. Bump. Huguff quig."

Wayne shrugged and grinned weakly at Sheilah. "Well, we're making headway. We know one thing that it isn't."

The girl had drifted so close to him now that he could feel the warmth of her body and smell the overwhelming fragrance of her perfume.

She put one hand on his arm, and Wayne found that he had neither the strength nor the inclination to jerk away.

But he protested weakly, "Now, listen, there's no point in you—I mean—even if we did, I couldn't produce a high dragon bump."

"What kind of work do you do, mister?" Sheilah asked softly, drawing herself even closer. "You know, you ain't even told me your name yet."

"It's Wayne," he said, fumbling in an effort to loosen his tie so he could breath more easily. "I'm an instructor. I teach physics at Kyler College, and I've got a weekly science show on TV. In fact I'd just finished my show when they got me. I was leaving the studio, starting down the stairs. Thought at first I'd missed a step and was falling, but I just kept falling. And I landed here, and ... Now, don't do that!"

"Why, I wasn't doing nothing. Whaddya do on your TV show?"

"I talk. About science. Physics. Like today, I was discussing the H-bomb. How it works, you know, and why the fallout is dangerous, and ... Oh, good Gawd! Seduce, reduce! High dragon bump!"

He shoved her away from him abruptly and violently and he went hurtling in the opposite direction.

"Well, hey!" Sheilah protested. "You don't need to get so rough. I wasn't going to—"

"Shut up," Wayne said. "I think I've figured out what the Cirissins want!

"Hey! Hey, open the door," he shouted. "I've got to talk to you."

The door opened and a Cirissin floated in.

Sheilah turned her head away, shuddering, and Wayne found it wise to close his eyes and open them little by little to grow re-accustomed to the sight gradually.

The only thing he could think of with which to compare the Cirissins was the intestinal complex of an anemic elephant.

It was not an entirely satisfactory comparison; but then, from his point of view, the Cirissins were entirely unsatisfactory creatures.

Each of the four he had seen was nearly twice his size. They had no recognizable features such as eyes, ears, nose, head, arms or legs.

Tentacle-like protrusions of various size and length seemed to serve as the sensory and prehensile organs. Wayne had identified one waving, restless flexible stalk as the eye. He suspected another of being the mouth, except that it apparently wasn't used for talking. The voice came from somewhere deep inside the convoluted mass of pastel-streaked tissue.

"Wand tog?" the Cirissin rumbled.

Wayne said, "Yes. Do you mind telling me what you want a high dragon bump *for*?"

"Blast away hearth," the Cirissin replied unhesitatingly.

Wayne swallowed and found it unnaturally difficult to do so.

"To blast away earth?" he said. "You can do that with just one high dragon bump?"

"Certificate. Alteration energy maguntoot. Compiled, though. Want splain?"

Wayne said, "Never mind. I believe you. Just tell me this: Why? Who do you feel it's necessary to do it?"

"Cause *is* necessary," the Cirissin explained. "Hearth no good. Whee dun lake. Godda gut red oft."

Sheilah gasped, "Why the inhuman beasts!"

Wayne expended one sidelong silencing glance on her and then said, "I see. And just suppose now that I don't give you a high dragon bump? What do you do then?"

"Use hot tummy ache your arnium fishing bumps. Got them us elves. Tooking longthier, more hurtful, but can. Few don't gives high dragon bump tweddy far whores, thin godda."

Wayne was silent for a while, staring at the alien creature, aware of Sheilah staring at him.

"Twenty-four hours," he muttered. "Then they use uranium fission bombs. Oh, hell!"

Finally he shrugged. "All right, I'll do it. Anyway, I'll try. I'll do what I can."

Sheilah said, "Hey, listen mister, you can't ..."

"Shut up!" Wayne snapped. "How do you know what I can do? You just let me handle this."

"No sea juicing?" the Cirissin asked, waving his eye stem at Sheilah.

"No. No sea juicing, and no torch hair either, please. I just didn't understand what you wanted at first. Now, if I could talk to your captain—

or, are you the captain?"

The Cirissin replied, "I spoke man. Name Orealgrailbliqu. Capitate nod sparking merry can languish. I only earning languish. Gut, hah? Tree whacks."

"Uh, yeah, very good indeed," Wayne said. "And in only three weeks! Now, Mr.—you don't mind if I call you O'Reilly, do you? Well, then, O'Reilly, do you have any suggestions as to how I should go about getting you a high dragon bump? You want me to make you one? Or—"

"Yukon mike?" O'Reilly asked.

Wayne shrugged modestly. "Of course. With proper materials and equipment—and enough time." He wondered if there was any chance at all of convincing O'Reilly of that.

"Nod mush timeless," O'Reilly said doubtfully. "God gut lab tarry, few wand lug."

Wayne hesitated, partly to translate O'Reilly's rumblings and partly to marvel at an audacious idea taking shape in his mind.

He said, "Uh, yes, by all means. I *do* want to look at your laboratory. Let's go."

The Cirissin offered no objections to Sheilah accompanying them, so they followed him, pulling themselves along the tubular corridor by means of metal rings set in the walls, apparently for that specific purpose.

It was the same means of propulsion employed by their guide, except that he used tentacles instead of hands.

They were more awkward than he, and so they fell behind.

"Listen, mister," Sheilah said. "You're not really gonna help these creeps, are ya? Cause, I mean, if you are I'm gonna stop you—one way or another."

Wayne looked at her, feeling a deep sadness that anything so gorgeous could be so stupid. Stirred to self-consciousness by her near-nudity, he

glanced quickly away.

"Why don't you quit trying to think?" he advised her. "I may not be able to make a high dragon bump, but so help me I'm going to do my damndest to see that they get one. And don't you get any stupid patriotic ideas. You just keep out of it. Understand?"

O'Reilly had thrown open a door and was waiting for them.

Wayne looked inside.

"Smatter? Dun lake lab tarry?" the Cirissin asked after waiting nearly a minute for some comment.

The laboratory probably wasn't adequate to produce a hydrogen bomb, Wayne realized; but he wasn't at all sure. It was the most complex, complete and compact laboratory he had ever seen. Its sheer size forced him to revise upward his estimate of the overall size of the ship.

Much of the equipment was totally alien to him, but there was also a great deal that he could at least guess the purpose of. Including a fabulous array of electronic equipment.

When Wayne still didn't say anything, the Cirissin closed the door. "Batter blan," he announced. "Wheeze india buck terth. Cup girlish ear. Torch herf youdon brink high dragon bump."

Wayne said, "Huh?"

"Flow me." O'Reilly led Wayne and Sheilah through a maze of corridors, tunnels and hatchways, stopping at last to throw open a door and let Wayne peer into the control cabin of a miniature space ship.

O'Reilly jumblingly explained that it was a reconnaissance ship, used for visiting the surface of a planet when it was impractical to land the mother ship.

The control board was simple: a few dials, one or two buttons, several switches and a view plate. It looked too simple.

Wayne said, "Now, wait. Let's see if I have this straight. You want me to take this ship to earth and swipe you a high dragon bump. And you're going to keep Sheilah here and torture her if I don't deliver the goods, huh?"

The Cirissin said that was right. "Kwiger butter. Jus bush piggest putton. Token ley tours gutther."

"I see. And what about communications?" Wayne asked. "Is the boat equipped with radio? How can I let you know when I have your high dragon bump?"

O'Reilly said, "Can't. Combundlecations Cirissin only."

From his further explanation Wayne gathered that communications between the two ships was on the basis of some sort of amplified brain waves, and could carry only the brain waves of Cirissins.

Wayne considered the situation.

Two hours to get to earth. No radio. The big Cirissin ship was circling earth at an unknown distance, unknown speed and unknown direction. And although the ship was enormous, it would be impossible to spot it from earth unless you knew exactly where to look.

He said, "It would really be better, wouldn't it, if I could make the high dragon bump right here?"

O'Reilly agreed that it would be better.

"Well, let me try. You've got a good lab, and we have plenty of time. Twenty-four hours, you said? Well, give me about ten hours in the laboratory. If I can't produce a high dragon bump in that time I'll take the small ship down and get you one. Okay?"

While the Cirissin thought it over in meditative silence Wayne was aware of Sheilah watching him with cold, hostile eyes. He wished he could explain things to her, but he didn't dare try.

Finally O'Reilly said, "Hokum. Tenners in lab. Thistle."

"It'll be enough," Wayne assured him.

SHEILAH was taken back to the room where Wayne had met her and the Cirissin instructed her to stay there. He closed the door but did not lock it. Then he took Wayne back to the lab.

"Neediest hulp?" he asked.

"Hulp? Help? Uh ... Why, no. No, thanks. I can manage fine by myself. In fact I'd rather work alone. Fewer distractions the better, you know."

"Hack saw lent. Wheel buzzy preparation. In trol room few deriding hulp needed." Then O'Reilly floated out the door.

Wayne was astounded. He'd taken it for granted that the Cirissin would insist on supervising him, and he'd been evolving elaborate plans for escaping his attention.

But Wayne thought he had the explanation for the Cirissins' idiotic behavior.

This ship and everything about it indicated an extremely high intelligence and an advanced culture.

Everything, that is, but the Cirissins themselves.

The idea of kidnapping him from earth to provide them with a weapon to destroy earth; kidnapping Sheilah to seduce him; the idea of even expecting him to be *able* to produce such a weapon—it was all idiotic.

There was only one explanation that he could see.

The Cirissins *were* idiots.

Some other race had produced this ship. These cosmic degenerates had somehow gotten hold of it and were on a mad binge through the universe, destroying all the worlds they didn't like.

He wondered how many they'd already wiped out. They had to be stopped.

Wayne immediately started constructing a radio transmitter from convenient materials in the laboratory. It was fairly simple.

He was not interrupted for nearly two hours. At which time he was saying into his improvised microphone:

"Seven hours? That long? Can't make it any sooner than that? Five hours? Six?"

And then it was not a Cirissin voice behind him which said: "Drop that. Put up your hands and turn around!"

It was Sheilah.

Wayne turned and saw her floating at the doorway pointing a long, tubular metal object at him, her finger poised on a protruding lever.

"What's that?" Wayne asked.

Sheilah said, "It's a gun I found after lookin' all over the damn ship. I'm going to kill you. And then I'm going to kill your Cirissin friends. You're nothing but a dirty traitor, and I wouldn't seduce you if—I never did trust you scientists. Maybe I'll be killed, too, but I don't care." She was close to tears.

"You're going to kill me?" Wayne said. "With that? How do you know it's even a gun? Looks more like a fire extinguisher to me. Aw, you poor little imbecile, I haven't had a chance to explain yet, but—"

Sheilah said, "You make me sick." She pulled the trigger.

The object was not a fire extinguisher, after all. It was quite obviously a weapon of some kind.

Also it seemed obvious that Sheilah had been pointing the wrong end of the weapon toward Wayne.

One more obvious fact that Wayne had time to comprehend was that the weapon was not a recoilless type.

But by then Sheilah had gone limp and the gun had rebounded from her grasp and was sailing at Wayne's head.

He ducked but not fast enough. The object whacked him solidly on top of his head.

His brain exploded into a display of dazzling lights, excruciating pain and deafening noise.

Then the lights went out and a long, dense silence set in.

When Wayne fought through the layers of renewed pain and opened his eyes, he was still floating near his makeshift radio equipment in the laboratory.

Sheilah still hung limply in mid-air near the door. The tubular weapon wavered near the ceiling. The radio transmitter was still open.

It was just as though he'd been unconscious no more than a few minutes. But Wayne had a strong feeling that it had been more than that.

Therefore he was only shocked, rather than stunned, when a glance at his wristwatch indicated six hours and forty minutes had elapsed.

He held his head tightly in both hands to keep it from flying off in all directions at once, and he tried to think.

He knew it was important to think—fast and straight.

Six hours and forty minutes.

That was too long to be unconscious from a simple blow on the head, and his head didn't really hurt that bad.

Probably the weapon had still been firing whatever mysterious ammunition it used when it struck him; and when it bounced off his head it had turned, and he'd been caught in its blast.

But that didn't matter. That wasn't the important thing.

Six hours and forty minutes he'd been out.

Seven hours!

The Defense Department official he'd spoken to had told him seven hours.

And thank God it wasn't five hours or six, as he'd been urging them to make it.

Anyway he had only twenty minutes now. Possibly a little more, but just as likely less.

That realization should have spurred him to instantaneous and heroic action, but instead it paralyzed him for several minutes. He couldn't think what to do. He couldn't get his muscles and nerves functioning and coordinated.

The absence of gravity didn't help. He thrashed about futilely.

But at last, almost by accident, his feet touched a metal support beam, and he pushed himself toward Sheilah. He grabbed her around the waist with one arm and with his free hand pulled both of them through the door.

It seemed a long, long time before he got Sheilah to the reconnaissance ship. By then the twenty minutes were up. His life was going into overtime.

Sheilah was conscious but still disorganized and limp, struggling weakly and ineffectually. Wayne fumbled with the door, got it open and shoved her inside.

Then he pulled himself in and closed the door.

They might make it yet. They still had a chance.

He studied the control board, deciding on the proper button to push.

From behind him Sheilah screamed, "The bomb! You've got the bomb and you're going to—Well, you're not!"

Her body slammed against his shoulders and her arms encircled his neck. Her fingers clawed at his eyes.

Wayne struggled, not to free himself, but only to get one hand loose, to reach the control board. When he did get a hand free, they had floated too far from the controls.

"Stop it, you stupid bitch!" Wayne snarled. "You're going to kill us both!"

Wayne said, "Listen, there's a guided missile from earth heading straight for this ship, and it has a hydrogen bomb warhead. It'll get here any minute now and when it—"

His words were broken off by the tremendous roar and concussion of the hydrogen bomb.

Wayne's last thought before oblivion swallowed him was that they wouldn't have had time to escape, anyway.

But that wasn't the end. Wayne woke up enough to refuse to believe he was alive, and O'Reilly was somewhere near, telling him:

"Cirissins full of grate your forts. Radio eggulant blan. Thankel normous. Rid of earth now. Blasted away. Givish *good* high dragon bump. Yukon gome now."

Wayne groaned. The meaning of O'Reilly's words was trying to get through to his brain, and he was trying desperately to keep the meaning out.

O'Reilly's voice receded into a thick gray fog. "Keep shib. Shores. Presirent felpings. Gluck."

Metal slammed against metal. Wayne slammed against something hard. And darkness closed in once again.

But this time it wasn't so smothering and didn't last nearly so long.

When he opened his eyes his head was clear. He wasn't floating. He was lying on something hard—a floor surface of the Cirissin landing ship. He didn't ache anywhere.

All in all he felt pretty good.

For the first few seconds.

Then he started remembering things, and he wished he hadn't bothered to wake up.

Sheilah was standing by the control panel, her back to him. She blocked the view screen, but Wayne didn't want to see it anyway. He wasn't even

curious.

Sheilah turned, saw him, smiled broadly.

She said, "Gee, mister, I guess you're a hero. I dunno how you done it, but you made 'em go away, and you made 'em turn us loose." Wayne could detect no mockery or bitterness in her voice.

"Aw, shut up," he growled.

"You still mad at me cause of what I done? Well, gee, I'm sorry. I didn't get whatcha were up to. I guess I still don't, but ... Oh, hell, let's don't fight about it. It don't matter now, does it?"

Wayne shook his head wearily. "No," he agreed. "It doesn't matter now."

Sheilah moved away from the control board and came toward him. In her filmy, transparent costume, she was the quintessence of womanly allure.

Wayne gasped and stared, but not at her.

The view screen had become visible when she'd moved.

It showed earth.

Or a curved, cloud-veiled slice of earth. Intact, serene and growing steadily larger.

"What the hell! Why, I thought ..." Wayne jumped to his feet, brushed past Sheilah and peered more closely at the view plate. There was no mistaking it. Earth.

"What's a matter with you, mister?" Sheilah asked.

Wayne felt dizzy. O'Reilly had said, "Earth blasted away," hadn't he? And the H-bomb hadn't destroyed the Cirissin ship. Therefore ... Well, therefore what?

In the first place what O'Reilly had actually said was, "Rid of earth now. Blasted away." It wasn't quite the same as ...

O'Reilly had never said anything about *destroying* earth.

Quite a sizeable re-evaluation project was taking place in Wayne's mind. It took several minutes for all the pieces to fall into their proper places. But once he was willing to realize that the Cirissins had known what they were doing, everything seemed obvious.

"Oh, good Gawd!" he muttered. "What utter idiots!"

"The Cirissins?" Sheilah asked.

"No, I mean us. Me. Good Lord, just because O'Reilly's English wasn't perfect! What did I expect for only three weeks? Hummm. The atomic structure of the entire ship must be uniformly charged to ... Damn! High dragon bump!"

"I don't getcha," Sheilah said. "What's with this high dragon bump business? I thought they wanted a hydrogen bomb to destroy earth, and I thought you'd agreed to help 'em, and so I thought ..."

"Oh, never mind," Wayne said. "I know what you thought, and you weren't any more stupid than I was. We were both wrong.

"Look, the Cirissins must have been stalled—out of gas, sort of. Something had gone wrong with their nuclear drive units. They had some emergency fuel, but they didn't want to use it. Like having a can of kerosene in the car when the tank runs dry, I suppose. It will work, but it messes up the engine. You understand so far?"

"Sure."

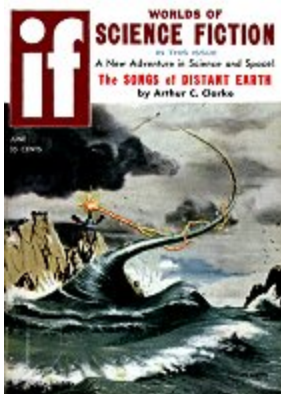
"Okay then. They happened to be close to earth, so they went into an orbit around it and studied it for a while on radio and TV bands, and realized they might be able to get help without using their emergency fuel—uranium, incidentally, not kerosene.

"So they grabbed us. Me, I suppose because they'd seen my TV science program. They must have gotten the idea from some stupid spy show that scientists have to be seduced into revealing information. That's why they picked up you."

Sheilah interrupted, "But what did they *want*? I thought ..."

Patiently, Wayne said, "Just what they said. A high dragon bump. A *bump*, not a bomb. A boost, a push. Not to blast away earth, but to blast away *from* earth. That's all."

END



Transcriber's Note:

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