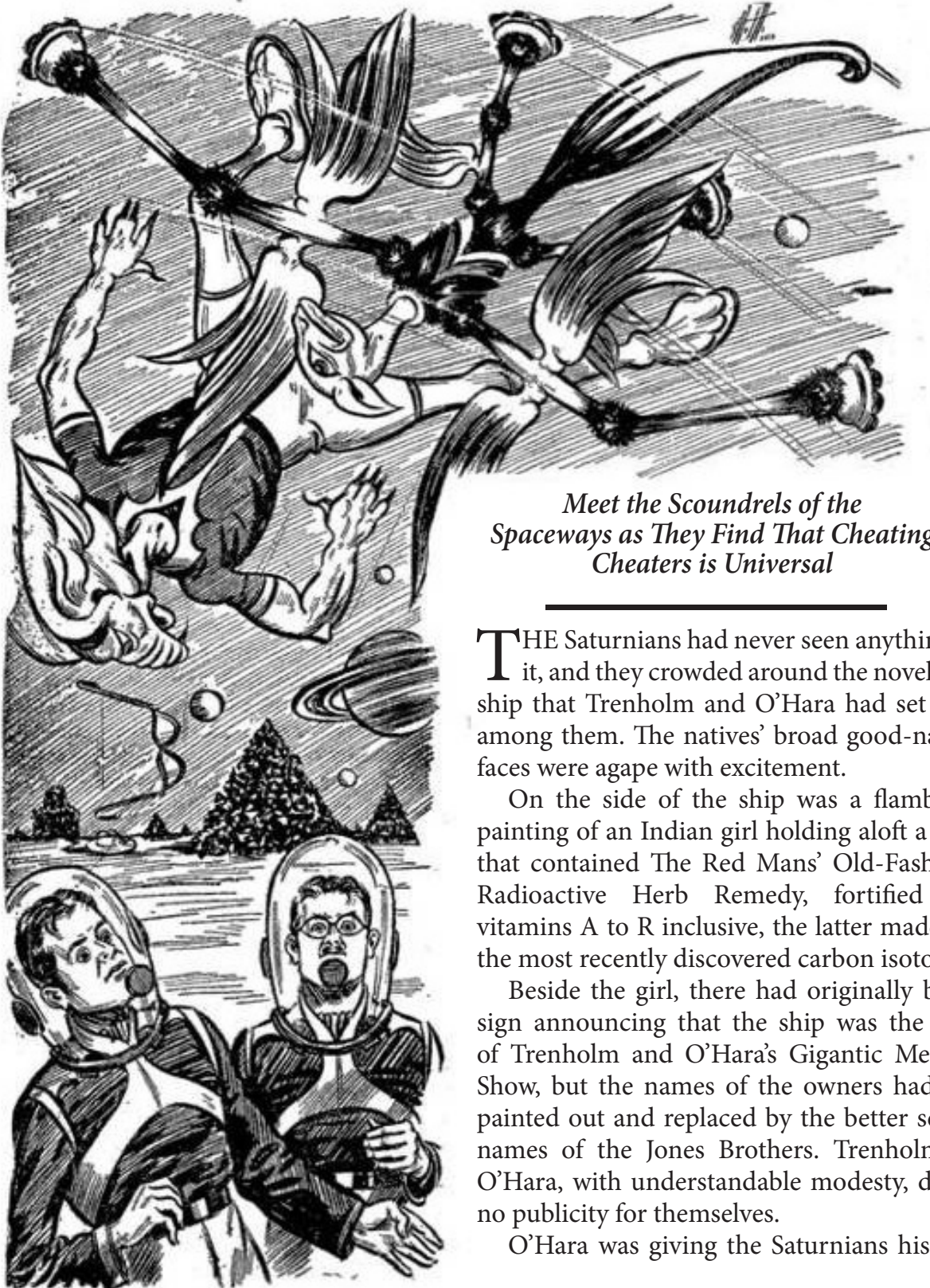


BAD MEDICINE

By WILLIAM MORRISON

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*Meet the Scoundrels of the
Spaceways as They Find That Cheating
Cheaters is Universal*

THE Saturnians had never seen anything like it, and they crowded around the novel space ship that Trenholm and O'Hara had set down among them. The natives' broad good-natured faces were agape with excitement.

On the side of the ship was a flamboyant painting of an Indian girl holding aloft a bottle that contained The Red Mans' Old-Fashioned Radioactive Herb Remedy, fortified with vitamins A to R inclusive, the latter made with the most recently discovered carbon isotope.

Beside the girl, there had originally been a sign announcing that the ship was the home of Trenholm and O'Hara's Gigantic Medicine Show, but the names of the owners had been painted out and replaced by the better serving names of the Jones Brothers. Trenholm and O'Hara, with understandable modesty, desired no publicity for themselves.

O'Hara was giving the Saturnians his usual

spiel now.

“Come closer, ladies and gentlemen, come closer,” he chanted. The ladies and gentlemen, eyes alight with expectation, obeyed. Their faces were elephantine, with huge flapping ears, but without trunks. And to O’Hara they brought back old memories of those ancient cartoons that in bygone days had depicted the Republican Party as a man with an elephant’s head.

But it was not the heads that chiefly interested him. It was the rough, pink beads they wore around their necks.

“We are now about to give you, ladies and gentlemen,” he went on, “absolutely free of charge, two hours of the most solid, fascinating, instructive, and educational entertainment it has ever been the fortune of any mortal being to experience! Yes, sir, ladies and gentlemen. Entertainment unparalleled and absolutely free of charge!”

Trenholm threw a switch then, and their ancient movie projector flashed a picture of a Martian dancing girl on the three-dimensional screen, while the braying of one of the latest dance tunes came from the loudspeaker. Most of the music had been produced by the new electric trumpets and trombones, with shrill overtones that were guaranteed to deafen a sensitive ear. The Saturnians watched and listened as if spellbound. O’Hara stared at the pink necklaces, and whispered:

“Trenholm, my lad, we’ve got a fortune in our hands!”

TRENHOLM nodded. He was a large man, blond, something like an ancient Viking in appearance, but with no trace of Viking recklessness. Recklessness wouldn’t have paid. These Saturnians were twelve feet tall, with muscles even out of proportion to their size, and an Earth man compared to them had no more than the strength of a child.

O’Hara was small and dark, with a volubility that contrasted with Trenholm’s tendency to silence. And at the moment, he was excited, very excited.

Attracted by the noise of the music, more Saturnians were flocking to the ship. O’Hara almost went crazy trying to estimate the value of those necklaces. They were made of satargyrite, which was mostly silver sulphide, but they contained appreciable quantities of Element 102.

Element 102 was the only known source of atomic energy whose transformation was capable of being accelerated or retarded at will, and the price for it was high, extremely so. But getting it was a very dangerous business. The Saturnians, being below par mentally, were protected by stringent laws. If Trenholm and O’Hara were caught at their little game, the penalty would be at least ten years in a jail that boasted no air conditioning, no television movies, and which guaranteed to teach wayward men the error of their ways.

The reel showing the Martian dancing girl came to an end, and Trenholm slipped on another that depicted a Mercurian minstrel show. The jokes and gags were so babyish that a ten-year-old Earth child would have flushed with shame to be caught listening to them, but they suited the Saturnian taste perfectly, and gales of laughter swept the crowd.

O’Hara did a little mental calculating then. Judging from the mass of people collected here, they would get rid of their radioactive herb remedy in three days. From advance information they had secured, they could reasonably count on a Saturnian patrol ship being back on the fourth day. That gave them a whole day to spare. O’Hara grinned, and almost felt the untold wealth in his pocket.

The Mercurian minstrels wheezed to an end, and O’Hara stepped forward with his right hand raised for attention.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he roared, “we offer you now an attraction so sensational, so unbelievable, that you will think your eyes and ears are playing you false. Nothing like it has been seen or heard of on Saturn from the beginning of time. Nothing like it has been seen or heard of on any of the planets. Ladies and gentlemen, we offer Waloo, the Saturnian with the intelligence of an Earthman!”

Waloo stepped forward, grinning with pride. He seemed like an average Saturnian, and he was exactly that. They had picked Waloo up stranded on Mercury, and he had shown no wisdom there. But now he was wearing a pair of huge spectacles whose rims were caught around his flapping ears. And to the other Saturnians he must have looked as wise as a judge.

“Waloo,” said O’Hara gravely, “how much is two plus two?”

WALOO hesitated. “Four,” he ventured after a while.

The crowd began to whisper excitedly. Evidently they were checking up. After a few seconds, however, most of them were convinced that Waloo’s answer was correct, and they stared at him admiringly.

“How much is four times six?” O’Hara asked.

“Twenty-four,” Waloo guessed. “How much is ninety-nine divided by three?”

“Seventeen,” replied Waloo, grinning stupidly, and O’Hara smothered an oath and swept on to the next question before the Saturnians could make up their minds whether or not he had made a mistake.

For a time Waloo answered correctly. And then O’Hara played his trump card.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he cried. “You have all heard of the Einstein theory. It is so difficult to understand, that few people, even on Earth, know what it is. But Waloo knows! Waloo,

explain the Einstein theory.”

Waloo began slowly.

“In ordinary mechanics,” he intoned, “if a body moves with the velocity ‘u’ with reference to ‘0,’ and ‘0’ itself moves with velocity ‘v’ with reference to ‘0’—”

They were stricken with awe. They hadn’t the slightest suspicion of what it all meant, of course. For that matter, neither had Trenholm and O’Hara. Trenholm had simply taken the words from a long-outmoded textbook on physics, and copied them for Waloo’s benefit on a small placard.

The placard was hung on the wall of the space ship, where to the near-sighted Saturnians it was practically invisible. But Waloo, with his spectacles, could read the words with ease, just as he had read the answers to the questions O’Hara had asked him. They were spelled in the new interplanetary phonetic manner, and even a Saturnian could pronounce them, no matter how ignorant he might be of their meaning. The whole difficulty with Waloo had been in teaching him to reply to the questions in order, and not to skip on to the next question’s answer before the previous one had been given, as he repeatedly did.

Waloo came to the end of the Einstein theory, and there was a burst of spontaneous applause. Waloo flushed happily.

“The damn fool must really think he knows what he’s talking about,” O’Hara thought, and then addressed the crowd again.

“My friends, you have seen and heard this remarkable exhibition. Would you ever have expected such intelligence from a Saturnian? Would you not have called it impossible? Well you, too, can be as intelligent as Waloo. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, incredible as it may seem, we can increase your intelligence a thousandfold! Just drink one bottle of genuine Red Mans’ Old-Fashioned Radioactive Herb Remedy with vitamins A to R every day for

five days, and you will be able to answer all the questions Waloo has answered.

“This intelligence remedy, discovered by an old Indian with one-fourth Martian blood in Oklahoma, U.S.A., Earth, while digging for roots, has a record of one-hundred percent success! It is radioactive, as you can see when I bring a bottle close to this electroscope. It has all the vitamins in the world, and it contains that magic element, carbon isotope seventeen-B the form of carbon responsible for the genius of our greatest thinkers. Results guaranteed, or your money back.”

O’HARA had them going, and he knew it. Stupid as they were, the Saturnians differed from other stupid people, in that they were aware of their deficiency. They had a tremendous respect for intelligence and learning, and would do anything to improve their minds. O’Hara did not tell them that on Earth, the same Radioactive Herb Remedy, consisting of little more than a trace of chemical and some colored water, had been advertised as a purifier of the blood stream and a cure for various disease. On Mercury they had guaranteed it to increase the strength of the muscles. The remedy had an unpleasant taste, and that made people believe in it. And for occasional doubters, he and Trenholm could refer to that Martian doctor who had written a crazy article solemnly asserting that they could improve the intelligence.

Sometimes O’Hara could not help grinning when he realized that despite all advances in science, people had the same old weaknesses and desires, and fell for the same old tricks.

“Results guaranteed, or your money back!” he repeated.

“The price, you idiot, the price!” Trenholm whispered. “Tell them the price!” O’Hara had a tendency to become intoxicated with his own words.

“And what do we charge for our magic Radioactive Herb Remedy?” declaimed O’Hara. “Not one thousand Interplanetary Lead Standard dollars, which it is well worth, ladies and gentlemen, which it is well worth. Not one hundred dollars. Not even ten dollars! No, all we ask for five bottles of this wonderful brain stimulator is one small necklace of pink beads.

“Think of it, just one small necklace of worthless pink beads for five bottles! And as an extra added bonus, to the first ten purchasers buying this wonderful Radioactive Herb Remedy with all the vitamins, we intend to give away, absolutely free of charge, one pair of beautiful, hand-made, guaranteed plastic spectacles that will make you look as intelligent as you are going to be!”

If the Saturnians had been impatient to buy the remedy before, the offer of the spectacles stampeded them. They pressed forward in so dense a mass that O’Hara was forced to plead with them.

“Just a moment, ladies and gentlemen, just a moment!” he boomed. “There is enough of the Radioactive Herb Remedy for all. And my brother and partner, Mr. Jones, authorizes me to state that our offer of spectacles to the first ten purchasers will be extended to every purchaser!”

It was an hour before the buying spree had ended and the last Saturnian had gone, his five bottles of Radioactive Herb Remedy clutched firmly to his breast, and his spectacles with their lenses of plain, green-tinted translucite suspended from his ears. O’Hara was dancing around the ship.

“Almost half the stock gone!” he gloated, fondling the necklaces. “Trenholm, one more evening like this, and we’re getting out of this place. We’ll have enough to be rich!”

TRENHOLM was more restrained. "Tomorrow's haul won't be as good as this one," he warned. "We got the cream of the crop tonight."

"If only I had thought to take more bottles," O'Hara groaned. He looked around the ship. "Where's Waloo?" he asked suddenly.

Waloo was gone.

"He's out there in the open country," observed Trenholm. "We'll have to go after him."

O'Hara nodded, and went into the ship. He returned with a small round metal object in his hand.

"For the stinger prongs," he explained, and they set out.

Overhead the rings of Saturn cast a faint, reflecting light, and they could see without using their electric rays. The countryside had an eerie appearance in the semi-darkness. The plants were pyramidal in shape, rising from a broad base, and coming almost to a point, so that they might conserve their heat against the freezing temperatures that would come during the long night. They were almost all dark red and brown in color, and there was no touch of green to relieve the ugly monotony.

Trenholm and O'Hara remained at first on a well-traveled path. Then, from far off to the right, came the whinnying of a megapod. They stopped suddenly.

"That's probably it," said Trenholm.

"Waloo heard it, and set out to capture it."

They turned off the path to the right. A small glowing helix came twisting slowly past them, shedding a lurid violet light, and they gave it a wide berth. When excited, the helix had been known to wrap itself with incredible speed around a man's arm or leg, and squeeze. There was terrific force in the luminescent coils, and the usual result was that the arm or leg fell off, the stump cauterized by the radiation as neatly as if done by a surgeon's electrodes.

In the distance they saw a megapod bound into the air, and come sailing down again slowly. Then they heard a low whistle. That was undoubtedly Waloo.

The Saturnian was no more than a few hundred feet from them, and if they were lucky they would see him in less than five minutes. As they made their way forward, however, a sudden shadow fell on them. They stopped again and looked up.

Apparently descending from a spot in one of Saturn's rings, far to the left of them, a cloud of what seemed to be dust was tracing a parabolic path in the air.

"I guess that's it," O'Hara said, and grasped the small metal object he had taken from the ship more tightly. "Suppose we put our backs to one of those plants?" he suggested.

Trenholm shook his head.

"The prongs might slide down its sides," he pointed out. "We'd better stay as far out in the open as we can. Save the energy in that projector."

The particles of dust came closer, so that they seemed like small black spheres. Then, while still high up, the spheres disintegrated, and there were a thousand particles for each one that had existed before. They fell less rapidly now, having encountered the resistance of the Saturnian air. But they fell nevertheless, and when apparently only a mile up, the new particles, themselves grown to black spheres, disintegrated in turn.

"Do they split again?" asked O'Hara.

"No. They're individual stinger animals now."

AS the animals drifted down, the Earthmen could make out their outlines. Each black leathery balloon was almost two feet in diameter. There was no appearance of eyes or any other features. Behind each balloon were three large purple streamers several yards in

length.

It was these streamers, arranged like the prongs of a fork, that had given the animals their name, and it was in them that the danger lay. A single touch of their purple fronds would incapacitate a Saturnian, or kill an Earthman.

The prongs were coming closer now, seeming to fill the whole sky.

"Turn on the projector," Trenholm said.

O'Hara pressed a button, and held the projector over his head. They could see very little, for the prongs blotted out most of the light, and the projector's radiation was ultra-violet. But they knew the projector was working, for above them a prong suddenly came within range, and exploded!

The ultra-violet light had struck the black balloon, and both the leathery substance and the purple streamers had dissolved into gas. O'Hara could smell a faint odor of sulfur compounds.

The prongs began to explode rapidly now, and for a moment the space above them became clear. But other prongs came drifting in from all sides, and O'Hara could not let up for a second. When he tired, Trenholm took the projector from him, and directed it against the silent throng of invaders.

A prong came within ten feet of them without exploding, and O'Hara tore it to pieces with a shot from his electric gun.

"The radiation is getting weak now," Trenholm snapped. "If they keep coming—"

A faint wind had sprung up suddenly, and all the prongs began to drift toward the left.

"It'll drive them away," exclaimed O'Hara happily. "All we have to do is wait."

The wind freshened, and within a minute it rose to hurricane intensity.

And after that the rain hit them.

Most of the prongs had drifted far enough away to be no longer dangerous, and the rest were disintegrating in the rain. The raindrops

were enormous, at least three inches in diameter, and they came down with many times the force of any hailstones Trenholm and O'Hara had ever seen on earth.

They fell without breaking up into smaller drops because they were not pure water, but a viscous aqueous solution. The force of the wind had whirled them up from a lake where they had been resting quietly, and was now hurling them at Trenholm and O'Hara.

The two men cast themselves on the ground in the lee of a tetraphyte, one of the huge pyramidal plants, and waited for the storm to pass. The drops of rain hit them and splattered, and the droplets rolled down their faces so that they could taste them. They were bitter and nauseous, and their taste was almost worse than the battering they were receiving from the rain.

In ten minutes, the wind ceased suddenly, and with it the rain. The two men rose to their feet painfully, and squeezed as much of the liquid as they could out of their clothes. Ahead of them, the megapod sprang into the air a second time, and once more they could hear Waloo whistling to the animal enticingly.

THEY started forward again. Soon they could see the megapod clearly. At first glance it looked like nothing more than four huge mustard-colored legs, grotesquely held together at the top by an insignificant body. On each leg was a pair of wings, kept folded when the animal sprang upward, extended as soon as the highest point in the leap had been reached, thus permitting a gradual descent. The wings were useful also during a high wind, for then the animal could soar, and travel long distances without effort. The legs were jointed, and the forelegs were twice as long as the others, so that on the ground the megapod had difficulty keeping its balance. But it occasionally made use of a stiff tail that

acted as an additional support. The head was round and tiny, and hardly seemed fitted for a beast of sufficient size to carry a Saturnian.

Waloo was holding something green out to it. As Trenholm and O'Hara came closer, they recognized the material as the roots of a rare variety of tetraphyte that was growing all about them. At the same time that Waloo was trying to lure the megapod nearer to him, he whistled coaxingly.

The megapod stared at Waloo, its tiny eyes showing its indecision. Finally it leaped forward, and nibbled the green roots. Waloo did not move, and the megapod, encouraged, began to eat steadily.

"It's wild, isn't it?" O'Hara asked, low-voiced.

"Wild, but not ownerless," Trenholm said.

"This field we're in belongs to a group of Saturnians."

"Then if Waloo is caught—"

"It's jail for him."

O'Hara frowned.

"What about us?"

"The Saturnians will probably make enough noise for someone to send for the patrol," Trenholm replied. "You know what the patrol, will do to us. Jail, and reconditioning of our evil ways."

"Don't you think we ought to get out of here?" O'Hara exclaimed. "We need Waloo for a couple of evenings yet." Trenholm stiffened suddenly. "Something's happening to the beast!"

The megapod had fallen asleep on its feet. With its tail jammed against the ground to keep itself from falling, and its eyes closed, it resembled a piece of sculpture. The green roots contained a drug called somnal, and it had acted with great speed.

Waloo had drawn several pieces of thin, metal twine from his pocket, and was carefully tying the megapod's wings, to prevent them from unfolding.

"Where did the Saturnians ever get the brains to handle these animals?" O'Hara wondered.

"They didn't," answered Trenholm. "This method of capture was devised by a Martian and taught to them. Watch."

The wings had all been tied, and Waloo carefully mounted the animal's back, his feet wrapping closely around it. Then he cautiously bit one of the vertebrae just below the megapod's neck. With one startled spring, his steed was leaping high in the air.

WITHOUT the wings to retard its descent, the megapod came down again as quickly as it had gone up, and landed with a shock that sent a tremor through its body. His legs wrapped firmly about it, Waloo held on. The megapod leaped again.

This time, with the pain of the descent, it staggered and almost fell. The next leap was not so high, and the following one still lower. Within a few minutes the megapod had become so bruised that it refused to spring. Then Waloo carefully untied the hind wings, and bit the megapod's neck again. The megapod leaped, and on the descent, spread its two free wings. The shock was not so severe now.

In half an hour, Waloo had reached the stage where he dared untie all the wings. The megapod no longer attempted to throw him off its back, and Trenholm and O'Hara watched in fascination as the animal and its rider went floating about the field.

A sudden crunching sound on the ground nearby drew the Earthmen's attention. A Saturnian was approaching, his eyes fixed on Waloo. His face showed an expression of deep anger.

"We'd better warn the damn fool," O'Hara whispered to his partner.

Waloo was unconscious of the danger. Then the Saturnian bellowed suddenly in a voice that

sounded like the roar of a hundred bulls, and from behind him came an answering bellow. The megapod, startled, leaped into the air, and, spreading his wings, turned upside down. Waloo began to slip off, clutching desperately at the animal's back to keep his balance. But his efforts were in vain. As he fell, the megapod turned right side up, hit the ground again, and bounded away.

"What do we do now?" O'Hara demanded.

"We run," Trenholm said. "Somebody is sure to send for the patrol. We can't afford to wait for it."

"But Waloo—"

"The worst he'll get is a month or two. They'd give us ten years and recondition us. Do you want that?"

"But we've still got some unsold bottles!"

"We've taken in enough satargyrite to be sitting pretty the rest of our lives. Come on!"

Waloo was lying where he had fallen, stunned. They ran without looking back toward him. At first the noise of the Saturnians behind them died away, but as they approached the space ship, it suddenly grew in intensity once more.

Waloo was coming after them in great twenty-foot strides. Behind him, the pack of Saturnians was howling their heads off, calling on him to stop. Waloo paid them as much attention as if they hadn't existed.

A hundred yards from the ship, he passed O'Hara and Trenholm, who had to swerve aside to prevent being run over by his hurtling body. He got to the ship five seconds ahead of them, and slammed the door in their faces.

"What do we do now?" O'Hara cried. "If they decide to make up for losing Waloo by taking it out on us—"

But the Saturnians were not interested in the Earthmen. They wanted Waloo. Through the transparent windows of the space ship, they could see him, the key to the door in his

hand.

THEY shouted at him; they cursed; they urged him to come out and take his medicine like a man. But Waloo didn't budge. Then the Saturnians, in their rage, began to bang against the ship.

"They'll wreck it," O'Hara moaned. "And the patrol will be coming back soon!"

Trenholm was breathing hard.

"The first thing to do," he said, "is to calm down. Take it easy, O'Hara. It'll be a half hour before the patrol gets here, and we've got plenty of time. We've got to calm these Saturnians and get Waloo out of the ship."

"Is that all?" scoffed O'Hara excitedly.

"Take it easy, or I'll smack you right in the teeth. That's better. I've got a plan. You're going to talk to these people. Waloo can hear you through the auditory tube, and whether the rest of them pay much attention to you or not won't matter at first. Give them a regular spiel, and lead up to the introduction of Waloo, the intelligent Saturnian."

O'Hara got it, and smiled slowly. He took a deep breath, and shouted: "Ladies and gentlemen!"

The hubbub came to a sudden stop.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he went on, "you are about to witness, absolutely free of charge, two hours of the most solid, fascinating, instructive, and educational entertainment it has ever been the fortune of any mortal being to experience. Yes sir, ladies and gentlemen. Entertainment unparalleled, and absolutely free of charge."

There was magic in O'Hara's voice, for they were actually listening to him. They muttered, but they listened.

"And to begin with," orated O'Hara, "we offer you an attraction so sensational, so unbelievable, that you will think your eyes and ears are playing you false. Nothing like it

has been seen or heard of on Saturn since the beginning of time. Nothing like it has been seen or heard of on any of the planets. Ladies and gentlemen, we offer Waloo, the Saturnian with the intelligence of an Earthman!”

And Waloo, hypnotized by the familiar introduction, opened the door of the ship and stepped out, his spectacles hanging from his ears!

The mob of Saturnians uttered one huge roar of triumph, and plunged forward, carrying Waloo back into the ship. Trenholm and O’Hara stood by shouting helplessly.

It was ten minutes before the Saturnians thought of getting out again, and when they did, they carried the unconscious Waloo as a trophy of victory. For the next couple of months, Waloo would inhabit a cell.

O’Hara and Trenholm hastened inside. At first glance, the place was a shambles, but the machinery had not been damaged.

They swung shut the door, locked the auditory tube, and started the engine.

“Ready?” Trenholm asked, and without waiting for a reply, gave the ship the gun with a jerk that sent O’Hara flying.

THE ship rose quickly, passed the rings of Saturn, and straightened out into space in the direction of Earth. O’Hara wiped the sweat from his forehead. Through the rear windows they could see the patrol ship coasting in to make a landing.

“That was close,” O’Hara panted. “I only hope they don’t try to follow us.”

“I’ll take them a half hour to find out from the Saturnians what’s been going on, and by then it’ll be too late.”

“If you knew how glad I am to get out of that place—” O’Hara began, and then he howled. “The bottles! The bottles!”

“What about them?” Trenholm demanded.

“They’re gone! Those Saturnians have stolen all our ‘Radioactive Herb Remedy! There’s just one bottle left. And you claimed they were honest!”

“They are, but they have no sense. If they see something in front of them, they take it.”

“The dumb clucks.” And then O’Hara’s voice froze with real horror. “They’ve taken the pink necklaces! And we hid them!”

“What!” Trenholm gasped.

“Every last one of them!” O’Hara trembled. “We’ve made a mistake, Trenholm. Those Saturnians aren’t stupid!”

Trenholm looked. O’Hara was right. Every last necklace was gone. “This is a dishonest business,” Trenholm said heavily. “We should never have gone into it. But I don’t understand—” He interrupted himself. “Well, I’ll be damned!”

“What is it now?”

“That damn herb remedy! Remember what first gave us the idea of an intelligence improver? That article we read about an infusion of Martian plants containing the new carbon isotope temporarily increasing the I.Q. Well, we used those plants to make our stuff. O’Hara, we actually made those Saturnians intelligent enough to rob us!”

“This is a fine time to be thinking of that!” stormed O’Hara.

“Calm down,” Trenholm urged, “and have a drink.”

“At a time like this, it’s a drink you’re offering me!”

“Our last bottle of Red Mans’ Old-Fashioned Radioactive Herb Remedy. There’s nothing better for stimulating the brain. I’m thinking we have greater need of it than those formerly dumb clucks we left behind us,” Trenholm added gloomily.
