

## VERMIN

By WILLIAM MORRISON

*The giants hated humans, and the humans hated—*

A GIANT shadow swooped down upon them without warning and involuntarily the two visitors cringed. Sarkin noted however, that Norick, with nerves strengthened by long experience, simply drew aside to the shelter of a cliff and said in a low voice that was definitely not a whisper, "Wait here. He hasn't noticed us."

Sure enough the shadow passed—and a second later Norick led them forward again. Above them, almost as far as the eye could see, stretched a smooth blank wall. Behind them, across a wide plain, rose a similar wall. Norick pulled aside a curtain that hid an entrance in the nearer wall and they followed him inside. "You've never seen a play?" he asked in a tone of surprise.

Sarkin and his wife, Leta, shook their heads. "We've heard vague rumors that such things exist," said Sarkin.

"They exist, all right," said Norick. "In fact, I try to write them myself in my spare time. The ones they act, though, are usually pretty old. There are a couple by a prehistoric called Shakespeare and one each by some of his contemporaries—Euripides, Wilde, Ibsen and Shaw.

"They're hard to understand, naturally, as they refer to a time that was almost forgotten long before the Great Migration. All the same the words have a soothing rhythm. Come in and listen."

Both Sarkin and Leta watched in wondering silence the strange scene that met their eyes. Upon a raised platform, visible to the entire audience, two men and a woman were declaiming their inmost thoughts and behaving as if they thought no one were looking at them.

"It's what is known as a stage convention," explained Norick at the end of what he designated as an act. "They pretend that the audience just doesn't exist."

"But they know that the audience is there," objected Leta. "It has come there for the single purpose of seeing them. They would speak the lines of the play to each other if there were no audience."

"I know it's absurd," agreed Norick. "But you get used to the absurdity after a time and then you have difficulty realizing that the act of watching a play is anything but the most natural experience in the world. Don't pay too much attention to your own uneasiness. Just listen and watch and enjoy what you can understand."

They tried to follow his advice but the strangeness of the proceedings was not to be got rid of so easily. And then, in the middle of the third act, the whole theater shook and both audience and actors froze in their places.

They could see how the sweat poured down the face of one of the actors, who was supposed to represent a calm and imperturbable character, but every one was sharing his emotions and no one blamed him. After a few seconds the theater settled back in place and the play went on as if nothing had happened.

LATER, when he was taking them home, Norick admitted, "I thought they were on to us that time."

"What would have happened if they had suspected we were there?" asked Leta.

"They'd have knocked the theater down and tried to smash us as we ran for safety. I had a very dear friend"—his voice faltered for a second. "I went to college with him. He was killed at a concert. And my brother was squashed to death just a year ago, caught outside his own door by one who probably never even knew he had stepped on him."

"It isn't as bad as that where *we* live," said Sarkin. "There aren't so many of them and at least we usually have more warning when they're coming. We've set up a rather elaborate alarm system."

"What good does it do you to know when they're on their way? If they want to take the trouble to get you they can."

"Not always. We have some good hideouts. And we're devising ways of striking back. As a scientist," said Sarkin modestly, "I think that they're more vulnerable than most people imagine."

"It would take an army of us to kill one of them," retorted Norick gloomily. "I'm not the kind of man who runs down the achievements of science but you'll have to admit that up to the present the best inventions you people have turned out have been pretty small tubers."

"We'll admit that we haven't much to boast about so far," agreed Sarkin serenely. "But as I have indicated we're beginning to learn about them. And I think that our chances are better than you poets and artists believe."

Norick would have retorted but at that moment Leta screamed. Sarkin put his arm about her and she seemed to tremble as she shrank back against him. "What is it, darling?"

She didn't answer in words but pointed. In the shadows, a small creature darted from one rock to another, then disappeared into a crack. Norick shrugged. "You women are all alike. I didn't get a clear look at the thing, but it was obviously too small to hurt you. What was all the shrieking about?"

"Ugh !" said Leta with distaste. "The thing was so—repulsive. What was it?"

"I don't know. Never saw one before," returned Norick.

"They've appeared lately in the next district," put in Sarkin. "Saw a small note about them in one of my journals. It's believed they were driven out of their former habitat by the drought."

Leta shuddered. "I hope they don't like us enough to stay. They give me the shivers."

Norick, proud of his superiority as a male, laughed. But the laughter froze on his lips as a peal of thunder rolled suddenly over them. Despite his greater experience with danger, this time he had been thrown off balance and he was the first to lead the dash for shelter. Two of their giant enemies passed and then the three emerged again, perspiring at the narrowness of their escape.

Norick seemed less amused than before as he led them to his home, keeping within the shadows of the great walls when possible, scurrying across the broad plains when more open travel was unavoidable, always with an eye out for a convenient gully or ravine into which to fling himself in case danger threatened. It was not an enjoyable trip for the two visitors. By the time they reached their destination they were in a state of exhaustion. Norick was little better off.

Later, after a hearty meal, they tried to relax. But always they were conscious that their enemies were not far away. The house was too well placed and too hardily constructed to shake with every passing footstep but they could feel occasional faint tremors that reminded them continually of the presence of their enemies.

When Norick showed them to their room and assured them confidently that they could go to bed without fear of being killed in their sleep, Leta tried to pass off his remark with a joke. But the jesting words changed to a shrill scream when she caught sight of another of the small creatures darting into a hole in the side of the room. Later she confided to Sarkin that she didn't sleep a wink all night.

Sarkin did slightly better. He slept for two hours toward morning—but before that he had done a great deal of thinking. When the day finally dawned he dressed and had Norick guide him to the local public library, one of the two that their civilized world afforded. The playgoing and the visiting of art galleries during his sojourn here were incidental. He had been sent because there was important work to do and it was time that he began it.

The shelf on history was disappointingly meager but the librarian was himself a historian and with his aid Sarkin was enabled to form a fairly clear picture of the events he had come to learn about. He took copious notes and did a great deal of thinking as he set them down.

THE history of their race began with almost twoscore men and women, who had found themselves in the great central plain some five hundred years before. How these few founding individuals had got there was not quite certain but at least the general outlines were clear. They had arrived in a Great Migration from a planet attached to a star they called the Sun, which they had left at a time when their race on this planet was engaged in a vast civil war.

"The manner of their leaving," said the librarian thoughtfully, "is not definitely established. It is known that our own race had attained the ability to travel from planet to planet but an interstellar journey was still beyond them.

"The consensus of opinion—I can cite such authorities as Trelyan, Maumber, Cullis and others—is that our forefathers came from an outer colony, and not from the original home planet.

"Our year, by the way, otherwise completely arbitrary and inexplicable, is supposed to correspond to the period of revolution of the home planet. But I digress. The colonized satellite of the Sun is supposed to have been visited by a ship of one of the Giants at a time when the losers in the civil war were facing extinction.

"The Giants had no suspicion of a civilized race so much smaller in stature than their own. Our forefathers, to the number of twenty, were supposed to have flown into the Giant ship by means of tiny planes, which escaped the traps set to bar small animals.

"Once in the ship, of course, it was simple for them to hide in out-of-the-way cracks and corners. They reached the Giant home planet after several generations of travel, during which their numbers increased, despite accidents, to thirty-seven.

"During the decades of the Migration itself, it goes almost without saying, most of the original scientific attainments of the race were lost. It would be expecting too much of the original twenty to be masters of the different branches of biology, physics, chemistry and the numerous other sciences which formed part of the ancient civilization.

"Fortunately they did take along several extremely valuable books. They remembered too that certain things had been accomplished and we know that some day we shall accomplish them again. But the research that is an indispensable preliminary must be repeated ab *initio*."

"Whatever that may mean," said Sarkin.

"From the beginning," translated the other. "A phrase that has come down to us from the time when the race was just evolving. But let me go on with my story. Our forefathers adapted themselves to life on this planet rather well. They had preserved as much knowledge as they could and they began to build and organize, keeping their activities hidden from the Giants, of whom they had a natural fear.

"For a hundred years or more our ancestors managed to keep out of sight. Then, gradually, the Giants seemed to become aware of their existence. There seems, offhand, no reason why both races, the large and small, could not have coexisted here peacefully. We are not powerful enough to interfere with the Giants and there seemed to be no reason why they should interfere with us.

"The Giants, however, took a different point of view. They hated us from the beginning and took steps to exterminate us. But though they stepped up our death rate tremendously our numbers are still increasing. The wise policy instituted by Vilyer, of building our homes within their cities, wherever they themselves are most populous, although it has had its unpleasant aspects, has been our salvation.

"In order to destroy us completely they would have had to destroy their own homes. They are therefore unable to make use of explosives—atomic or otherwise—they are severely limited in their use of poisons and they are forced to utilize less certain methods, which we have so far been able to parry.

"We have developed antidotes for the few mild dusts and gases they occasionally use against us. We have developed minor weapons—"

"You needn't tell me of those," interrupted Sarkin. "I have one of the latest models here myself."

"Unfortunately they can't kill," lamented the librarian.

"Even so they're reasonably effective."

The librarian went on with details to confirm what he had already told and Sarkin, while making notes, thought over what he had learned. They were fighting a war which they seemed to have no hope of winning but in which they had so far managed to hold their own. The tragedy of the situation lay in the fact that there seemed to be no necessity for such a war at all.

Suppose they could get into intelligent contact with the Giants, explain their situation, arrange for peace on terms that would be to the benefit of both races? He put the question to the librarian.

"That has been tried," said the latter. "About a hundred years ago as a matter of fact. A prominent electrical expert—I think his name was Jugas—produced electromagnetic waves that could be detected

by their apparatus and managed to establish temporary communication.

"He even compiled a dictionary of their language, which I have here." A withered hand pulled an old volume from the shelves, and passed it over to Sarkin. "His attempt ended in complete failure and I believe he himself was crushed to death."

"Why?"

"The Giants absolutely refused to hear of peace. They gave no reason that I know of."

"Do you mind if I take the dictionary home and study it?"

"Under the circumstances, no. Of course you'll have to fill out a card."

ON the way home Sarkin was hugging the sides of the great walls rather absent-mindedly, in the manner of a scientist who has more important matters on his mind, when his figure was suddenly enveloped in shadow. As he looked up in alarm he heard a great snarl—and then a monstrous body filled the air and seemed to dive at him.

He twisted to one side and as he did his foot caught in a crack and he fell headlong. The body landed over him and in the resulting darkness he was conscious of a sharp, overpowering odor. Great spiky bristles rasped through his clothes, tearing them into shreds and lacerating his skin.

Then momentum carried the creature past him and he could see once more. He watched it twist rapidly, caught the gleam of its eyes, saw it crouch for another spring. He raised the weapon of which he had been so modestly boastful a short time before.

The creature that had attacked him was much smaller than one of the Giants and fortunately his aim was good. His shot caught it below the eye and the vibrations of an ensuing howl of rage almost swept him off his feet.

The creature somersaulted in agony, one great paw tearing at its eye, and then another shadow enveloped both Sarkin and the animal which had attacked him. A gigantic foot rose above him, ready to stamp him out.

Sarkin fired again. He could hardly miss so extensive a target but this time his missile had to tear through an outer covering before lodging in the foot itself. Nevertheless it must have penetrated deeply for it was now the Giant's turn to roar and Sarkin's cue to dive into a crevice and escape.

He found himself in a dark and narrow corridor from which a side entrance led in the direction he wanted to go. He flashed a narrow beam from an electric lighter to illuminate his way. From a map on the wall he realized that he was in one of the numerous escape tunnels so thoughtfully provided by the local authorities. By following it he was enabled to return to Norick's home with a minimum of risk.

He was still somewhat breathless from his narrow escape but he began to study the dictionary nevertheless. The structure of the Giant language was simpler than he had supposed and a short appendix gave him its essentials.

Another appendix supplied details of the apparatus Jugas had used in its compilation. A few days of study would enable him to master enough of it to send and receive messages and a few more days would suffice for the building of suitable apparatus by a technician.

During the following days he worked with a minimum of interruption. Once the neighborhood was flooded with an unpleasant gas but suitable absorbents for it had been developed only a short time before and Sarkin did not even have to leave the house.

And once, when Norick had guests who chatted in another room while Sarkin soberly continued his studies, the place was thrown into an uproar by an invasion of the tiny creatures whose appearance had so revolted Leta. With a single exception, all the guests, both men and women, were aroused to the point of frenzy.

Sarkin heard the shrieking and yelling and stepped in annoyance from his study. He saw supposedly intelligent human beings running around madly to escape from creatures that couldn't harm them, throwing furniture and racing frantically for safety whenever one of the equally frightened beasts headed in their direction.

He watched in silence and when the last little invader had made its escape stepped thoughtfully back into the study.

A few days later the apparatus was ready. He had learned from the experience of Jugas and conducted his broadcasts from a relay station, so that if the Giants traced the waves back and attempted to kill him, as they had eventually killed Jugas, he would not be so easily victimized. Then he began to send out his messages.

On the second day he received a reply. The Giant mentality was evidently geared to lower speed than his own and the questions and answers dragged out over the course of several days. There was a considerable amount of repetition, as both individuals went back again and again over points which had not been made clear. But in essentials, the conversation was as follows:

Sarkin: My name is Sarkin. I am speaking unofficially but in case we can arrive at any sort of agreement I am prepared to transmit our conclusions to my government, which I am sure will give them careful consideration. (That ought to impress him, thought Sarkin. I must sound like a born diplomat.)

Giant: We are not interested in reaching agreement on any subject.

Sarkin: Why are you conducting a war of extermination against us?

Giant: That is our business.

Sarkin: We have done you no harm whatever. Isn't it absurd to spend so much energy trying to kill us?

Giant: (No answer.)

Sarkin: Do you mean that we *have* done you harm?

(Again no answer. There must be a question of military secrecy involved here, thought Sarkin, and a glow of pleasure swept through him. We must be more dangerous to them than we have realized.)

Sarkin: If we have done you any harm it has been unintentional. Are you allergic to us?

Giant: No.

Sarkin: If it's anything else we can come to an agreement to eliminate features of our activities that you don't like.

Giant: Only one sort of agreement is possible. You must surrender unconditionally and leave the planet.

Sarkin: That is out of the question.

Giant: Then so is agreement.

Sarkin: Tell us what harm we have done you. We may be able to put a stop to it.

Giant: (No answer.)

Sarkin: Your proposition is absurd. Do you kill merely for the lust of killing? Or is it because you think we cannot hit back? We prefer peace but we are not defenseless, despite your superiority in size. We are preparing gases and explosives of our own. We shall soon carry the war to you. Peace would benefit you as much as it would us. (I may be exaggerating slightly, thought Sarkin, but not much. In another ten years we'll certainly be able to hit back effectively with a few gases and explosives of our own.)

Giant: (No answer.)

Sarkin: Do all your race think as you do?

Giant: (No answer.)

Sarkin: You leave us no choice. If you really intend to exterminate us—

At this point the conversation came to an abrupt end. The Giants had located his relay sender and now broke in on it. Sarkin had the satisfaction of hearing, on his observer set, the explosion that drew a cry of pain from the leading Giant and wrecked the relay as well.

He had learned from the unfortunate experience of Jugas. They had tried to trap him, and had been trapped themselves, thus receiving very convincing evidence that he was not boasting overmuch when he talked of his own race's ability to hit back.

LATER he talked over the situation with Leta. She had been on a round of museums, plays and poetry readings but the pleasure of these diversions palled rapidly when she learned that the Giants had their eyes out especially for places of amusement, knowing that in them they could bag large numbers of victims in a comparatively defenseless condition.

"Something will have to be done," said Leta firmly. "How do you expect actors to do their best when their performance is always liable to be interrupted by some one's stepping on them?"

"That's not the point," observed Sarkin. "The question is, why do they hate us? Why do they try to kill us off?"

"Does there have to be a reason?"

"Of course there does. The Giants are intelligent."

"Does there have to be an *intelligent* reason? It may be just a whim."

Sarkin bit his lip. "You're right, it doesn't have to be intelligent. But don't judge the Giants by some of the people you've been seeing. They're not creatures of whim."

"I don't know what you mean by that," complained Leta. "Good Heavens, Sarkin, I haven't understood half the poetry I've been hearing the past few days. Don't you start talking like a poet."

"All right. What I mean is that the Giants are motivated not by whim, which is something trivial, but by a deep-seated emotional reason. Leta, why do you hate those little creatures that have been making you scream every now and then?"

"I don't know whether I can explain or not. They're so repulsive—"

"That's the point. Why?"

She said helplessly, "How can any one answer a question like that? Why do I love you? Why did I hate Gorson Manders—"

"Never mind that," said Sarkin in haste. "I don't want to discuss the men you knew before we were married. I'll merely grant you that it's a fascinating topic and get back to the original subject. We have to find those reasons."

"Well, I can tell you that nothing on Earth—and I'm not using the name of our ancestral Mother Planet in vain, Sarkin—nothing would have made me like Gorson. Just as nothing would make me like those furry little creatures."

"You dislike them because they're furry?"

"Not only that. It's the way they creep. At the thought of one of them touching me—ugh!"

"Your skin crawls?"

"Exactly. They're—they're vermin."

Sarkin's eyes glittered at the word. "And *we* are vermin to the Giants. That must be it."

"But that's absurd. *We're* not repulsive!"

"Not to each other, just as the furry creatures aren't repulsive to each other. But our smooth skin may be repulsive to the Giants—their own furriness and the ideas they've formed that smooth skin is ugly may have conditioned them to that."

"Then again they're three-legged and our two-legged gait may seem to them an unpleasant, hopping mode of locomotion. To them our voices may be unpleasant squeaks. And when you add to all that the fact that we are as intelligent as they are and potentially harmful because of our intelligence—perhaps they have reason enough to hate us."

"But if that's so—what can we do about their silly ideas?"

"Nothing. I'm afraid. It's possible to treat our own individuals to rid them of the fear of small creatures. But we're in no position to make the Giants lose their fear of us."

"If they really have any fear."

"I think I'm right. But I'll investigate further, Leta."

Further investigation, as Sarkin had expected, confirmed his theory. He found references in old books to the fears that had afflicted human beings while still on Earth. Many had been repelled by mice, spiders, insects, crustaceans, snails, worms—the list was long and inclusive. Elephants had been repelled by mice.

Even on the other planets native animals and plants had aroused repulsions. One inoffensive plant had been rendered extinct merely because it resembled a slug and thus offended the sensibilities of the first colonists on Venus.

Moreover there was no way of removing these repulsions without extensive psychological treatment and there was no opportunity to convince the Giants that such treatment would be useful. The war was

inevitably on to the death.

IT was only a few days after Sarkin had reached this conclusion that the Giants confirmed it. They opened a campaign of extermination beside which all previous ones were pale and harmless.

They used poisonous and repellent chemicals, they baited traps, they *systematically* searched out and destroyed the larger dwelling places, even at the cost of ruining some of their own buildings. They hunted down the hapless victims with their tame animals. In certain localities the death rates mounted alarmingly.

At the Special Assembly called to deal with the new menace Sarkin had the opportunity to express the conclusions at which he had arrived. Strangely enough it was his friend Norick who challenged the value of these conclusions.

"Granted that they hate us," said Norick, "it would be absurd to suppose that so intelligent a race is afflicted with so irrational a fear. Moreover Sarkin's theory doesn't take us a step further in devising methods to combat the danger."

"I should like to differ," observed Sarkin mildly. "If I am correct—and I think I am—my theory offers a very simple method of routing the Giants. We can turn their own irrational fears against them. Of course a short training period may be necessary and experience will doubtless teach us many improvements. But there is a method of attack against the Giants which I am willing to apply in person."

"You are willing," asked Norick incredulously, "to seek out the Giants and attack them?"

"Exactly."

A delegate arose and shouted, "Mr. Chairman, the honorable delegate is obviously insane. I suggest that he be removed by the Sergeant-at-Arms and that a discussion of logically possible methods be continued."

To Sarkin's regret that set off the kind of uproar which might have been expected. It was not until evening that he was able to explain his plan. And it was not until a week later, after rigorous training, that he and one of the younger and more reckless delegates formed an experimental team to attack the Giants.

Armed with no more than the usual weapons, which were capable at most of inflicting a painful sting on their gigantic enemies, they invaded no less a gathering than a Giant Repertory Theatre. The Giants had concentrated on attacking their own places of amusement, thought Sarkin, and turnabout was only fair play.

There were five of the great creatures in a room, two of them seated at a table, and during the thunderous roll of presumably sparkling wit Sarkin and his companion managed to reach the floor beneath the table itself. Sarkin's heart was in his mouth for fear that one of the actors or a member of the audience might notice him but attention was centered too intently on the play. At a critical moment, when his companion gave him the signal, he took the plunge.

He had climbed up the table leg, using a specially prepared scaling ladder and now he showed himself on the flat surface of the table. Shouting at the top of his voice to draw every one's attention, he yelled, "Here I am! Come and get me!"

The words he used meant nothing to them but his shrill squeak brought the thunderous dialogue to an abrupt stop. One furry Giant hand rose and remained suspended in the air because the individual to whom it belonged hesitated to dirty himself with the squashed corpse of the furless creature.

Sarkin had counted on that. He had counted too on second thought, and the attempt to squash him with a book. As the great volume started its descent he leaped aside, fired into the back of the hand that held it, then sprang after the missile.

He raced over the Giant's furry skin, feeling the monster tremble, his ears deafened by the roar of repulsion. The man's fellow were shrinking away from him and at that moment, Sarkin's companion ran up the leg of another.

The place became an immense madhouse as members of the audience stampeded in panic for the exits. Guards ran out upon the stage and one of them shot wildly, wounding an actor. When Sarkin and his companion finally leaped to the ground once more and made their escape their exit went unnoticed.

One of the Giants had discarded his clothes in full view of the unheeding audience and was roaring wildly as his fellows sprayed him with what looked to Sarkin like a great green waterfall, which he knew contained a human-repellent chemical.

The next day the whole theatre was abandoned. "They think it's infested with humans," reported Sarkin to his own Military Council with grim satisfaction.

From then on the campaign swung into high speed. Volunteers were trained by the thousands and sent out in teams to demoralize the Giants. Not all of them had Sarkin's luck. In fact, during the third week of the campaign, overconfidence led to extremely high casualties but the Giants were in a state of panic and the Military Council gave them no chance to recover.

BY the end of a month they had been driven out of the city proper. They sent huge planes over the ground with radioactives but the Council had been prepared for that and had already ordered the evacuation of the city.

A few days after the bombing an advance guard managed to board a supply truck and reach a Giant camp unobserved. Using the tactics Sarkin had devised they drove the Giants out of the air base, then from the rest of the camp.

In no more than four months the campaign was over. The Giants, evacuating by means of great passenger vessels, abandoned the planet. It took them another month to do so and whenever they showed any signs of lagging the Council would stimulate them a bit—but it was clear that they knew themselves defeated. They made no attempt to put up a last-ditch flight.

Some time later, when they no longer went in fear of the sudden roar of thunder from Giant throats or the great shadows from Giant footsteps, Leta faced her husband across the breakfast table and said, "My hero!"

There was an amused smile on her face as she said it but deep down she was immensely proud of him and Sarkin felt her pride. He knew that she wouldn't even have minded if he wore his medals and one of these days he thought he'd surprise her by spreading them over his chest when he took her to a concert.

But at the moment he contented himself with saying, "You inspired me, dear. You gave me the clue when you used the word, 'vermin.' "

"And the vermin drove their enemies from the planet."

"Not at all. The vermin were the ones who were driven."

Leta's pretty eyebrows lifted. "Surely the Giants were too large to fall into that category."

"It isn't a matter of size," said Sarkin. "Back in primitive days, on Earth the Mother Planet, our proto-ancestors used a term 'varmint,' a variation of the more general 'vermin.' They applied it to quite large animals."

"Who am I?" asked Leta, "to argue with a man who's studied history?"

"A very pretty woman," he retorted as she expected. "And you've studied more important things than history. However—a varmint was a creature that destroyed. That's why I consider the Giants vermin."

"We were willing to live and let live. They weren't. And in their irrational hatred they wanted to exterminate every living thing in the city outside of themselves. Remember their radioactive clouds?"

Leta nodded.

"People who go in for wholesale extermination have no rights. And that's something for us to remember too. We are justified in killing for the sake of preserving the human race. We have no justification for killing because of blind hatred."

"Of course not," said Leta.

"I'm glad you agree with me. Look at this."

LETA stared in horrified surprise at the thing in his hand and screamed. "Keep it *away* from me. *Step on it!*"

"I'll do nothing of the kind. I'll step away from you so that you may be sure it won't bite or make faces at you. I want you to look at it. Is it really so repulsive?"



Leta looked. She saw a six-legged creature about three inches long. It had a short tail and a round face with small blue markings around the eyes that made it seem to be wearing spectacles with blue lenses.

She said, "*Ugh!*"

"Ugh yourself. It's a very cute animal. It's exceedingly tame and dying to be friends. Watch."

He held his hand flat and the creature ran up one sleeve, around his neck and down his other sleeve. When it reached his other hand it chirped interrogatively.

Leta laughed hesitantly.

"Now, honestly, what are you afraid of?"

"I don't know. It's—"

"Nothing of the kind. I've trapped several in my laboratory, made friends with them and studied them. I can't imagine a better and more useful creature to have around the house. It kills small food-spoiling predators, it warns of poison gases, it does a great many other useful things.

"I don't expect you to conquer your fear of it overnight. But get used to the idea that it's a friend. Because it's going to be fashionable. A month from now no home will be complete without one for a pet."

"Honest?" said Leta "It'll really be fashionable?"

Sarkin nodded. A half hour later Leta was letting the friendly little creature eat out of her hand while Sarkin wondered whether those great enemies of theirs, the Giants, had found a home half as good as the one from which their own stupidity had driven them.

"When they might have had us eating out of *their* hands!" he thought with an amusement he didn't consider it advisable to share with Leta.