

Prologue. From the Encyclopaedia Galactica, 11th edition: TOKA:
Brackney's Star III. The sun (NSC 7-190853426) is of type G2, located
in Region Deneb, approximately 503 light-years from Sol. . . . The
third planet appears Earthlike, to a sufficiently superficial observer
. . . There are three small moons, their League names being Uha, Buha,
and Huha. As is customary in the case of inhabited planets, these
derive from a major autochthonous language (see NOMENCLATURE:
Astronomical). It was discovered too late that they mean, respectively
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"Fat," "Drunk," and "Sluggish." . . . At least "Toka" means "Earth."
However, indigenous tongues have become little more than historical
curiosities, displaced by whatever Terrestrial speech suits the role o
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the moment. . . . Two intelligent species evolved, known today as the
Hokas and the Slissii. The former are quasi-mammalian, the latter
reptiloid. . . . Conflict was ineluctable. . . . It terminated after
human explorers had come upon the system and the Interbeing League too
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charge. . . . In effect, the Slissii were bought out. Abandoning their
home world en masse, they became free wanderers throughout
civilization, much to its detriment. (See SLISSII. See also COMPUTER
CRIME; CONFIDENCE GAMES; EMBEZZLEMENT; GAMBLING: Crooked;
MISREPRESENTATION; POLITICS.) The ursinoid Hokas generally stayed in
place. No nation of theirs refused to accept League tutelage, which of
course has had the objective of raising their level of civilization to
a point where autonomy and full membership can be granted. Rather, the
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all agreed with an eagerness which should have warned the
Commissioners. . . . The fact is that the Hokas are the most
imaginative race of beings in known space, and doubtless in unknown
space too. Any role that strikes their fancy they will play,
individually or as a group, to the limits of the preposterous and
beyond. This does not imply deficiency of intellect, for they are
remarkably quick to learn. It does not even imply that they lose touch
with reality; indeed, they have been heard to complain that reality
often loses touch with them. It does demonstrate a completely protean
personality. Added to that are a physical strength and energy
astonishing in such comparatively small bodies. Thus, in the course of
a few short years, the "demon teddy bears," to use a popular phrase fo
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them, have covered their planet with an implausible kaleidoscope of
harlequin societies describable only by some such metaphor as the

foregoing. . . . Full Pack. When one is a regular ambassador to a civilized planet with full membership in the Interbeing League, it is quite sufficient to marry a girl who is only blond and beautiful. However, a plenipotentiary, guiding a backward world along the tortuous path to modern culture and full status, needs a wife who is also competent to handle the unexpected. Alexander Jones had no reason to doubt that his Tanni met all the requirements of blondness, beauty, and competence. Neither did she. After a dozen years of Toka, he did not hesitate to leave her in charge while he took a native delegation to Earth and arranged for the planet's advancement in grade. And for a while things went smoothly--as smoothly, at least, as they can go on a world of eager, energetic teddy bears with imaginations active to the point of autohypnosis. Picture her, then, on a sunny day shortly after

lunch, walking through her official residence in the city Mixumaxu. Bright sunshine streamed through the glassite wall, revealing a pleasant view of cobbled streets, peaked roofs, and the grim towers of

the Bastille. (This was annually erected by a self-appointed Roi Soleil, and torn down again by happy sans-culottes every July 14.) Tanni Jones' brief tunic and long golden hair were in the latest Bangkok fashion, even on this remote outpost, and her slim tanned figure would never be outmoded and she was comfortably aware of the fact. She had just checked the nursery, finding her two younger children safe at play. A newly arrived letter from her husband was tucked into her bosom. It announced in one sentence that his mission had been successful; thereafter several pages were devoted to more important matters, such as his imminent return with a new fur coat and

he wished he could have been in the envelope and meanwhile he loved her

madly, passionately, etc. She was murmuring to herself. Let us listen. "Damn and blast it to hell, anyway! Where is that little monster?" As she passed the utility room, a small, round-bellied, yellow-furred ursinoid popped out. This was Carruthers. His official title was Secretary-in-Chief-to-the-Plenipotentiary, which meant whatever Carruthers decided it should mean. Tanni felt relieved that today he was dressed merely in anachronistic trousers, spats, coat, and

bowler hat, umbrella furled beneath one arm, and spoke proper Oxford English. Last week it had been a toga, and he had brought her messages

written in Latin with Greek characters; he had also buttonholed every passerby with the information that she, Tanni, was above suspicion. "The newsfax sheet, madam," he bowed. "Just came off the jolly old printer, don't y'know." "Oh. Thanks." She took the bulletin and swept her eyes down it. Sensational tidings from Earth Headquarters: the delegates from Worben and Porkelans accused of

conspiracy; Goldfarb's Planet awarded to Bagdadburch; a League-wide alert for a Starflash space yacht which had been seen carrying the Tertiary Receptacle of Wisdom of Sanussi and the as-yet-unidentified dastards who had kidnaped him from his planet's Terrestrial embassy; commercial agreement governing the xisfthikl traffic signed between Jruthn and Ptrfsk-Tanni handed it back. There were too many worlds for

anyone to remember; none of the names meant a thing to her. "Have you seen young Alex?" she inquired. Carruthers screwed a monocle into one beady black eye and tapped his short muzzle with the umbrella handle. "Why, yes, I do believe so, eh, what, what, what?" "Well, where is he?" "He asked me not to tell, madam." Carruthers eyed her reproachfully. "Couldn't peach on him, now could I? Old School Tie and

all that sort of bally old . . ." Tanni stalked off with the secretary

still bleating behind her. True, she thought, her children did attend the same school which educated the adult Hokas, but . . . Hah! In way,

it was too bad Alex was returning so soon. She had long felt that he didn't take a firm enough line with his mercurial charges. He was too easily reduced to gibbering bewilderment. Now she was made of sterner stuff, and-in a Boadicean mood, she swept through a glassite passageway

to the flitter garage. Yes, there was her oldest son, Alexander Braithwaite Jones, Jr., curled up on the front seat with his nose buried in an ancient but well-preserved folio volume. She much regretted giving it to him. Her idea had been that he could carry it under one arm and enjoy it between bouts of healthful outdoor play, rather than having to sit hunched over a microset; but all he did was read it, sneaking off to places like-"Alexander!" The boy, a nine-year-old, tanglehaired pocket edition of his father, started guiltily. "Oh, hello, Mom," he smiled. It quite melted her resolve. "Now, Alex," said Tanni in a reasonable tone, "you know you ought to be out getting some exercise. You've already read those Jungl

e Books a dozen times." "Aw, golly, Mom," protested the younger generation. "You give me a book and then you won't let me read it!" "Alexander!" Boadicea had returned in full armor. "You know perfectly well what I mean. Now I told you to-" "Madam," squeaked a voice, "the devil's to pay!" Tanni yipped and jumped. Remembering herself, she turned in a suitably dignified manner to see Carruthers, hastily clad in pith helmet and fake walrus mustache. "Message on the transtype just came," said the Hoka. "From Injah, don't y' know. Seems

a bit urgent." Tanni snatched the paper he extended and read: FROM: Captain O'Neil of the Black Tyrone TO: Rt. Hon. Plen. A. Jones SUBJECT :

UFO (Unidentified Flying Object) identified. Your Excellency: While burying dead and bolting beef north of the Kathun road, received word

from native scout of UFO crashed in jungle nearby, containing three beasts of unknown origin. Interesting, what? Yr. Humble & Obt. Svt., etc., "Crook" O'Neil . For a moment Tanni had a dreamlike sense of unreality. Then, slowly, she translated the Hokaese. Yes . . . there were some Hokas from this northern hemisphere who had moved down to the sub-continent due south which the natives had gleefully rechristened India, and set themselves up as Imperialists. The Indians were quite happy to cooperate, since it meant that they could wear turbans and mysterious expressions. Vaguely she recalled Kipling's Ballad of Boh D a

Thone. It dealt with Burma, to be sure, but if consistency is the virtue of little minds, then the Hokas were very large-minded indeed. India was mostly Kipling country, with portions here and there belonging to Clive, the Grand Mogul, and lesser lights. The UFO must be

a spaceship and the "beasts," of course, its crew, from some other planet. God alone knew what they would think if the Indians located them first and assumed they were-what would Hokas convinced they were Hindus, Pathans, and Britishers imagine alien space travelers to be? "Carruthers!" said Tanni sharply. "Has there been any distress call

on the radio?" "No, madam, there has not. And damme, I don't like it. Don't like it at all. When I was with Her Majesty's Very Own Royal, Loyal, and Excessively Brave Fifth Fusiliers, I-" Tanni's mind worked swiftly. This was just the sort of situation in which Alex, Sr., was always getting involved and coming off second best. It was her chance to show him how these matters ought to be handled. "Carruthers," she snapped, "you and I will take the flitter and go to the rescue of these

aliens. And I want it clearly understood that-" "Mom! Can I go? Can I go, huh, Mom, can I?" It was Alex, Jr., hopping up and down with excitement, his eyes shining. "No," began Tanni. "You stay here and read your book and-" She checked herself, aware of the pitfall. Countermanding her own orders! Here was a heaven-sent opportunity to get the boy out of the house and interested in something new-like, for

example, these castaways. They were clearly beings of authority or means, important beings, or they could not afford a private spaceship.

There was no danger involved; Toka's India was a land of congenial climate, without any life-forms harmful to man. "You can go," she told

Alex severely, "if you'll do exactly as I say at all times. Now that means exactly." "Yes, yes, yes. Sure, Mom, sure." "All right, then," said Tanni. She ran back into the house, making hasty arrangements with

the servants, while Carruthers set the flitter's autopilot to locating the British bivouac. In minutes, two humans and one Hoka were

skyborne... * * *. The camp proved to be a collection of tents set among fronded trees and tangled vines, drowsy under the late afternoon sun. A

radio and a transtype were the only modern equipment, a reluctant concession to the plenipotentiary's program of technological education.

They stood at the edge of the clearing, covered with jungle mold, while

the Black Tyrone, a hundred strong, drilled with musket, fife, and drum. Captain O'Neil was a grizzled, hard-bitten Hoka in shorts, tunic,

and bandolier. He limped across the clearing, pith helmet in hand, as

Tanni emerged from the flitter with Alex and Carruthers. "Honored, ma'am," he bowed. "Pardon my one-sided gait, ma'am. Caught a slug in the ulnar bone recently." (Tanni knew very well he had not; there was no war on Toka, and anyway the ulnar bone is in the arm.) "Now a slug that is hammered from telegraph wire-ah, a book?" His eyes lit up with

characteristic enthusiasm, and Tanni, looking around, discovered the reason in her son's arms. "Alex!" she said. "Did you bring that Jungle

Books thing along?" His downcast face told her that he had. "I'm not going to bother with it any longer. You hand that right over to Captain

O'Neil and let him keep it for you till we leave for home again." "Awwwww, Mom!" "Right now!" "-is a thorn in the flesh and a rankling fire," murmured Captain O'Neil. "Ah, thank you, m'boy. Well, well, what have we here? The Jungle Books, by Rudyard Kipling himself!

Never seen 'em before." Humming a little tune, he opened the volume. "Now, where is that UFO?" demanded Tanni. "Have you rescued it

crew yet?" "No, ma'am," said the Captain, with his nose between the pages. "Going to go look for 'em this morning, but we were hanging Danny Deever and-" His voice trailed off into a mumble. Tanni compressed her lips. "Well, we shall have to find them," she clipped. "Is it far? Should we go overland or take the flitter?" "Er . . . yes,

ma'am? Ha, hum," said O'Neil, closing the book reluctantly but marking

the place with a furry forefinger. "Not far. Overland, I would recommend. You'd find landing difficult in our jungles here in the Seeonee Hills-" "The what?" "Er . . . I mean north of the Kathun road.

A wolf . . . I mean, a native scout brought us the word. Perhaps you'd

care to talk to him, ma'am?" "I would," said Tanni. "Right away." O'Neil shouted for Gunga Din and sent him off to look, then dov

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back into the volume. Presently another Hoka slouched from behind a tent. He was of the local race, which had fur of midnight black, but was otherwise indistinguishable from the portly northern variety. Unless, of course, you specified his costume: turban, baggy trousers, loose shirt, assorted cutlery thrust into a sash, and a flaming red false beard. He salaamed. "What's your name?" asked Tanni. "Mahbub Ali

' memsahib," replied the newcomer. "Horse trader." "You saw the ship land?" "Yes, memsahib. I had stopped to patch my bridles and count my gear-whee, a book!" "It's mine!" said O'Neil, pulling it away from him. "Oh. Well, ah-" Mahbub Ali edged around so that he could read over

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the Captain's shoulder. "I, er, saw the thing flash through the air and

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went to see. I, um, glimpsed three beasts of a new sort coming out, but, um, they were back inside before I could . . . By that time the moon was shining into the cave where I lived and I said to myself, 'Augrh!' I said, 'it is time to hunt again-' ". "Gentlebeings!" cried Tanni. The book snapped shut and two fuzzy faces looked dreamily up at

her. "I shall want the regiment to escort me to that ship tomorrow." "Why, er, to be sure, ma'am," said O'Neil vaguely. "I'll tell the pack and we'll move out at dawn." A couple of extra tents were

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set up in the clearing, and there was a supper at which the humans shared top honors with Danny Deaver. (A Hoka's muscles are so strong that hanging does not injure him.) When night fell, with subtropical swiftness, Alex crawled into one tent and Tanni into the other. She lay

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for a while, thinking cheerfully that her theories of management were bearing fruit. True, there had been some small waverings on the part of

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the autochthones, but she had kept things rolling firmly in the proper

direction. Why in the Galaxy did her husband insist it was so difficult

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to . . . The last thing she remembered as she drifted into sleep was the murmur of a voice from the campfire. "Crook" O'Neil had assembled his command and was reading to them. . . . * * *

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She blinked her eyes open to dazzling sunlight. Dawn was hours past, and a great stillness brooded over the clearing. More indignant than alarmed, she scrambled out of her sleeping bag, threw on tunic and shoes, and went into the open. The camp was deserted. Uniforms and equipment were piled by the cold ashes of the fire, and a flying snake was opening a can of bully beef with its saw-edged beak. For a moment the world wavered before her. "Alex!" she screamed. Running from tent to tent, she found them all empty. She remembered wildly that she did not even have a raythrower along. Sobbing, she dashed toward the flutter-geet an aerial

view- Bush crackled, and a round black-nosed head thrust cautiously forth. Tanni whirled, blinked, and recognized the gray-shot pelt of O'Neil. "Captain!" she gasped. "What's happened? Come out this minute!" The brush parted, and the Hoka trotted out on all fours, attired in nothing but his own fur. "Captain O'Neil!" wailed Tanni. "What's the meaning of this?" The native reached up, got the hem of her tunic between his jaws, and tugged. Then he let go and moved toward the canebrake, looking back at her. "Captain," said Tanni helplessly. She followed him for a moment, but stopped. Her voice grew shrill. "I'm not moving another centimeter till you explain this-this outrageous-" The Hoka waddled back to her. "Well, speak up! Don't whine at me! Stand up

and talk like a . . . like a . . . a Captain. And stop licking my hand!" O'Neil headed into the jungle. Tanni gave up. Throttling her fears, she went after him. Colorful birds whistled overhead, and flowers drooped on long vines and snagged in her hair. Presently she found herself on a trail. It ran for some two kilometers, an uneventful trip except for the pounding of her heart and the Captain's tendency to dash off after small game. At the end, they reached a meadow surrounding a large flat-topped rock. The Black Tyrone were there. Like their commander, they had stripped off their uniforms and now frisked about in the grass, tumbling like puppies and snarling between their teeth. She caught fragments of continuous conversation: "-Sambhur belled, once, twice, and again . . . wash daily from nose-tip to tail-tip . . . the meat is very near the bone-" and other interesting though possibly irrelevant information. Rolling about, Tanni's eyes found her son. He was seated on top of the rock, wearing only a wreath of flowers and a kitchen knife on a string about his neck. At his feet

equally nude and happy, sprawled Carruthers and the black-furred Mahbub Ali. "Alex!" cried Tanni. She sped to the rock and stared up at her offspring, uncertain whether to kiss and cry over him or turn him across her knee. "What are you doing here?" Captain O'Neil spoke for the first time. "Thy mother was doubtful about coming, Little Frog." "Oh, so you can talk!" said Tanni, glaring at him. "He can't talk to you, Mom," said Alex. "What do you mean, he can't?" "But that's wolf talk, Mom. You can't understand it. I'll have to translate for you." "Wolf?" "The Seeonee Pack," said Alex proudly. He nodded at O'Neil. "Thou hast done well, Akela." "Argh!" said Mahbub Ali. "I run with no pack, Little Frog." "By the Bull that brought me!" exclaimed

Alex, contrite. "I forgot, Bagheera." He stroked the black head. "This

is Bagheera, Mom, the Black Panther, you know." Pointing to the erstwhile Carruthers: "And this is Baloo the Bear. And I'm Mowgli. Isn't it terrific, Mom?" "No, it isn't!" snapped Tanni. Now, if ever, was the time to take the strong line she believed in. "Captain O'Neil,

will you stop being Akela this minute? I'm here to rescue some very important people, and-" "What says thy mother Messua?" asked the Captain-or, rather, Akela-lolling out his tongue and looking at Mowgli-Alex. The boy started gravely to translate. "Alex, stop that!" Tanni found her voice wobbling. "Don't encourage him in this . . . this game!" "But it isn't a game, Mom," protested her son. "It's real. Honest!" "You know it isn't," scolded Tanni. "He's not really Akela at

all. He should be sensible and go back to being himself." "Himself?" murmured Baloo-Carruthers, forgetting in his surprise that he wasn't supposed to understand English. "Captain O'Neil," explained Tanni, holding on to her patience with both hands. "Captain-" "But he wasn't really Captain O'Neil either," pointed out Baloo. On many occasions Tanni had listened sympathetically, but with a hidden sense of superiority, to her husband's description of his latest encounter with

Hoka logic. She had never really believed in all the dizzy sensations he spoke of. Now she felt them. She gasped feebly and sat down in the grass. "I wanted to let you know, Mom," chattered Alex. "The Pack's got

Shere Khan treed a little ways from here. I wanted to know if it was all right for me to go call him a Lame Thief of the Waingunga. Can I, Mom, huh, can I?" Tanni drew a long, shuddering breath. She remembered

Alex, Sr.'s advice: `Roll with the punches. Play along and watch for a chance to use their own logic on them.' There didn't seem to be anything else to do at the moment. "All right," she whispered. Akela took the lead, yapping; Baloo and Bagheera closed in on either side of

Alex; and the Pack followed. Brush crackled. It was not easy for a naturally bipedal species to go on all fours, and Tanni saw Akela walking erect when he thought she wasn't looking. He caught her eye, blushed under his fur, and crouched down again. She decided that this new lunacy would prove rather unstable. It just wasn't practical to run

around on your hands and try to bring down game with your teeth. But it would probably take days for the Hokas to weary of the sport and return

to being the Black Tyrone, and meanwhile what was she to do? "By the Broken Lock that freed me!" exclaimed Bagheera, coming to a halt. "One

approaches-I mean approacheth." "Two approach," corrected Baloo, sitting up on his haunches bear-fashion. Being an ursinoid, he did this rather well. Tanni looked ahead. Through a clump of bamboo-like plants emerged a black-haired form with a blunt snout under heavy brow ridges, the size of a man but stooped over, long arms dangling past bent knees. He wore a sadly stained and ragged suit. She recognized him as a native of the full-status planet Chakba. Behind him lifted the serpentine head of a being from some world unknown to her. Akela bristled. "The Bandar-log!" he snarled. "But see," pointed Baloo, "Kaa the Python follows him, and yet the shameless Bandar is not afraid." He scratched his head. "This is not supposed to be," he said plaintively. The Chakban spotted Tanni and hurried toward her. "Ah, dear lady," he cried. His voice was highpitched, but he spoke fluent English. "At last, a civilized face!" He bowed. "Permit me to introduce myself. I am Echpo of Doralik-Li, and my poor friend is named Seesis." Tanni, glancing at the friend in question, was moved to agree that he was, indeed, poor. Seesis had come into full view now, revealing ten meters of snake body, limbless except for two delicate arms just under the big bald head. A pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez wobbled on his nose. He hissed dolefully and undulated toward the woman, wringing his small hands. Tanni gave her name and asked: "Are you the beings who crashlanded here?" "Yes, dear lady," said Echpo. "A most-" Seesis tugged at the woman's tunic and began to scratch on the ground with his forefinger. "What?" Tanni bent over to look. "Poor chap, poor chap," said Echpo, shaking his head. "He doesn't speak English, you know. Moreover, the crash . . ." He revolved a finger near his own right temple and gave her a meaningful look. "Oh, how terrible!" Tanni got to her feet in spite of Seesis' desperate efforts to hold her down and make her look at his dirt scratchings. "We'll have to get him to a doctor-Dr. Arrowsmith in Mixumaxu is really very good if I can drag him away from discovering bacteriophage-" "That is not necessary, madam," said Echpo. "Seesis will recover naturally. I know his race. But if I may presume upon your kindness, we do need transportation." The Hokas crowded around Seesis, addressing him as Kaa and asking him if he was casting his skin and obliterating his marks on the ground. The herpetoid seemed ready to burst into tears. "But weren't there three o

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you?" asked Tanni. "Yes, indeed," said Echpo. "But-well-I am afraid, dear lady, that your little friends do not seem to approve of our companion Heragli. They have, er, chased him up a tree." "Why, how could they?" Gently, Tanni detached the fingers of Seesis from her skirt, patted him on his scaly head, and turned an accusing eye on Alex. "Young man, what do you know about this?" The boy squirmed. "Tha
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must be Shere Khan." Defiantly: "He does look like a tiger too." He glared at Echpo. "Believe thou not the Bandar-log." "These gentlebeing
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are no such thing!" snapped Tanni. "Surely thy mother has been bitten by Tabaqui, the Jackal," said Baloo to Alex. "All the Jungle knows Shere Khan." "This is dewanee, the madness," agreed Bagheera. "Heed th
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old tutor who taught thee the Law, Little Frog." "But-" began Alex. "But the hairy one dares say that-" "Surely, Little Brother," interrupted Baloo, "thou hast learned by this time to take no notice o
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the Bandar-log. They have no Law. They are very many, evil, dirty, shameless, and they desire, if they have any fixed desire, to be noticed by the Jungle-People. But we do not notice them even when they
throw nuts and filth on our heads." "Oh!" groaned Echpo. "That I, an ex-cabinet minister of the Chakban Federation, B.A., M.S., Ph.D., LL.D., graduate of Hasolbath, Trmp, and the Sorbonne, should be accuse
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of throwing nuts and filth on people's heads to attract attention!" "I'm so sorry!" apologized Tanni. "It's the imagination these Hokas have. Please, please forgive them, sir!" "Your slightest whim, dear lady, is my most solemn command and highest joy," bowed Echpo. Tanni returned gallantly to the subject: "But how did you happe
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to be marooned here?" "Ah . . . we were outward bound, madam, on a mission from Earth to the Rim Stars." Echpo produced a box of lozenges
and politely offered them around. "A cultural mission, headed by our poor friend Seesis-is he bothering you, dear lady? Just slap his hands
down. The shock, you know . . . Ah . . . A most important and urgent mission, I may say with all due modesty, undertaken to-pardon me, I cannot say more. Our converter began giving trouble as we passed near this sun, so we approached your planet-Toka, is that the name?-to get help. We knew from the pilot's manual that it had civilization, though
we scarcely expected such delightful company as yours. At any rate, th
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converter failed us completely as we were entering the atmosphere, and though we glided down, the landing was still hard enough to wreck our

communications equipment. That was yesterday, and today we were setting out in quest of help—we had seen from the air that there is a city some fifty kilometers hence—when, ah, your Hokas appeared and our poor friend Heragli—"Oh, dear!" said Tanni. "We'd better go get him right away. Can you guide me?" "I should be honored," said Echpo. "I know the very tree." "Does thy mother hunt with the Bandar-log, O Mowgli?" inquired Akela. "Certainly not!" snapped Tanni, whirling on him. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Captain." "What says she?" asked Akela agreeably. Alex repeated it for him. "Oh!" said Tanni, stamping off. "Ah . . . poor dear Seesis," murmured Echpo. "He should not be left unguarded. He could hurt himself. Would your, ah, Hokas watch him

while we rescue Heragli?" "Of course," said Tanni. "Alex, you stay here and see to it." The boy protested, was Alexander'd down, and gave

in and announced importantly that he, the Man-Cub, wished the Pack to remain with him and not let Kaa depart. Tanni and Echpo started into the woods. Baloo and Bagheera followed. "Hey, there!" said the woman. "Didn't Mowgli tell you to—" "By the Broken Lock that freed me," squeaked Bagheera, slapping his paunch with indignation, "dost thou take us for wolves?" Tanni sighed and traded a glance with Echpo. As they went among the trees, she calmed down enough to say: "I can fly you to Mixumaxu, of course, and put you up; but it may take weeks before you can get off the planet. Not many deep-space ships stop here." "Oh, dear." The Chakban wrung hairy hands. "Our mission is so vital. Could we not even get transportation to Gelkar?" "Well . . ." Tanni considered. "Why, yes, it's only a few lightyears off. I can take

you myself in our courier boat, and you can charter a ship there." "Blessed damosel, my gratitude knows no limits," said Echpo. Tanni preened herself. She was no snob, but certainly a favor done for beings as important as these would hurt no one's career. Through the ruffling leaves, she heard a hoarse, angry bellow.

"That must be your friend," she remarked brightly, or as brightly as possible when battling through a humid jungle with hair uncombed and no breakfast. "What did you say his name was?" "Heragli. A Rowra of Drus.

A most gentlemanly felino-centauroid, dear lady. I can't conceive why your Hokas insist on chasing him up trees." A minute later the girl saw him, perched in the branches seven meters above ground. She had to admit that he was not unlike a tiger. The long, black-striped orange body was there, and the short yellow-eyed head, though a stumpy torso

with two muscular arms was between. His whiskers were magnificent, and a couple of saber teeth did the resemblance no harm. Like Echpo, he wore the thorn-ripped tatters of a civilized business suit. "Heragli, dear friend," called the Chakban, "I have found a most agreeable lady who has graciously promised to help us." "Are those unprintables around?" floated down a bass rumble. "Every blanked time I set foot to

earth, the thus-and-so's have gone for me." "It's all right!" snapped Tanni. She was not, she told herself, a prude; but Heragli's language was scarcely what she had been led to expect from the Bandar's-oops!-from Echpo's description of him as a most gentlemanly felino-centauroid. "Why, sputter dash censored!" rasped the alien. "I see two of 'em just behind you!" "Oh, them?" said Tanni. "Never mind them. They're only a bear and a black panther." "They're what?" "They're . . . well . . . oh, never mind! Come on down." Heragli

descended, two meters of rippling muscle hot in the leaf-filtered sunlight. "Very well, very well," he grumbled. "But I don't trust 'em.

Lick my weight in flaming wildcats, but these asterisk unmentionables wreck my nerves. Where's the snake?" Echpo winced. "My dear fellow!" he

protested delicately. "All right, all right!" bawled the Rowra. "The herpetoid, then. Don't hold with these dashed euphemisms. Call an encarnadined spade a cursed spade is my way. Where is he?" "We left him

back at-" "Should've knocked'm on the mucking head. Said so all along.

Save all this deleted trouble." Echpo flinched again. "The, ah, the Rowra is an old military felino-centauroid," he explained hastily. "Believes in curing shock with counter-shock. Isn't that right, Heragli?" "What? What're you babbling about now? Oh . . . oh, yes. You

servant, ma'am," thundered the other. "Which bleeding way out, eh?" "A

rough exterior, dear lady," whispered Echpo in Tanni's ear, "but a heart of gold." "That may be," answered the woman sharply, "but I'm going to have to ask him to moderate his voice and expurgate his language. What if the Hokas should hear him?" "Blunderbore and killecrantz!" swore Heragli. "Let'm hear. I've had enough of this deifically anathematized tree climbing. Let'm show up once more and I'll gut 'em, I'll skin 'em, I'll-" A chorus of falsetto wolfish howls

interrupted him, and a second later the space around the tree was filled with leaping, yelling Hokas and the Rowra was up in the branches

again. "Come down, Striped Killer!" bawled Akela, bounding a good two meters up the trunk. "Come down ere I forget wolves cannot climb! I myself will tear thy heart out!" "Sput! Meowr!" snarled Heragli,

swiping a taloned paw at him. "Meeourl spss rowul rhrrrrr!" "What's he saying?" demanded Tanni. "Dear lady," replied Echpo with a shudder, "don't ask. General! General!-His old rank may snap him out of it-General, remember your duty!" "LAME THIEF OF THE WAINGUNGA!" shouted Alex, bombarding him with fallen fruits. Heragli closed his eyes and panted. "Oh, m'nerves!" he gasped above the roar of the Hokas. "All your fault, Echpo, you insisting on no sidearms. Of all the la-di-da conspir-" "General!" cried the Chakban. Tanni struggled around the Hokas and collared her son. "Alex," she said ominously, "I told you to keep them away." "But they outvoted me, Mom," he answered. "They're the Free People, you know, and it's the full Pack-" "FOR THE PACK, FOR THE FULL PACK, IT IS MET!" chorused the Hokas, leaping up and snapping at Heragli's tail. Tanni put her hands over her ears and tried to think. It hurt her pride, but she sought desperately to imagine what Alex, Sr., would have done. Play along with them . . . use their own fantasy . . . yes and she had read the Jungle Books herself-Ah! She snatched a nut from her boy just before he launched it and said sweetly: "Alex, dear, shouldn't the Pack be in bed now?" "Huh, Mom?" "Doesn't the Law of the Jungle say so? Ask Baloo." "Indeed, Man-Cub," replied Baloo pontifically when Alex had repeated it, "the Law of the Jungle specifically states: 'And remember the night is for hunting, and forget not the day is for sleep.' Now that you remind me-thou remindest me, it is broad daylight and all the wolves ought to be in their lairs." It took a little while to calm down the Hokas, but then they trotted obediently off into the forest. Tanni was a bit disconcerted to note that Baloo and Bagheera were still present. She racked her brains for something in the Jungle Books specifically dealing with the obligation of bears and black panthers also to go off and sleep in the daytime. Nothing, however, came to mind. And Heragli refused to climb down while-Inspiration came. She turned to the last Hokas. "Aren't you thirsty?" she asked. "What says thy mother, Little Frog?" demanded Bagheera, washing his nose with his hand and trying to purr. "She asked if thou and Baloo were not thirsty," said Alex. "Thirsty?" The two Hokas looked at each other. The extreme suggestibility of their race came into play. Two tongues reached out and licked two muzzles. "Indeed, the Rains have been scant this year," agreed Bagheera. "Perhaps I had better go shake the mohwa tree and check the petals that fall down," said Baloo. "I hear," said the girl slyly, "that Hathi proclaimed the Water Truce last night." "Oh . . . ah?" sai

d

Bagheera. "And you know that according to the Law of the Jungle, that means all the animals must drink peaceably together," went on Tanni. "Tell them, Alex." "Quite true," nodded Baloo sagely when the boy had translated. "Macmillan edition, 1933, page 68." "So," said Tanni, springing her trap, "you'll have to take Shere Khan off and let him drink with you." "Wuh!" said Baloo, sitting down on his haunches to consider the situation. "It is the Law," he decided at length. "You can

come down now," called Tanni to Heragli. "They won't hurt you." "Blood

and bones!" grumbled the Rowra, but descended and looked at the Hokas with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm. "Har d'ja do." "Hello, Lame Thief," said Bagheera amiably. "Lame Thief? Why-" Heragli began to roar, and Bagheera tried manfully to arch his back, which is not easy for a barrel-shaped Hoka. "General! General!" interrupted Echpo. "It's

the only way. Go off and have a drink with them, and as soon as you can, meet us here again." "Oh, very well. Blank dash flaming etcetera."

Heragli trotted off into the brush, accompanied by his foes. Their voices trailed back: "Hast hunted recently, Striped Killer?" "Eh? What?

Hunted? Well, as a matter of fact, in England on Earth last month-the Quorn-Master of the Hunt told me-went to earth at-" The jungle swallowed them up. * * * "And now, dear lady," said Echpo nervously,

"I must presume still further upon your patience. Poor Seesis has been

left unguarded all this time-" "Oh, yes!" The woman's long slim legs broke into a trot, back toward the place where she had first met the herpetoid. Echpo lumbered beside her and Alex followed. "Ah . . . it is

a difficult situation," declared the Chakban. "I fear the concussion has made my valued friend Seesis, ah, distrust the General and myself.

His closest comrades! Can you imagine? He has, I think, some strange delusion that we mean to harm him." Tanni slowed down. She felt no great eagerness to confront a paranoid python. "He won't get violent,"

reassured Echpo. "I just wanted to warn you to discount anything he may

do. He might, for example, try to write messages . . . Ah, here we are!" They looked around the trampled vegetation. "He must have slipped

away," said Tanni. "But he can't have gone far." "Oh, he can move rapidly when he chooses, gracious madam," said Echpo, rubbing his hands

in an agitated fashion. "Normally, of course, he does not so choose. You see, his race places an almost fanatical emphasis on

self-restraint. Dignity, honor, and the like . . . those are the important things. A code, dear lady, which"-Echpo's deep-set eyes took on an odd gleam-"renders them vulnerable to, er, manipulation by those alert enough to press the proper semantic keys. But one which also renders them quite unpredictable. We had better find him at once." It was not a large area in which they stood, and it soon became apparent that they had not simply overlooked the presence of ten meters of snake-like alien. A shout from Alex brought them to a trail crushed into the soft green herbage, as if someone had dragged a barrel through it. "This," said the boy, "must be the road of Kaa.'" "Excellent spotting, young man," said Echpo. "Let us follow it." They went rapidly along the track for several minutes. Tanni brushed the tangled golden hair from her eyes and wished for a comb, breakfast, a hot bath and-She noticed that the trail suddenly bent northward and continued in a straight line, as if Kaa-Seesis, blast it!-had realized where he was and set off toward some definite goal. Echpo stopped, frowning, his flat nostrils a-twitch. "Dear me," he murmured, "this is most distressing." "Why-he's headed toward your ship, hasn't he?" asked Tanni. "He should be easy to find. Let's go!" "Oh, no, no, no!" The Chakban shook his bat-eared head. "I wouldn't dream of letting you and your son-delightful boy, madam!-go any further. It is much too dangerous." "Nonsense! There's nothing harmful here, and you said yourself he isn't violent." "Please! Not another word!" The long hands waved her back. "No, dear lady, just return to the meeting place, if you will, and when Heragli gets there send him on to the ship. Meanwhile I will follow poor Seesis and, ah, do what I can." Before Tanni could reply, Echpo had bounded off and the tall grasses hid him. She stood for a moment, frowning. The Chakban was a curious and contradictory personality. Though his manners were impeccable, she had not felt herself warming to him. There was something, something almost . . . well, Bandar-loggish about him. Ridiculous! she told herself. But why did he suddenly change his mind about having me along? Just because Seesis headed back toward the wrecked ship? "Shucks, Mom," pouted Alex, "everybody's gone. All the wolves are in bed-in their lairs, I mean, and Bagheera and Baloo gone off with Shere Khan, and the Bandar's gone to the Cold Lairs and we can't even watch Kaa fight him. Nobody lets me have any fun." Decision came to Tanni. The demented Seesis might, after all, turn on Echpo. If she had any chance of preventing

such a catastrophe, her duty was clear. In plain language, she felt an infernal curiosity. "Come along, Alex," she said. They had not far to go. Breaking through a tall screen of pseudo-bamboo, they looked out on a meadow. And in the center of that meadow rested a small, luxurious Starflash space rambler. . . * * * . "Wait here, Alex," ordered Tanni. "If there seems to be any danger, run for help." She crossed the ground to the open airlock. Strange, the ship was not even dented. Peering in, she saw the control room. No sign of Echpo or Seesis-maybe they were somewhere aft. She entered. It struck her that the controls were in very good shape for a vessel that had landed hard enough to knock out its communication gear. On impulse, she went over to the visio and punched its buttons. The screen lit up . . . why, it was perfectly useable! She would call Mixumaxu and have a detachment of Hoka police flown here. The Private Eyes and Honest Cops could easily- A thick, hairy arm shot past her and a long finger snapped the set off. Another arm like a great furry shackle pinned her into the chair she had taken. "That," whispered Echpo, "was a mistake, dear lady." For a second, instinctively and furiously, Tanni tried to break loose. A kitten might as well have tried to escape a gorilla. Echpo let her have it out while he closed the airlock by remote control. Then he eased his grip. She bounced from the chair. A hard hand grabbed her wrist and whirled her about. "What is this?" she raged. "Let me go!" She kicked at Echpo's ankles. He slapped her so her head rang. Sobbing, she relaxed enough to stare at him through a blur of horror. "I am afraid, dear Mrs. Jones, that you have penetrated our little deception," said the Chakban gently. "I had hoped we could abandon our ship here, since a description of it has unfortunately been broadcast on the subvisio. By posing as castaways, we could have used the transportation to Gelkar which you so graciously offered us, and hired another vessel there. But as it is-" He shrugged. "It seems best we stay with this one after all, using you, madam, as a hostage . . . much though it pains me, of course." "You wouldn't dare!" gasped Tanni, unable to think of a more telling remark. "Dare? Dear lady," said Echpo, smiling, "our poor friend Seesis is the Tertiary Receptacle of Wisdom of Sanussi. If we dared kidnap him, surely-Please hold still. It would deeply grieve me to have to bind you." "Sanussi . . . I don't believe you," breathed the girl. "Why, you're unarmed and he must have twice your strength." "Dea

r
 charmer," sighed Echpo, "how little you know of Sanussians. Their ethical code is so unreasonably strict. When Heragli and I entered Seesis' embassy office on Earth, all we had to do was threaten to fill an ancestral seltzer bottle we had previously . . . ah . . . borrowed, with soda pop. The dishonor would have compelled the next hundred generations of his family to spend an hour a day in ceremonial writhing and give up all public positions. We wrung his parole from him: he was not to speak to anyone or resist us with force until released." "Not speak . . . oh, so that's why he was trying to write," said Tanni. A degree of steadiness was returning to her. She could not really believe this mincing dandy capable of harm. "And I suppose he slipped back here with some idea of calling our officials and showing them a written account of-" "How quickly you grasp the facts, madam," bowed Echpo. "Naturally, I trailed him and, since he may not use his strength on me, dragged him into a stateroom aft and coiled him up. As long as Heragli and I abide by the Sanussian code-chiefly, to refrain from endangering others-he is bound by his promise. That is why we have no weapons; the General is so impulsive." "But why have you kidnapped him?" "Politics. A matter of pressure to get certain concessions from his planet. Don't trouble your pretty head about it, my lady. As soon as practical after we have reached our destination-surely not more than a year-you will be released with our heartfelt thanks for your invaluable assistance." "But you don't need me for a hostage!" wailed Tanni. "You've got Seesis himself." "Tut-tut. The Sanussian police are hot on our trail. Despite the size of interstellar space, they may quite possibly detect us and close in . . . after which, to wipe out the stain on their honor, they would cheerfully blow Seesis up with Heragli and myself. But their ethics will not permit them to harm an innocent bystander like you, so-" Echpo backed toward the airlock, half dragging the woman. His bulk filled the chamber, blocking off escape, as he opened the valves. "So, as soon as Heragli returns-and not finding me at the agreed rendezvous, he will surely come here-we depart." His

simian face broke into a grin as discordant noises floated nearer. "Why, here he is now. Heragli, dear friend, do hurry. We must leave this delightful planet immediately." His voice carried to the Rowra, who had just emerged from the canebrake with Bagheera on one side and Baloo on the other. Staggering, Heragli sat down, licked one oversized paw, and began to wash his face. Peering past Echpo, Tanni saw that the General's swiping motions were rather unsteady. "Heragli!" said the Chakban on a sharper note. "Pay attention!" "Go sputz yourself," boomed the Rowra, and broke into song. "Oh, when I was twenty-one, when I was twenty-one, I never had lots of mvrouwing but I always had lots of fun . My basket days were over and my prowling days begun, on the very very rrrnowing night when I was twenty-one-Chorus!" he roared, beating time with a wavering paw, and the two Hokas embraced him and chimed in: "When we wash twenty-one-" "Heragli!" yelled Echpo. "What's wrong with you?" Tanni could have told him. She realized suddenly, as she stood there with the Chakban's heavy grip on her wrist, that when she evoked thirst in Baloo and Bagheera, she had pointed them in one inevitable direction: the abandoned camp of the Black Tyrone. The phrase "take Shere Khan off and let him drink with you" could have only one meaning to a Hoka. Heragli, like many beings before him, had encountered the fiery Tokan liquor. There are bigger, stronger, wiser races than the Hokas, but the Galaxy knows none with more capacity. Heragli was twice the size and eight times the weight of a Hoka, but his companions were just pleasantly high, while he was-no other word will do-potted. And Tanni was willing to bet that Baloo and Bagheera were each two bottles ahead of him. The General rolled over on his back and waved his feet in the air. "Oh, that little ball of yarn-" he warbled. "Heragli!" shrieked Echpo. "Oh, those wild, wild kittens, those wild, wild kittens, they're making a wildcat of me!" "General!" "Old tomcats never die, they just fa-a-a-aade-huh? Whuzza matta wi' you, monkey?" demanded Heragli, still on his back, looking at the spaceship upside down from bloodshot eyes. "Stannin' onna head. Riddickerluss, ab-so-lute-ly . . . Oh, curse the city that stole muh Kitty, by dawn she'll-Le's havva nuther one, mnowrr, 'fore you leave me! Hell an' damnation," said Heragli, suddenly dropping from the peak of joyous camaraderie to the

valley of bitter suspicion, "dirty work inna catagon. Passed over f' promotion, twishe. Classmate, too . . . Is this a ray gun that I see b'fore me, the handle toward muh hand? Come, lemme clutch thee. . . . Monkeys an' snakes. Gallopin' horrors, I call 'em. Never trus' a primate-" and he faded off into mutterings. "General!" called Echpo, sternly. "Pull yourself together and come aboard. We're leaving." "Huh ?

Awri', awri', awri'-' said Heragli in a bleared tone. He lurched to all four feet, focused with some effort on the ship, and wobbled in its general direction. "Mom!" cried a boyish voice, and Alex broke into the meadow. "What's going on?" He spotted Tanni with Echpo's hand clutching her. "What're you doing to my mother?" "Heragli!" yelled Echpo. "Stop that brat!" The Rowra blinked. Whether he would have obeyed if he had been sober, or if he had not been brooding about other races and the general unfairness of life, is an open question. He was not a bad felino-centauroid at heart. But as it was, he saw Alex running toward the ship, growled the one word "Primate!" to himself, and crouched for

a leap. His first mistake had been getting drunk. His second was to ignore, or be unaware of, three facts. These were, in order: 1) A Hoka, though not warlike, enjoys a roughhouse. 2) A Hoka's tubby appearance is most deceptive; he is, for instance, more than a match for any human. 3) Baloo and Bagheera did not think Shere Khan should be allowed

to harm the Man-Cub. Heragli leaped. Baloo met him in mid-air, head to head. There was a loud, hollow thunk, and Heragli fell into a sitting position with a dazed look on his face while Baloo did a reeling sort of off-to-Buffalo. At that moment, Bagheera entered the wars. He would

have been more effective had he not religiously adhered to the principle of fighting like a black panther, scrambling onto the Rowra's

back, scratching and biting. "Ouch!" howled Heragli, regaining full consciousness. "What the sputz? Get the snrrowl off me! Leggo, you illegitimate forsaken object of an origin which the compilers of Leviticus would not have approved! Wrowrrl!" And he made frantic efforts to reach over his shoulder. "Striped Killer!" squeaked Bagheera

joyously. "Hunter of helpless frogs! Lame Thief of the Waingunga! Take

that! And that!" "What're you talking about? Never ate a frog in m' life. Unhand me-gug!" Bagheera had wrapped both sturdy arms around Heragli's neck and started throttling him. At the same time Baloo recovered sufficiently to stage a frontal attack. Fortunately, being in

the role of a bear, he could fight like a bear, which is to say, very much like a Hoka. Accordingly, he landed a stiff one-two on Heragli's nose and then, as the Rowra reared up, wheezing, he fell into a clinch that made his enemy's ribs creak. Breaking cleanly, he landed a couple of hard punches in the midriff of Heragli's torso, chopped him over the heart, sank his teeth into the right foreleg, was lifted off his feet by an anguished jerk, used the opportunity to deliver a double kick to the chin while flurrying a series of blows, and generally made himself useful. "Run, Alex!" cried Tanni. The boy paused, uncertain, as Rowra and Hokas tore up the sod a meter from him. "Run! Do what Mother tells you! Get help!" Reluctantly, Alex turned and sped for the woods. Tanni felt Echpo's grasp shift as he moved behind her. When he pulled a Holman raythrower from beneath his tunic, the blood seemed to drain out of her heart. "Believe me, dear lady, I deplore this," said the Chakban. "I had hoped to keep my weapon unknown and untouched. But we cannot risk your son's warning the authorities too soon, can we? And then there are those Hokas." He pinned her against the wall and sighted on Alex. "You do understand my position, don't you?" he asked anxiously. Struggling and screaming, Tanni clawed for his eyes. The brow ridges defeated her. She saw the gun muzzle steady--and there was a shock that threw her from Echpo's grip and out onto the ground. Dazed, she scrambled to her feet with a wild notion of throwing herself in the path of the beam . . . But where was Echpo? The airlock seemed to hold nothing but coil upon coil of Seesis. Only gradually, as her vision cleared, did Tanni make out a contorted face among those cable-thick bights. The Chakban was scarcely able to breathe, let alone move. "Sssssso!" Seesis adjusted his pince-nez and regarded his prisoner censoriously. "So you lied to me. You were prepared to commit violence after all. I am shocked and grieved. I thought you shared my abhorrence of bloodshed. I see that you must be gently but firmly educated until you understand the error of your ways and repent and enter the gentle brotherhood of beings. Lie still, now, or I will break your back." "I--" gasped Echpo. "I . . . had . . . my duty--" "And I," answered Seesis, swaying above him, "have my honor." Alex fell into hi

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mother's arms. She was not too full of thanksgiving to pick up the
fallen gun. Across the meadow, Baloo and Bagheera stood triumphant ove
r
a semi-conscious Heragli and beamed at their snaky ally. The Cold Lair
S
were taken. The Man-Cub had been rescued from Bandar-log and Lame
Thief. Kaa's Hunting was finished.

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