# **The Hazing**

Isaac Asimov

The Campus of Arcturus University, on Arcturus’s second planet, Eron, is a dull place during mid-year vacations and, moreover, a hot one, so that Myron Tubal, sophomore, found life boring and uncomfortable. For the fifth time that day, he looked in at the Undergraduate Lounge in a desperate attempt at locating an acquaintance, and was at last gratified to behold Bill Sefan, a green-skinned youngster from Vega’s fifth planet.

Sefan, like Tubal, had flunked Biosociology and was staying through vacation to study for a make-up exam. Things like that weave strong bonds between sophomore and sophomore.

Tubal grunted a greeting, dropped his huge hairless body-he was a native of the Arcturian System itself-into the largest chair and said:

“Have you seen the new freshmen yet?”

“Already! It’s six weeks before the fall semester starts!”

Tubal yawned. “These are a special breed of frosh. They’re the very first batch from the Solarian System-ten of them.”

“Solarian System? You mean that new system that joined the Galactic Federation three-four years ago?”

“That’s the one. Their world capital is called Earth, I think.”

“Well, what about them?”

“Nothing much. They’re just here, that’s all. Some of them have hair on the upper lip, and very silly it looks, too. Otherwise, they look like any of a dozen or so other breeds of Humanoids.”

It was at this point that the door flew open and little Wri Forase ran in. He was from Deneb’s single planet, and the short, gray fuzz that covered his head and face bristled with agitation, while his large purple eyes gleamed excitedly.

“Say,” he twittered breathlessly, “have you seen the Earthmen?”

Sefan sighed. “Isn’t anyone ever going to change the subject? Tubal was just telling me about them.”

“He was?” Forase seemed disappointed. “But-but did he tell you these were that abnormal race they made such a fuss over when the Solarian System entered the Federation?”

“They looked all right to me,” said Tubal.

“I’m not talking about them from the physical standpoint,” said the Denebian disgustedly. “It’s the mental aspect of the case. Psychology! That’s the stuff?” Forase was going to be a psychologist some day.

“Oh, that! Well, what’s wrong with them?”

“Their mob psychology as a race is all wrong,” babbled Forase. “Instead of becoming less emotional with numbers, as is the case with every other type of Humanoid known, they become more emotional! In groups, these Earthmen riot, panic, go crazy. The more there are, the worse it is. So help me, we even invented a new mathematical notation to handle the problem. Look!”

He had his pocket-pad and stylus out in one rapid motion; but Tubal’s hand clamped down upon them before the stylus so much as made a mark.

Tubal said, “Whoa! I’ve got a walloping lulu of an idea.”

“Imagine!” murmured Sefan.

Tubal ignored him. He smiled again, and his hand rubbed thoughtfully over his bald dome.

“Listen,” he said, with sudden briskness. His voice dropped to a conspiratorial whisper.

Albert Williams, late of Earth, stirred in his sleep and became conscious of a prodding finger exploring the space between his second and third ribs. He opened his eyes, swiveled his head, stared stupidly; then gasped, shot upright, and reached for the light switch.

“Don’t move,” said the shadowy figure beside his bed. There was a muted click, and the Earthman found himself centered in the pearly beam of a pocket Hash.

He blinked and said, “Who the blasted devil are you?”

“You are going to get out of bed,” replied the apparition stolidly. “Dress, and come with me.”

Williams grinned savagely. “Try and make me.”

There was no answer, but the Hash beam shifted slightly and fell upon the shadow’s other hand. It held a “neuronic whip,” that pleasant little weapon that paralyzes the vocal cords and twists nerves into so many knots of agony. Williams swallowed hard, and got out of bed.

He dressed in silence, and then said:

“All right, what do I do now?”

The gleaming “whip” gestured, and the Earthman moved toward the door.

“Just walk ahead,” said the unknown.

Williams moved out of the room, along the silent corridor, and down eight stories without daring to look back. Out upon the campus he stopped, and felt metal probe the small of his back.

“Do you know where Obel Hall is?”

Williams, nodding, began walking. He walked past Obel Hall, turned right at University Avenue, and after half a mile stepped off the roads and past the trees. A spaceship hulked dimly in the darkness, with ports closely curtained and only a dim light showing where the airlock opened a crack.

“Get in!” He was shoved up a flight of stairs and into a small room.

He blinked, looked about him and counted aloud.

“—seven, eight, nine, and I make ten. They’ve got us all, I guess.”

“It’s no guess,” growled Eric Chamberlain sourly. “It’s a certainty.”

He was rubbing his hand. “I’ve been here an hour.”

“What’s wrong with the mitt?” asked Williams.

“I sprained it on the jaw of the rat that brought me here. He’s as tough as a spaceship’s hull.”

Williams seated himself cross-legged upon the floor and rested his head against the wall.

“Has anyone any idea as to what this is all about?”

“Kidnaping!” said little Joey Sweeney. His teeth were chattering.

“What the devil for?” snorted Chamberlain. “If any of us are millionaires, I hadn’t heard of it. I know I’m not!”

Williams said, “Look, let’s not go off the deep end. Kidnaping or anything of that sort is. out. These people can’t be criminals. It stands to reason that a civilization that has developed psychology to the extent this Galactic Federation has, would be able to wipe out crime without raising a sweat.”

“Pirates,” grunted Lawrence Marsh. “I don’t think so, but it’s just a suggestion.”

“Nuts!” said Williams. “Piracy is a frontier phenomenon. This region of space has been civilized for tens of millennia.”

“Just the same, they had guns,” insisted Joe, “and I don’t like it.” He had left his glasses in his room and peered about in near-sighted anxiety.

“That doesn’t mean much,” answered Williams. “Now, I’ve been thinking. Here we are-ten newly arrived freshmen at Arcturus u. On our first night here, we’re bundled mysteriously out of our rooms and into a strange spaceship. That suggests something to me. How about it?”

Sidney Morton raised his head from his arms long enough to say sleepily:

“I’ve thought of it, too. It looks like we’re in for one hell of a hazing. Gents, I think the local sophs are just having good, clean fun.”

“Exactly,” agreed Williams. “Anyone have any other ideas?”

Silence. “ All right, then, so there isn’t anything to do but wait. Personally, I’ve going to catch up on my sleep. They can wake me up if they need me.”

There was a jar at that moment and he fell off balance. “Well, we’re off-wherever we’re going.”

Moments later, Bill Sefan hesitated just an instant before entering the control room. When he finally did, it was to face a highly excited Wri Forase.

“How is it working?” demanded the Denebian.

“Rotten,” responded Sefan sourly. “If they’re panicked, then I’ve damned. They’re going to sleep.”

“Asleep! All of them? But what were they saying?”

“How do I know? They weren’t speaking Galactic, and I can’t make head or tail out of their infernal foreign gibberish.”

Forase threw his hands into the air in disgust.

Tubal spoke finally. “Listen, Forase, I’m cutting a class in Biosoc.-which I can’t afford. You guaranteed the psychology of this stunt. If it turns out to be a flop, I’m not going to like it.”

“Well, for the love of Deneb,” grated Forase desperately, “you two are a fine pair of yellow-bellies! Did you expect them to start screaming and kicking right off? Sizzling Arcturus I Wait till we get to the Spican System, will you? When we maroon them overnight-”

He tittered suddenly. “This is going to be the fanciest trick since they tied those stink-bats to the chromatic organ on Concert Night.”

Tubal cracked a grin, but Sefan leaned back in his chair and remarked thoughtfully.

“What if someone-say, President Wynn-hears about this?”

The Arcturian at the controls shrugged. “It’s only a hazing. They’ll “go easy.

“Don’t play dumb, M. T. This isn’t kid stuff. Planet Four, Spica-the whole Spican System, in fact-is banned to Galactic ships, and you know that. It’s got a sub-Humanoid race on it. They’re supposed to develop entirely free of interference until they discover interstellar travel on their own. That’s the law, and they’re strict about it. Space! If they find out about this, we’ll be in the soup for fair.”

Tubal turned in his seat. “How in Arcturus do you expect Prexy Wynn-damn his thick hide!-to find out about us? Now, mind you, I’m not saying the story won’t spread around the campus, because half the fun will be killed if we have to keep it to ourselves. But how will names come out? No one will squeal. You know that.”

“Okay,” said Sefan, and shrugged.

And then Tubal said, “Ready for hyper-space!”

He compressed keys and there was the queer internal wrench that marked the ship’s departure from normal space.

The ten Earthmen were rather the worse for wear, and looked it. Lawrence Marsh squinted at his watch again.

“Two-thirty,” he said. “That’s thirty-six hours now. I wish they’d get this over with.”

“This isn’t a hazing,” moaned Sweeney. “It takes too long.”

Williams grew red. “What do you all look half-dead about? They’ve been feeding us regularly, haven’t they? They haven’t tied us up, have they? I should say it was pretty evident that they were taking good care of us.”

“Or,” came Sidney Morton’s discontented drawl, “fattening us up for the slaughter.”

He paused, and everyone stiffened. There was no mistaking the queer internal wrench they had felt.

“Get that!” said Eric Chamberlain in sudden frenzy. “We’re back in normal space again, and that means we’re only an hour or two from wherever we’re going. We’ve got to do something!”

“Hear, hear,” Williams snorted. “But what?”

“There are ten of us, aren’t there?” shouted Chamberlain, puffing out his chest. “Well, I’ve only seen one of them so far. Next time he comes in, and we’ve got another meal due us pretty soon, we’re going to mob him.”

Sweeney looked sick. “What about the neuronic whip he always carries?”

“It won’t kill us. He can’t get us all before we pin him down, anyway.”

“Eric,” said Williams bluntly, “you’re a fool.”

Chamberlain flushed and his stub-fingered fists closed slowly.

“I’m just in the mood for a little practice persuasion. Call me that again, will you?”

“Sit down!” Williams scarcely bothered to look up. “ And don’t work so hard justifying my epithet. All of us are nervous and keyed-up, but that doesn’t mean we ought to go altogether crazy. Not yet, anyway. First of all, even discounting the whip, mobbing our jailer won’t be particularly successful.

“We’ve only seen one, but that one is from the Arcturian System. He’s better than seven feet tall, and comfortably past the three-hundred-pound mark. He’d mop us up-all ten of us-with his bare fists. I thought you had one run-in with him already, Eric.”

There was a thickish silence.

Williams added, “ And even if we could knock him out and finish as many others as there may be in the ship, we still haven’t the slightest idea where we are or how to get back or even how to run the ship.” A pause. Then, “Well?”

“Nuts!” Chamberlain turned away, and glowered in silence.

The door kicked open and the giant Arcturian entered. With one hand, he emptied the bag he carried, and with the other kept his neuronic whip carefully leveled.

“Last meal,” he grunted.

There was a general scramble for the rolling cans, still lukewarm from recent heating. Morton glared at his with disgust.

“Say,” he spoke stumblingly in Galactic, “can’t you give us a change? I’m tired of this rotten goulash of yours. This is the fourth can!”

“So what? It’s your last meal,” the Arcturian snapped, and left.

A horrified paralysis prevailed.

“What did he mean by that?” gulped someone huskily.

“They’re going to kill us!” Sweeney was round-eyed, the thin edge of panic in his voice.

Williams’ mouth was dry and he felt unreasoning anger grow against Sweeney’s contagious fright. He paused-the kid was only seventeen-and said huskily, “Stow it, will you? Let’s eat.”

It was two hours later that he felt the shuddering jar that meant the landing and end of the journey. In that time, no one had spoken, but Williams could feel the pall of fear choke tighter with the minutes.

Spica had dipped crimsonly below the horizon and there was a chill wind blowing. The ten Earthmen, huddled together miserably upon the rock-strewn hilltop, watched their captors sullenly. It was the huge Arcturian, Myron Tubal, that did the talking, while the green-skinned Vegan, Bill Sefan, and the fuzzy little Denebian, Wri Forase, remained placidly in the background.

“You’ve got your fire,” said the Arcturian gruffly, “and there’s plenty of wood about to keep it going. That will keep the beasts away. We’ll leave you a pair of whips before we go, and those will do as protection, if any of the aborigines of the planet bother you. You will have to use your own wits as far as food, water and shelter are concerned.”

He turned away. Chamberlain let loose with a sudden roar, and leaped after the departing Arcturian. He was sent reeling back with an effortless heave of the other’s arm.

The lock closed after the three other-world men. Almost at once, the ship lifted off the ground and shot upward. Williams finally broke the chilled silence.

“They’ve left the whips. I’ll take one and you can have the other, Eric.”

One by one, the Earthmen dropped into a sitting position, back to the fire, frightened, half panicky.

Williams forced a grin. “There’s plenty of game about-the region is well-wooded. Come on, now, there are ten of us and they’ve got to come back sometime. Let’s show them we Earthmen can take it. How about it, fellows?”

He was talking aimlessly now. Morton said listlessly.

“Why don’t you shut up? You’re not making this any easier.”

Williams gave up. The pit of his own stomach was turning cold.

The twilight blackened into night, and the circle of light about the fire contracted into a little flickering area that ended in shadows. Marsh gasped suddenly, and his eyes went wide.

“There’s some-something coming!”

The stir that followed froze itself into attitudes of breathless attention.

“You’re crazy,” began Williams huskily-and stopped dead at the unmistakable, slithering sound that reached his ears.

“Grab your whip!” he screamed to Chamberlain.

Joey Sweeney laughed suddenly-a strained, high-pitched laugh.

And then-there was a sudden shrieking in the air, and the shades charged down upon them.

Things were happening elsewhere, too.

Tubal’s ship lazed outward from Spica’s fourth planet, with Bin Sefan at the controls. Tubal himself was in his own cramped quarters, polishing off a huge flagon of Denebian liquor in two gulps.

Wri Forase watched the operation sadly.

“It cost twenty credits a bottle,” he said, “and I only have a few left.”

“Well, don’t let me hog it,” said Tubal magnanimously, “Match me bottle for bottle. It’s all right with me.”

“One swig like that,” grumbled the Denebian, “and r d be out till the Fall exams:’

Tubal paid scant attention. “This,” he began, “is going to make campus history as the hazing stunt-”

And at this point, there was a sharp, singing pinging ping-g-g-g, scarcely muffled by intervening walls, and the lights went out.

Wri Forase felt himself pressed hard against the wall. He struggled for breath and stuttered out in gasps.

“B-by Space, we’re at f-full acceleration! What’s wr-rong with the equalizer?”

“Damn the equalizer!” roared Tubal, heaving to his feet. “What’s wrong with the ship?”

He stumbled out the door, into the equally dark corridor, with Forase crawling after him. When they burst into the control room, they found Sefan surrounded by the dim emergency lights, his green skin shining with perspiration.

“Meteor,” he croaked. “It played hob with our power distributors. It’s all going into acceleration. The lights, heating units and radio are all out of commission, while the ventilators are just barely limping.” He added, “And Section Four is punctured:’

Tubal gazed about him wildly. “Idiot! Why didn’t you keep your eye on the mass indicator?”

“I did, you overgrown lump of putty,” howled Sefan, “but it never registered! It-never-registered! Isn’t that just what you’d expect from a second-hand jalopy, rented for two hundred credits? It went through the screen as if it were empty ether.”

“Shut up!” Tubal flung open the suit-compartments and groaned. “They’re all Arcturian models. I should have checked up. Can you handle one of these, Sefan?”

“Maybe.” The Vegan scratched a doubtful ear.

In five minutes, Tubal swung into the lock and Sefan, stumbling awkwardly, followed after. It was half an hour before they returned.

Tubal removed his head-piece. “Curtains!”

Wri Forase gasped. “you mean-we’re through?”

The Arcturian shook his head. “We can fix it, but it will take time. The radio is ruined for good, so we can’t get help.”

“Get help!” Forase looked shocked. “That’s all we need. How would we explain being inside the Spican system? We might as well commit suicide as send out radio calls. As long as we can get back without help, we’re safe. Missing a few more classes won’t hurt us too much.”

Sefan’s voice broke in dully. “But what about those panicky Earthmen back on Spica Four?”

Forase’s mouth opened, but he didn’t say a word. It closed again, and if ever a Humanoid looked sick, Forase was that Humanoid.

That was only the beginning.

It took a day and a half to unscramble the space jalopy’s power lines. It took two more days to decelerate to safe turning point. It took four days to return to Spica IV. Total-eight days.

When the ship hovered once more over the place where they had marooned the Earthmen, it was midmorning, and the Tubal’s face as he surveyed the area through the televisor was a study in length. Shortly he broke a silence that had long since become sticky.

“I guess we’ve made every boner we could possibly have made. We landed them right outside a native village. There’s no sign of the Earthmen.”

Sefan shook his head dolefully. “This is a bad business.”

Tubal buried his head in his long arms clear down to the elbows.

“That’s the finish. If they didn’t scare themselves to death, the natives got them. Violating prohibited solar systems is bad enough-but it’s just plain murder now, I guess.”

“What we’ve got to do,” said Sefan, “is to get down there and find out if there are any still alive. We owe them that much. After that-”

He swallowed. Forase finished in a whisper.

“After that, it’s expulsion from the U., psycho-revision-and manual labor for life.”

“Forget it!” barked Tubal. “We’ll face that when we have to.”

Slowly, very slowly, the ship circled downward and came to rest on the rocky clearing where, eight days previously, ten Earthmen had been left stranded.

“How do we handle these natives?” Tubal turned to Forase with raised eyebrow ridges (there was no hair on them, of course). “Come on, son, give with some sub-Humanoid psychology. There are only three of us and I don’t want any trouble.”

Forase shrugged and his fuzzy face wrinkled in perplexity. “I’ve just been thinking about that, Tubal. I don’t know any.”

“What!” exploded Sefan and Tubal in twin shouts.

“No one does,” added the Denebian hurriedly. “It’s a fact. After all, we don’t let sub-Humanoids into the Federation till they’re fully civilized, and we quarantine them until then. Do you suppose we have much opportunity to study their psychology?”

The Arcturian seated himself heavily. “This gets better and better. Think, Fuzzy-face, will you? Suggest something!”

Forase scratched his head. “Well-uh-the best we can do is to treat them like normal Humanoids. If we approach slowly, palms spread out, make no sudden movements and keep calm, we ought to get along. Now, remember, I’m saying we ought to. I can’t be certain about this.”

“Let’s go, and damnation with certainty,” urged Sefan impatiently. “It doesn’t matter much, anyway. If I get knocked off here, I don’t have to go back home.” His face took on a hunted look. “When I think of what my family is going to say-”

They emerged from the ship and sniffed the atmosphere of Spica’s fourth planet. The sun was at meridian, and loomed overhead like a large orange basketball. Off in the woods, a bird called once in a creaky caw. Utter silence descended.

“Hmph!” said Tubal, arms akimbo.

“It’s enough to make you feel sleepy. No signs of life at all. Now, which way is the villager

There was a three-way dispute about this, but it didn’t last long. The Arcturian first, the other two tagging along, they strode down the slope and toward the straggling forest.

A hundred feet inside, the trees came alive, as a wave of natives dropped noiselessly from the overhanging branches. Wri Forase went under at the very first of the avalanche. Bill Sefan stumbled, stood his ground momentarily, then went over backward with a grunt.

Only huge Myron Tubal was left standing. Legs straddled wide, and whooping hoarsely, he laid about right and left. The attacking natives hit him and bounced off like drops of water from a whirling flywheel. Modeling his defense on the principle of the windmill, he backed his way against a tree.

Here he made a mistake. On the lowest branch of that tree squatted a native at once more cautious and more brainy than his fellows. Tubal had already noticed that the natives were equipped with stout, muscular tails, and had made a mental note of the fact. Of all the races in the Galaxy, only one other, Homo Gamma Cepheus, possessed tails. What he didn’t notice, however, was that these tails were prehensile.

This he found out almost immediately, for the native in the branch above his head looped his tail downward, Hashed it about Tubal’s neck and contracted it.

The Arcturian threshed wildly in agony, and the tailed attacker was jerked from his tree. Suspended head-first and whirled about in huge sweeps, the native nevertheless maintained his hold and tightened that tail-grip steadily.

The world blacked out. Tubal was unconscious before he hit the ground.

Tubal came to slowly, unpleasantly aware of the stinging stiffness of his neck. He tried vainly to rub that stiffness, and it took a few seconds to realize that he was tied tightly. The fact startled him into alertness. He became aware, first, that he was lying on his stomach; second, of the horrible din about him; third, of Sefan and Forase bundled up next to him-and last, that he could not break his bonds.

“Hey, Sefan, Forase! Can you hear me?”

It was Sefan that answered joyfully. “you old Draconian goat! We thought you were out for good.”

“I don’t die so easy,” grunted the Arcturian. “Where are we?”

There was a short pause.

“In the native village, I imagine,” Wri Forase said dully. “Did you ever hear such a noise? The drum hasn’t stopped a minute since they dumped us here.”

“Have you seen anything of-”

Hands were upon Tubal, and he felt himself whirled about. He was in a sitting posture now and his neck hurt worse than ever. Ramshackle huts of thatch and green logs gleamed in the early afternoon sun. In a circle about them, watching in silence, were dark-skinned, long-tailed natives. There must have been hundreds, all wearing feathered head-dresses and carrying short, wickedly barbed spears.

Their eyes were upon the row of figures that squatted mysteriously in the foreground, and upon these Tubal turned his angry glare. It was plain that they were the leaders of the tribe. Dressed in gaudy, fringed robes of ill-tanned skins, they added further to their barbaric impressiveness by wearing tall wooden masks painted into caricatures of the human face.

With measured steps, the masked horror nearest the Humanoids approached.

“Hello,” it said, and the mask lifted up and off. “Back so soon?”

For quite a long while, Tubal and Sefan said absolutely nothing, while Wri Forase went into a protracted fit of coughing.

Finally, Tubal drew a long breath. “You’re one of the Earthmen, aren’t you?”

“That’s right. I’m Al Williams. Just call me Al.”

“They haven’t killed you yet?”

Williams smiled happily. “They haven’t killed any of us. Quite the contrary. Gentlemen,” he bowed extravagantly, “meet the new tribal-er-gods.”

“The new tribal what?” gasped Forase. He was still coughing. “—er-gods. Sorry, but I don’t know the Galactic word for a god.”

“What do you ‘gods’ represent?”

“We’re sort of supernatural entities-objects to be worshipped. Don’t you get it?”

The Humanoids stared unhappily.

“Yes, indeed,” Williams grinned, “we’re persons of great power.”

“What are you talking about?” exclaimed Tubal indignantly. “Why should they think you were of great power? You Earth people are below average physically-well below!”

“Its the psychology of the thing,” explained Williams. “If they see us landing in a large, gleaming vehicle that travels mysteriously through the air, and then takes off in a burst of rocket-flame-they’re bound to consider us supernatural. That’s elementary barbaric psychology.”

Forase’s eyes seemed on the point of dropping out as Williams continued.

“Incidentally, what detained you? We figure it was all a hazing of some sort, and it was, wasn’t it?”

“Say,” broke in Sefan, “I think you’re feeding us a lot of bull! If they thought you people were gods, why didn’t they think we were? We had the ship, too, and-”

“That,” said Williams, “is where we started to interfere. We explained-via pictures and sign language-that you people were devils. When you finally came back-and say, were we glad to see that ship coming down-they knew what to do.”

“What, “ asked Forase, with a liberal dash of awe in his voice, “are ‘devils’?”

Williams sighed. “Don’t you Galaxy people know anything? Tubal moved his aching neck slowly. “How about letting us up now?” he rumbled. “I’ve got a crick in my neck.”

“What’s your hurry? After all, you were brought here to be sacrificed in our honor.”

“Sacrificed!”

“Sure. You’re to be carved up with knives.”

There was a horror-laden silence. “Don’t give us any of that cometgas!” Tubal managed to grind out at last. “We’re not Earthmen who get panicky or scared, you know.”

“Oh, we know that! I wouldn’t fool you for the world. But simple ordinary savage psychology always goes for a little human sacrifice, and-”

Sefan writhed against his bonds and tried to throw himself in a rage at Forase.

“I thought you said no one knew any sub-Humanoid psychology! Trying to alibi your ignorance, weren’t you, you shriveled; fuzz-covered, pop-eyed son of a half-breed Vegan lizard! A fine mess we’re in now!”

Forase shrank away. “Now, wait! Just-”

Williams decided the joke had gone far enough.

“Take it easy,” he soothed. “Your clever hazing blew up right in your faces-it blew up beautifully-but we’re not going to carry it too far. I guess we’ve had enough fun out of you fellows. Sweeney is with the native chief now, explaining that we’re leaving and taking you three with us. Frankly, I’ll be glad to get going-Wait a while, Sweeney’s calling me.”

When Williams returned two seconds later, his expression was peculiar, having turned a bit greenish. In fact, he got greener by the second.

“It looks,” he gulped throatily, ‘‘as if our counter-haze has blown up in our faces. The native chief insists on the sacrifice!”

Silence brooded, while the three Humanoids thought over the state of affairs. For moments, none of them could say a word

“I’ve told Sweeney,” Williams added, glumly, “to go back and tell the chief that if he doesn’t do as we say, something terrible is going to happen to his tribe. But it’s pure bluff and he may not fall for it. Uh,-I’m sorry, fellows. I guess we went too far. If it looks really bad, we’ll cut you loose and join in the fight.”

“Cut us loose now,” growled Tubal, his blood running cold. “Let’s get this over with!”

“Wait!” cried Forase frantically. “Let the Earthman try some of his psychology. Go ahead, Earthman. Think hard!”

Williams thought until his brain began to hurt.

“You see,” he said weakly, “we’ve lost some of our godlike prestige, ever since we were unable to cure the chief’s wife. She died yesterday.” He nodded abstractedly to himself. “What we need is an impressive miracle. Er-have you fellows anything in your pockets?”

He knelt beside them and began searching. Wri Forase had a stylus, a pocket-pad, a thin-toothed comb, some anti-itch powder, a sheaf of credits and a few odds and ends. Sefan had a collection of similar nondescript material.

It was from Tubal’s hip pocket that Williams withdrew a small black gunlike object with a huge hand-grip and a short barrel.

“What’s this?”

Tubal scowled. “Is that what I’ve been sitting on all this while? It’s a weld-gun that I used to fix up a meteor puncture in our ship. It’s no good; power’s almost gone.”

Williams’ eyes kindled. His whole body galvanized with excitement.

“That’s what you think! You Galaxy men never could see farther than your noses. Why don’t you come down to Earth for a spell-and get a new point of view?”

Williams was running toward his fellow conspirators now.

“Sweeney,” he howled, “you tell that damned monkey-tailed chief that in just about one second, I’m going to get sore and pull the whole sky down over his head. Get tough!”

But the chief did not wait for the message. He gestured defiance and the natives made a united rush. Tubal roared, and his muscles cracked against the bonds. The weld-gun in Williams’ hand flared into life, its feeble power beaming outward.

The nearest native hut went up in sudden flames. Another followed-and another-and the fourth-and then the weld-gun went dead.

But it was enough. Not a native remained standing. All were groveling on their faces, wailing and shrieking for pardon. The chief wailed and shrieked loudest of all.

“Tell the chief,” said Williams to Sweeney, “that that’s just a little, insignificant sample of what we’re thinking of doing to him!”

To the Humanoids, as he cut the rawhide holding them, he added complacently,

“Just some simple, ordinary savage psychology.”

It was only after they were back in their ship and off in space again that Forase locked up his pride.

“But I thought Earthmen had never developed mathematical psychology! How did You know all that sub-Humanoid stuff? No one in the Galaxy has got that far yet!”

“Well,” Williams grinned, “we have a certain amount of rule-of-thumb knowledge about the workings of the uncivilized mind. You see-we come from a world where most people, in a manner of speaking, are still uncivilized. So we have to know!”

Forase nodded slowly. “You screwball Earthmen! At least, this little episode has taught us all one thing.”

“What’s that?”

“Never,” said Forase, dipping a second time into Earth slang, “get tough with a bunch of nuts. They may be nuttier than you think!”