

Party of the Two Parts

William Tenn

GALACTOGRAM FROM STELLAR SERGEANT O-DIK-VEH, COMMANDER OF OUTLYING PATROL OFFICE 1001625, TO HEADQUARTERS DESK SERGEANT HOY-VEH-CHALT, GA-LACTIC PATROL HEADQUARTERS ON VEGA XXI—(PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS TO BE TRANSMITTED AS PERSONAL, NOT OFFICIAL, MESSAGE AND AS SUCH WILL BE CHARGED THE USUAL HYPERSPACE RATES)

My Dear Hoy:

I am deeply sorry to trouble you again, but, Hoy, am I in a jam! Once more, it's not something that I did wrong, but something I didn't do right—what the Old One is sure to wheeze is "a patent dereliction of obvious duty." And since I'm positive he'll be just as confused as I, once the prisoners I'm sending on by slow light-transport arrive (when he reads the official report that I drew up and am transmitting with them, I can see him dropping an even dozen of his jaws), I can only hope that this advance message will give you enough time to consult the best legal minds in Vegan Headquarters and get some sort of solution worked out.

If there's any kind of solution available by the time he reads my report, the Old One won't be nearly as angry at my dumping the problem on his lap. But I have an uneasy, persistent fear that Headquarters is going to get as snarled up in this one as my own office. If it does, the Old One is likely to remember what happened in Out-lying Patrol Office 1001625 the last time—and then, Hoy, you will be short one spore-cousin.

It's a dirty business all around, a real dirty business. I use the phrase advisedly. In the sense of *obscene*, if you follow me.

As you've no doubt suspected by now, most of the trouble has to do with that damp and irritating third planet of Sol, the one that many of its inhabitants call Earth. Those damned chattering bipeds cause me more sleeplessness than any other species in my sector. Sufficiently advanced technologically to be almost at Stage 15—self-devel-oped interplanetary travel—they are still centuries away from the usually concur-rent Stage 15A—friendly contact by the galactic civilization.

They are, therefore, still in Secretly Supervised Status, which means that I have to maintain a staff of about two hundred agents on their planet, all encased in clumsy and uncomfortable protoplasmic disguises, to prevent them from blowing their silly selves up before the arrival of their spiritual millennium.

On top of everything, their solar system only has nine planets, which means that my permanent headquarters office can't get any farther away from Sol than the planet they call Pluto, a world whose winters are bearable, but whose summers are unspeak-ably hot. I tell you, Hoy, the life of a stellar sergeant isn't all *gloor* and *skubbets*, no matter what Rear Echelon says.

In all honesty, though, I should admit that the difficulty did not originate on Sol III this time. Ever since their unexpected and uncalled-for development of nuclear fission, which, as you know, cost me a promotion, I've doubled the number of un-dercover operatives on the planet and given them stern warning to report the slight-est technological spurt immediately. I doubt that these humans could invent so much as an elementary time-machine now, without my knowing of it well in advance.

No, this time it all started on Rugh VI, the world known to those who live on it as Gtet. If you consult your atlas, Hoy, you'll find Rugh is a fair-sized yellow dwarf star on the outskirts of the galaxy, and Gtet an extremely insignificant planet which has only recently achieved the status of Stage 19—primary interstellar citizenship.

The Gtetans are a modified amoeboid race who manufacture a fair brand of *ashkebac*, which they

export to their neighbors on Rugh IX and XII. They are a highly individualistic people and still experience many frictions living in a centralized society. Despite several centuries of advanced civilization, most Gtetans look upon the Law as a de-lightful problem in circumvention rather than as a way of life.

An ideal combination with my bipeds of Earth, eh?

It seems that a certain L'payr was one of the worst troublemakers on Gtet. He had committed almost every crime and broken almost every law. On a planet where fully one-fourth of the population is regularly undergoing penal rehabilitation, L'payr was still considered something quite special. A current Gtetan saying, I understand, puts it, "You're like L'payr, fellow—you don't know *when* to stop!"

Nonetheless, L'payr had reached the point where it was highly important that he did stop. He had been arrested and convicted for a total of 2,342 felonies, just one short of the 2,343 felonies which, on Gtet, make one a habitual criminal and, therefore, subject to life imprisonment. He made a valiant effort to retire from public life and devote himself to contemplation and good works but it was too late. Almost against his will, as he insisted to me under examination in my office, he found his mind turning to foul deeds left undone, illegalities as yet unperpetrated.

And so one day, quite casually—hardly noticing, as it were—he committed another major crime. But this one was so ineffably ugly, involving an offense against the moral code as well as civil legislation, that the entire community turned against L'payr.

He was caught selling pornography to juvenile Gtetans.

The indulgence that a celebrity may enjoy turned to wrath and utter contempt. Even the Gtetan Protective Association of Two Thousand Time Losers refused to raise funds for his bail. As his trial approached, it became obvious to L'payr that he was in for it. His only hope lay in flight.

He pulled the most spectacular coup of his career—he broke out of the hermetically sealed vault in which he was being guarded around the clock (how he did this, he consistently refused to tell me up to the time of his lamented demise or whatever you want to call it) and escaped to the spaceport near the prison. There, he managed to steal aboard the pride of the Gtetan merchant fleet, a newly developed interstellar ship equipped with two-throttle hyperspace drive.

This ship was empty, waiting for a crew to take it out on its maiden run.

Somehow, in the few hours at his disposal before his escape was known, L'payr figured out the controls of the craft and managed to lift it off Gtet and into hyper-space. He had no idea at this time that, since the ship was an experimental model, it was equipped with a transmitting device that kept the spaceport informed of its location.

Thus, though they lacked the facilities to pursue him, the Gtetan police always knew exactly where he was. A few hundred amoeboid vigilantes did start after him in old-fashioned, normal-drive ships, but after a month or so of long and fatiguing interstellar travel at one-hundredth his speed, they gave up and returned home.

For his hideout, L'payr wanted a primitive and unimportant corner of the galaxy. The region around Sol was ideal. He materialized out of hyperspace about halfway between the third and fourth planets. But he did it very clumsily (after all, Hoy, the best minds of his race are just beginning to understand the two-throttle drive) and lost all of his fuel in the process. He barely managed to reach Earth and come down.

The landing was effected at night and with all drives closed, so that no one on the planet saw it. Because living conditions on Earth are so different from Gtet, L'payr knew that his mobility would be very limited. His one hope was to get help from the inhabitants. He had to pick a spot where possible contacts would be at maximum and yet accidental discovery of his ship would be at minimum. He chose an empty lot in the suburbs of Chicago and quickly dug his ship in.

Meanwhile, the Gtetan police communicated with me as the local commanding officer of the Galactic

Patrol. They told me where L'payr was hidden and demanded extradition. I pointed out that, as yet, I lacked jurisdiction, since no crime of an *in-terstellar* nature had been committed. The stealing of the ship had been done on his home planet—it had not occurred in deep space. If, however, he broke any galactic law while he was on Earth, committed any breach of the peace, no matter how slight...

"How about that?" the Gtetan police asked me over the interstellar radio. "Earth is on Secretly Supervised Status, as we understand it. It is illegal to expose it to superior civilizations. Isn't L'payr landing there in a two-throttle hyperspace-drive ship enough of a misdemeanor to entitle you to pick him up?"

"Not by itself," I replied. "The ship would have to be seen and understood for what it was by a resident of the planet. From what we here can tell, no such observation was made. And so long as he stays in hiding, doesn't tell any human about us and refrains from adding to the technological momentum of Earth, L'payr's galactic citizenship has to be respected. I have no legal basis for an arrest."

Well, the Gtetans grumbled about what were they paying the star tax for, anyway, but they saw my point. They warned me, though, about L'payr—sooner or later his criminal impulses would assert themselves. He was in an impossible position, they insisted. In order to get the fuel necessary to leave Earth before his supplies ran out, he'd have to commit some felony or other—and as soon as he did so and was arrested, they wanted their extradition request honored.

"The filthy, evil-minded old pervert," I heard the police chief mutter as he clicked off

I don't have to tell you how I felt, Hoy. A brilliant, imaginative amoeboid criminal at large on a planet as volatile culturally as Earth! I notified all our agents in North America to be on the alert and settled back to wait it out with prayerfully knotted tentacles.

L'payr had listened to most of this conversation over his own ship's receiver. Natu-rally, the first thing he did was to remove the directional device which had enabled the Gtetan police to locate him. Then, as soon as it was dark again, he managed, with what must have been enormous difficulty, to transport himself and his little ship to another area of the city. He did this, too, without being observed.

He made his base in a slum tenement neighborhood that had been condemned to make way for a new housing project and therefore was practically untenanted. Then he settled back to consider his problem.

Because, Hoy, he had a problem.

He didn't want to get in any trouble with the Patrol, but if he didn't get his pseudo-pods on a substantial amount of fuel very soon, he'd be a dead amoeboid. Not only did he need the fuel to get off Earth, but the converters—which, on this rather primitive Gtetan vessel, changed waste matter back into usable air and food—would be stop-ping very soon if they weren't stoked up, too.

His time was limited, his resources almost non-existent. The spacesuits with which the ship was furnished, while cleverly enough constructed and able to satisfy the peculiar requirements of an entity of constantly fluctuating format, had not been designed for so primitive a planet as Earth. They would not operate too effectively for long periods away from the ship.

He knew that my OP office had been apprised of his landing and that we were just waiting for some infraction of even the most obscure minor law. Then we'd pounce—and, after the usual diplomatic formalities, he'd be on his way back to Gtet, for a nine-throttle Patrol ship could catch him easily. It was obvious that he couldn't do as he had originally planned—make a fast raid on some human supply center and collect whatever stuff he needed.

His hope was to make a trade. He'd have to find a human with whom he could deal and offer something that, to this particular human in any case, was worth the quantity of fuel L'payr's ship needed to take him to a less policed corner of the Cosmos. But almost everything on the ship was essential to its functioning. And L'payr had to make his trade without (1) giving away the existence and nature of the

galactic civi-lization, or (2) providing the inhabitants of Earth with any technological stimulus.

L'payr later said that he thought about the problem until his nucleus was a mass of corrugations. He went over the ship, stem to stern, again and again, but everything a human might consider acceptable was either too useful or too revealing. And then, just as he was about to give up, he found it.

The materials he needed were those with which he had committed his last crime!

According to Gtetan law, you see, Hoy, all evidence pertaining to a given felony is retained by the accused until the time of his trial. There are very complicated reasons for this, among them the Gtetan juridical concept that every prisoner is *known* to be guilty until he manages, with the aid of lies, loopholes and brilliant legalisms, to convince a hard-boiled and cynical jury of his peers that they should, in spite of their knowledge to the contrary, declare him innocent. Since the burden of the proof rests with the prisoner, the evidence does likewise. And L'payr, examining this evidence, decided that he was in business.

What he needed now was a customer. Not only someone who wanted to buy what he had to sell, but a customer who had available the fuel he needed. And in the neigh-borhood which was now his base of operations, customers of this sort were rare.

Being Stage 19, the Gtetans are capable of the more primitive forms of telepathy—only at extremely short ranges, of course, and for relatively brief periods of time. So, aware that my secret agents had already begun to look for him and that, when they found him, his freedom of action would be even more circumscribed, L'payr desperately began to comb through the minds of any terrestrials within three blocks of his hideout.

Days went by. He scuttled from mind to mind like an insect looking for a hole in a collector's jar. He was forced to shut the ship's converter down to one-half operation, then to one-third. Since this cut his supply of food correspondingly, he began to hunger. For lack of activity, his contractile vacuole dwindled to the size of a pinpoint. Even his endoplasm lost the turgidity of the healthy amoeboid and became dangerously thin and transparent.

And then one night, when he had about determined to take his chances and steal the fuel he needed, his thoughts ricocheted off the brain of a passerby, came back unbelievably, examined further and were ecstatically convinced. A human who not only could supply his needs, but also, and more important, might be in the market for Gtetan pornography!

In other words, Mr. Osborne Blatch.

This elderly teacher of adolescent terrestrials insisted throughout all my interro-gations that, to the best of his knowledge, no mental force was used upon him. It seems that he lived in a new apartment house on the other side of the torn-down tenement area and customarily walked in a wide arc around the rubble because of the large number of inferior and belligerent human types which infested the district. On this particular night, a teachers' meeting at his high school having detained him, he was late for supper and decided, as he had once or twice before, to take a short cut. He claims that the decision to take a short cut was his own.

Osborne Blatch says that he was striding along jauntily, making believe his um-brella was a malacca cane, when he seemed to hear a voice. He says that, even at first hearing, he used the word "seemed" to himself because, while the voice definitely had inflection and tone, it was somehow completely devoid of volume.

The voice said, "Hey, bud! C'mere!"

He turned around curiously and surveyed the rubble to his right. All that was left of the building that had once been there was the lower half of the front entrance. Since everything else around it was completely flat, he saw no place where a man could be standing.

But as he looked, he heard the voice again. It sounded greasily conspiratorial and slightly impatient.

"C'mere, bud. *C'mere!*"

"What—er—what *is* it, sir?" he asked in a cautiously well-bred way, moving closer and peering in the direction of the voice. The bright street light behind him, he said, improved his courage as did the solid quality of the very heavy old-fashioned um-brella he was carrying.

"C'mere. I got somp'n to show you. C'mon!"

Stepping carefully over loose brick and ancient garbage, Mr. Blatch came to a small hollow at one side of the ruined entrance. And filling it was L'payr or, as he seemed at first glance to the human, a small, splashy puddle of purple liquid.

I ought to point out now, Hoy—and the affidavits I'm sending along will substantiate it—that at no time did Mr. Blatch recognize the viscous garment for a spacesuit, nor did he ever see the Gtetan ship which L'payr had hidden in the rubble behind him in its completely tenuous hyperspatial state.

Though the man, having a good imagination and a resilient mind, immediately realized that the creature before him must be extraterrestrial, he lacked overt technological evidence to this effect, as well as to the nature and existence of our specific galactic civilization. Thus, here at least, there was no punishable violation of Inter-stellar Statute 2,607,193, Amendments 126 through 509.

"What do you have to show me?" Mr. Blatch asked courteously, staring down at the purple puddle. "And where, may I ask, are you from? Mars? Venus?"

"Listen, bud, y'know what's good for ya, y'don't ast such questions. Look, I got somep'n for ya. Hot stuff. *Real* hot!"

Mr. Blatch's mind, no longer fearful of having its owner assaulted and robbed by the neighborhood tough it had originally visualized, spun off to a relevant memory, years old, of a trip abroad. There had been that alley in Paris and the ratty little French-man in a torn sweater...

"What would that be?" he asked.

A pause now, while L'payr absorbed new impressions.

"Ah-h-h," said the voice from the puddle. "I 'ave somezing to show M'sieu zat M'sieu weel like vairry much. If M'sieu weel come a leetle closair?"

M'sieu, we are to understand, came a leetle closair. Then the puddle heaved up in the middle, reaching out a pseudopod that held flat, square objects, and telepathed hoarsely, "Ere, M'sieu. Feelthy peekshures."

Although taken more than a little aback, Blatch merely raised both eyebrows in-terrogatively and said, "Ah? Well, well!"

He shifted the umbrella to his left hand and, taking the pictures as they were given to him, one at a time, examined each a few steps away from L'payr, where the light of the street lamp was stronger.

When all the evidence arrives, you will be able to see for yourself, Roy, what they were like. Cheap prints, calculated to excite the grossest amoeboid passions. The Gtetans, as you may have heard, reproduce by simple asexual fission, but only in the presence of saline solution—sodium chloride is comparatively rare on their world.

The first photograph showed a naked ameba, fat and replete with food vacuoles, splashing lazily and formlessly at the bottom of a metal tank in the completely re-laxed state that precedes reproducing.

The second was like the first, except that a trickle of salt water had begun down one side of the tank and a few pseudopods had lifted toward it inquiringly. To leave noth-ing to the imagination, a sketch of the sodium chloride molecule had been superim-posed on the upper right corner of the photograph.

In the third picture, the Gtetan was ecstatically awash in the saline solution, its body distended to maximum, dozens of pseudopods thrust out, throbbing. Most of the chromatin had become concentrated in chromosomes about the equator of the nucleus. To an ameba, this was easily the most exciting photograph in the collection.

The fourth showed the nucleus becoming indented between the two sets of sibling chromosomes—while, in the fifth, with the division completed and the two nuclei at opposite ends of the reproducing individual, the entire cytoplasmic body had begun to undergo constriction about its middle. In the sixth, the two resultant Gtetans were emerging with passion-satisfied languor from the tank of salt water.

As a measure of L'payr's depravity, let me pass on to you what the Gtetan police told me. Not only was he peddling the stuff to amoeboid minors, but they believed that he had taken the photographs himself and that the model had been his own brother—or should I say sister? His own one and only sibling, possibly? This case has many, many confusing aspects.

Blatch returned the last picture to L'payr and said, "Yes, I am interested in buying the group. How much?"

The Gtetan named his price in terms of the requisite compounds available in the chemistry laboratory of the high school where Blatch taught. He explained exactly how he wanted them to be prepared and warned Blatch to tell nobody of L'payr's existence.

"Uzzerwise, when M'sieu gets 'ere tomorrow night, ze peekshures weel be gone, I weel be gone—and M'sieu weel have nozzing to show for his trouble. *Comprenez?*"

Osborne Blatch seems to have had very little trouble in obtaining and preparing the stuff for which L'payr had bargained. He said that, by the standards of his community, it was a minute quantity and extremely inexpensive. Also, as he had scrupulously always done in the past when using school supplies for his own experiments, he reimbursed the laboratory out of his own pocket. But he does admit that the photographs were only a small part of what he hoped to get out of the amoeboid. He expected, once a sound business arrangement had been established, to find out from which part of the Solar System the visitor had come, what his world was like and similar matters of understandable interest to a creature whose civilization is in the late phases of Secretly Supervised Status.

Once the exchange had been effected, however, L'payr tricked him. The Gtetan told Blatch to return on the *next* night when, his time being more free, they could discuss the state of the Universe at leisure. And, of course, as soon as the Earthman had left with the photographs, L'payr jammed the fuel into his converters, made the necessary sub-nuclear rearrangements in its atomic structure and, with the hyperspace-drive once more operating under full power, took off like a *rilg* out of *Gowkuldady*.

As far as we can determine, Blatch received the deception philosophically. After all, he still had the pictures.

When my OP office was informed that L'payr had left Earth in the direction of the Hercules Cluster M13, without leaving any discernible ripple in terrestrial law or technology behind him, we all relaxed gratefully. The case was removed from **TOP PRIORITY—FULL ATTENTION ALL PERSONNEL** rating and placed in the **PENDING LATENT EFFECTS** category.

As is usual, I dropped the matter myself and gave full charge of the follow-up to my regent and representative on Earth, Stellar Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh. A tracer beam was put on L'payr's rapidly receding ship and I was free to devote my attention once more to my basic problem—delaying the development of interplanetary travel until the various human societies had matured to the requisite higher level.

Thus, six Earth months later, when the case broke wide open, Pah-Chi-Luh handled it himself and didn't bother me until the complications became overwhelming. I know this doesn't absolve me—I have ultimate responsibility for everything that transpires in my Outlying Patrol District. But between relatives, Hoy, I am mentioning these facts to show that I was not completely clumsy in the situation and that a little help from you and the rest of the family, when the case reaches the Old One in Galactic Headquarters, would not merely be charity for a one-headed oafish cousin.

As a matter of fact, I and most of my office were involved in a very complex problem. A Moslem mystic, living in Saudi Arabia, had attempted to heal the ancient schism that exists in his religion between the Shiite and Sunnite sects, by communing with the departed spirits of Mohammed's son-in-law, Ali, the patron of the first group, and Abu Bekr, the Prophet's father-in-law and founder of the Sunnite dynasty. The object of the mediumistic excursion was to effect some sort of arbitration agreement in Paradise between the two feuding ghosts that would determine who should rightfully have been Mohammed's successor and the first caliph of Mecca.

Nothing is simple on Earth. In the course of this laudable probe of the hereafter, the earnest young mystic accidentally achieved telepathic contact with a Stage 9 civilization of disembodied intellects on Ganymede, the largest satellite of the planet Jupiter. Well, you can imagine! Tremendous uproar on Ganymede and in Saudi Arabia, pilgrims in both places flocking to see the individuals on either end of the telepathic connection, peculiar and magnificent miracles being wrought daily. A mess!

And my office feverishly working overtime to keep the whole affair simple and religious, trying to prevent it from splashing over into awareness of the more rational beings in each community! It's an axiom of Outlying Patrol Offices that nothing will stimulate space travel among backward peoples faster than definite knowledge of the existence of intelligent celestial neighbors. Frankly, if Pah-Chi-Luh had come to me right then, blathering of Gtetan pornography in human high-school textbooks, I'd probably have bitten his heads off.

He'd discovered the textbooks in the course of routine duties as an investigator for a United States Congressional Committee—his disguised status for the last decade or so, and one which had proved particularly valuable in the various delaying actions we had been surreptitiously fighting on the continent of North America. There was this newly published biology book, written for use in the secondary schools, which had received extremely favorable comment from outstanding scholars in the universities. Naturally, the committee ordered a copy of the text and suggested that its investigator look through it.

Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh turned a few pages and found himself staring at the very pornographic pictures he'd heard about at the briefing session six months before—published, available to everyone on Earth, and especially to minors! He told me afterward, brokenly, that in that instant all he saw was a brazen repetition of L'payr's ugly crime on his home planet.

He blasted out a galaxy-wide alarm for the Gtetan.

L'payr had begun life anew as an *ashkebac* craftsman on a small, out-of-the-way, mildly civilized world. Living carefully within the law, he had prospered and, at the time of his arrest, had become sufficiently conventional—and, incidentally, fat—to think of raising a respectable family. Not much—just two of him. If things continued to go well, he might consider multiple fission in the future.

He was indignant when he was arrested and carried off to the detention cell on Pluto, pending the arrival of an extradition party from Gtet.

"By what right do you disturb a peace-loving artisan in the quiet pursuit of his trade?" he challenged. "I demand immediate unconditional release, a full apology and restitution for loss of income as well as the embarrassment caused to my person and ego. Your superiors will hear of this! False arrest of a galactic citizen can be a very serious matter!"

"No doubt," Stellar Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh retorted, still quite equable, you see. "But the public dissemination of recognized pornography is even more serious. As a crime, we consider it on a level with—"

"What pornography?"

My assistant said he stared at L'payr for a long time through the transparent cell wall, marveling at the creature's effrontery. All the same, he began to feel a certain disquiet. He had never before encountered such complete self-assurance in the face of a perfect structure of criminal evidence.

"You know very well what pornography. Here—examine it for yourself. This is only one copy out of

20,000 distributed all over the United States of North America for the specific use of human adolescents." He dematerialized the biology text and passed it through the wall.

L'payr glanced at the pictures. "Bad reproduction," he commented. "Those humans still have a long way to go in many respects. However, they do display a pleasing technical precocity. But why show this to me? Surely, you don't think *I* have anything to do with it?"

Pah-Chi-Luh says the Gtetan seemed intensely puzzled, yet gently patient, as if he were trying to unravel the hysterical gibberings of an idiot child.

"Do you deny it?"

"What in the Universe is there to deny? Let me see." He turned to the title page. "This seems to be *A First Book in Biology* by one Osborne Blatch and one Nicodemus P. Smith. You haven't mistaken me for either Blatch or Smith, have you? My name is L'payr, not Osborne L'payr, nor even Nicodemus P. L'payr. Just plain, old, everyday, simple L'payr. No more, no less. I come from Gtet, which is the sixth planet of—"

"I am fully aware of Gtet's astrographic location," Pah-Chi-Luh informed him coldly. "Also, that you were on Earth six of their months ago. And that, at the time, you completed a transaction with this Osborne Blatch, whereby you got the fuel you needed to leave the planet, while Blatch obtained the set of pictures that were later used as illustrations in that textbook. Our undercover organization on Earth functions very efficiently, as you can see. We have labeled the book Exhibit A."

"An ingenious designation," said the Gtetan admiringly. "Exhibit A! With so much to choose from, you picked the one that sounds just right. My compliments." He was, you will understand, Hoy, in his element—he was dealing with a police official on an abstruse legal point. L'payr's entire brilliant criminal past on a law-despising world had prepared him for this moment. Pah-Chi-Luh's mental orientation, however, had for a long time now been chiefly in the direction of espionage and *sub rosa* cultural manipulation. He was totally unprepared for the orgy of judicial quibbles that was about to envelop him. In all fairness to him, let me admit that I might not have done any better under those circumstances and neither, for that matter, might you—nor the Old One himself!

L'payr pointed out, "All I did was to sell a set of artistic studies to one Osborne Blatch. What *he* did with it afterward surely does not concern me. If I sell a weapon of approved technological backwardness to an Earthman—a flint fist-axe, say, or a cauldron for pouring boiling oil upon the stormers of walled cities—and he uses the weapon to dispatch one of his fellow primitives, am I culpable? Not the way I read the existing statutes of the Galactic Federation, my friend. Now suppose you reimburse me for my time and trouble and put me on a fast ship bound for my place of business."

Around and around they went. Dozens of times, Pah-Chi-Luh, going frantically through the Pluto Headquarters law library, would come up with a nasty little wrinkle of an ordinance, only to have L'payr point out that the latest interpretation of the Supreme Council put him wholly in the clear. I can myself vouch for the fact that the Gtetans seem to enjoy total recall of all judicial history.

"But you *do* admit selling pornography yourself to the Earthman Osborne Blatch?" the stellar corporal bellowed at last.

"Pornography, pornography," L'payr mused. "That would be defined as cheaply exciting lewdness, falsely titillating obscenity. Correct?"

"Of course!"

"Well, Corporal, let me ask you a question. You saw those pictures. Did you find them exciting or titillating?"

"Certainly not. But I don't happen to be a Gtetan amoeboid."

"Neither," L'payr countered quietly, "is Osborne Blatch."

I do think Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh might have found some sensible way out of the dilemma if the

extradition party had not just then arrived from Gtet on the special Patrol ship which had been sent for it. He now found himself confronted with six more magnificently argumentative ameboids, numbering among them some of the trickiest legal minds on the home planet. The police of Rugh VI had had many intricate dealings with L'payr in the Gtetan courts. Hence, they took no chances and sent their best representatives.

Outnumbered L'payr may have been, but remember, Hoy, he had prepared for just these eventualities ever since leaving Earth. And just to stimulate his devious intellect to maximum performance, there was the fact that *his* was the only life at stake. Once let his fellow amoeboids get their pseudopods on him again, and he was a gone protozoan.

Between L'payr and the Gtetan extradition party, Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh began to find out how unhappy a policeman's lot can become. Back and forth he went, from the prisoner to the lawyers, stumbling through quagmires of opinion, falling into chasms of complexity.

The extradition group was determined not to return to their planet empty-pseudopodded. In order to succeed, they had to make the current arrest stick, which would give them the right—as previously injured parties—to assert their prior claim to the punishment of L'payr. For his part, L'payr was equally determined to invalidate the arrest by the Patrol, since then he would not only have placed our outfit in an un-comfortable position, but, no longer extraditable, would be entitled to its protection from his fellow citizens.

A weary, bleary and excessively hoarse Pah-Chi-Luh finally dragged himself to the extradition party on spindly tentacles and informed them that, after much careful consideration, he had come to the conclusion that L'payr was innocent of any crime during his stay on Earth.

"Nonsense," he was told by the spokesman. "A crime was committed. Arrant and unquestioned pornography was sold and circulated on that planet. A crime *has* to have been committed."

Pah-Chi-Luh went back to L'payr and asked, miserably, how about it? Didn't it seem, he almost pleaded, that all the necessary ingredients of a crime were present? *Some* kind of crime?

"True," L'payr said thoughtfully. "They have a point. Some kind of crime *may* have been committed—but not by me. Osborne Blatch, now..."

Stellar Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh completely lost his heads.

He sent a message to Earth, ordering Osborne Blatch to be picked up.

Fortunately for all of us, up to and including the Old One, Pah-Chi-Luh did not go so far as to have Blatch arrested. The Earthman was merely held as a material witness. When I think what the false arrest of a creature from a Secretly Supervised world could lead to, especially in a case of this sort, Hoy, my blood almost turns liquid.

But Pah-Chi-Luh *did* commit the further blunder of incarcerating Osborne Blatch in a cell adjoining L'payr's. Everything, you will observe, was working out to the amoeboid's satisfaction—including my young assistant.

By the time Pah-Chi-Luh got around to Blatch's first interrogation, the Earthman had already been briefed by his neighbor. Not that the briefing was displayed over-much—as yet.

"Pornography?" he repeated in answer to the first question. "*What* pornography? Mr. Smith and I had been working on an elementary biology text for some time and we were hoping to use new illustrations throughout. We wanted larger, clear pictures of the sort that would be instantly comprehensible to youngsters—and we were particularly interested in getting away from the blurry drawings that have been used and reused in all textbooks, almost from the time of Leeuwenhoek. Mr. L'payr's series on the cycle of amoeboid reproduction was a godsend. In a sense, they *made* the first section of the book."

"You don't deny, however," Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh inquired remorselessly, "that, at the time of the purchase, you knew those pictures were pornographic? And that, despite this knowledge, you went

ahead and used them for the delectation of juve-niles of your race?"

"Edification," the elderly human schoolteacher corrected him. "*Edification*, not delectation. I assure you that not a single student who studied the photographs in question—which, by the way, appeared textually as drawings—received any pre-mature erotic stimulation thereby. I will admit that, at the time of purchase, I did receive a distinct impression from the gentleman in the next cell that he and his kind considered the illustrations rather racy—"

"Well, then?"

"But that was his problem, not mine. After all, if I buy an artifact from an extra-terrestrial creature—a flint fist-axe, say, or a cauldron for pouring boiling oil upon the stormers of walled cities—and I use them both in completely peaceful and use-ful pursuits—the former to grub onions out of the ground and the latter to cook the onions in a kind of soup—have I done anything wrong?"

"As a matter of fact, the textbook in question received fine reviews and outstanding commendations from educational and scientific authorities all over the nation. Would you like to hear some of them? I believe I may have a review or two in my pockets. Let me see. Yes, just by chance, I seem to have a handful of clippings in this suit. Well, well! I didn't know there were quite so many. This is what the *Southern Prairie States Secondary School Gazette* has to say—'A substantial and noteworthy achievement. It will live long in the annals of elementary science pedagogy. The authors may well feel...'"

It was then that Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh sent out a despairing call for me.

Fortunately, I was free to give the matter my full attention, the Saudi Arabia-Ganymede affair being completely past the danger point. Had I been tied up...

After experimenting with all kinds of distractions, including secret agents disguised as dancing girls, we had finally managed to embroil the young mystic in a tremendous theological dispute on the exact nature and moral consequences of the miracles he was wreaking. Outstanding Mohammedan religious leaders of the region had lined up on one side or the other and turned the air blue with quotations from the Koran and later Sunnite books. The mystic was drawn in and became so involved in the argument that he stopped thinking about his original objectives and irreparably broke the mental connection with Ganymede.

For a while, this left a continuing problem on that satellite—it looked as if the civilization of disembodied intellects might eventually come to some approximation of the real truth. Luckily for us, the entire business had been viewed there also as a religious phenomenon and, once telepathic contact was lost, the intellect who had been communicating with the human, and had achieved much prestige thereby, was thoroughly discredited. It was generally believed that he had willfully and deliberately faked the entire thing, for the purpose of creating skepticism among the more spiritual members of his race. An ecclesiastical court ordered the unfortunate telepath to be embodied alive.

It was, therefore with a warm feeling of a job well done that I returned to my head-quarters on Pluto in response to Pah-Chi-Luh's summons.

Needless to say, this feeling quickly changed to the most overpowering dismay. After getting the background from the overwrought corporal, I interviewed the Gtetan extradition force. They had been in touch with their home office and were threatening a major galactic scandal if the Patrol's arrest of L'payr was not upheld and L'payr remanded to their custody.

"Are the most sacred and intimate details of our sex life to be shamelessly flaunted from one end of the Universe to the other?" I was asked angrily. "Pornography is pornography—a crime is a crime. The intent was there—the overt act was there. We demand our prisoner."

"How can you have pornography without titillation?" L'payr wanted to know. "If a Chumblostian sells a Gtetan a quantity of *krrgllwss*—which they use as food and we use as building material—does the shipment have to be paid for under the nutritive or structural tariffs? The structural tariffs obtain, as you

well know, Sergeant. I de-mand immediate release!"

But the most unpleasant surprise of all awaited me with Blatch. The terrestrial was sitting in his cell, sucking the curved handle of his umbrella.

"Under the code governing the treatment of all races on Secretly Supervised Sta-tus," he began as soon as he saw me, "and I refer not only to the Rigellian-Sagittarian Convention, but to the statutes of the third cosmic cycle and the Supreme Council decisions in the cases of Khwomo vs. Khwomo and Farziplok vs. Antares XII, I de-mand return to my accustomed habitat on Earth, the payment of damages according to the schedule developed by the Nobri Commission in the latest Vivadin contro-versy. I also demand satisfaction in terms of—"

"You seem to have acquired a good deal of knowledge of interstellar law," I com-mented slowly.

"Oh, I have, Sergeant—I have. Mr. L'payr was most helpful in acquainting me with my rights. It seems that I am entitled to all sorts of recompenses—or, at least, that I can claim entitlement. You have a very interesting galactic culture, Sergeant. Many, many people on Earth would be fascinated to learn about it. But I am quite prepared to spare you the embarrassment which such publicity would cause you. I am certain that two reasonable individuals like ourselves can come to terms."

When I charged L'payr with violating galactic secrecy, he spread his cytoplasm in an elaborate amoeboid shrug.

"I told him nothing on Earth, Sergeant. Whatever information this terrestrial has received—and I will admit that it would have been damaging and highly illegal—was entirely in the jurisdiction of *your* headquarters office. Besides, having been wrongfully accused of an ugly and unthinkable crime, I surely had the right to pre-pare my defense by discussing the matter with the only witness to the deed. I might go further and point out that, since Mr. Blatch and myself are in a sense co-defen-dants, there could be no valid objection to a pooling of our legal knowledge."

Back in my office, I brought Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh up to date.

"It's like a morass," he complained. "The more you struggle to get out, the deeper you fall in it! And this terrestrial! The Plutonian natives who've been guarding him have been driven almost crazy. He asks questions about everything—what's this, what's that, how does it work. Or it's not hot enough for him, the air doesn't smell right, his food is uninteresting. His throat has developed an odd tickle, he wants a gargle, he needs a—"

"Give him everything he wants, but within reason," I said. "If this creature dies on us, you and I will be lucky to draw no more than a punishment tour in the Black Hole in Cygnus. But as for the rest of it—look here, Corporal, I find myself in agree-ment with the extradition party from Gtet. A crime *has* to have been committed."

Stellar Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh stared at me. "You—you mean..."

"I mean that if a crime was committed, L'payr has been legally arrested and can therefore be taken back to Gtet. We will then hear no more from him ever and we will also be rid of that bunch of pseudopod-clacking Gtetan shysters. That will leave us with only one problem—Osborne Blatch. Once L'payr is gone and we have this terrestrial to ourselves, I think we can handle him—one way or another. But first and foremost, Corporal Pah-Chi-Luh, a crime—*some crime*—has to have been commit-ted by L'payr during his sojourn on Earth. Set up your bed in the law library."

Shortly afterward, Pah-Chi-Luh left for Earth.

Now please, Hoy, no moralistic comments! You know as well as I do that this sort of thing has been done before, here and there, in Outlying Patrol Offices. I don't like it any more than you, but I was faced with a major emergency. Besides, there was no doubt but that this L'payr, amoeboid master criminal, had had punishment deferred far too long. In fact, one might say that morally I was completely and absolutely in the right.

Pah-Chi-Luh returned to Earth, as I've said, this time disguised as an editorial assistant. He got a job

in the publishing house that had brought out the biology text-book. The original photographs were still in the files of that establishment. By pick-ing his man carefully and making a good many mind-stimulating comments, the stellar corporal finally inspired one of the technical editors to examine the photo-graphs and have the material on which they were printed analyzed.

The material was *fahrtuch*, a synthetic textile much in use on Gtet and not due to be developed by humanity for at least three centuries.

In no time at all, almost every woman in America was wearing lingerie made of *farhtuch*, the novelty fabric of the year. And since L'payr was ultimately responsible for this illegal technological spurt, we at last had him where we wanted him!

He was very sporting about it, Hoy.

"The end of a long road for me, Sergeant. I congratulate you. Crime does not pay. Lawbreakers always lose. Law-enforcers always win."

I went off to prepare the extradition forms, without a care in the galaxy. There was Blatch, of course, but he was a mere human. And by this time, having gotten involved in all kinds of questionable dealings myself, I was determined to make quick work of him. After all, one might as well get blasted for a *skreek* as a *launt*!

But when I returned to escort the Gtetan to his fellow-amoeboids, I almost fell through the surface of Pluto. Where there had been one L'payr, there were now two! Smaller L'payrs, of course—half the size of the original, to be exact—but L'payrs unmistakable.

In the interval, he had reproduced!

How? That gargle the Earthman had demanded, Hoy. It had been L'payr's idea all along, his last bit of insurance. Once the Earthman had received the gargle, he had smuggled it to L'payr, who had hidden it in his cell, intending to use it as a last resort.

That gargle, Hoy, was *salt water*! Saline solution, eh?

So there I was. The Gtetans informed me that their laws covered such possibili-ties, but much help *their* laws were to me.

"A crime has been committed, pornography has been sold," the spokesman reiter-ated. "We demand our prisoner. Both of him!"

"Pursuant to Galactic Statutes 6,009,371 through 6,106,514," Osborne Blatch in-sisted, "I demand immediate release, restitution to the extent of two billion Galactic Megawhars, a complete and written—"
And.

"It's probably true that our ancestor, L'payr, committed all sorts of indiscretions," lisped the two young amoeboids in the cell next to Osborne Blatch, "but what does that have to do with us? L'payr paid for his crimes by dying in childbirth. We are very young and very, very innocent. Surely the big old galaxy doesn't believe in punishing little children for the sins of their parents!"

What would you have done?

I shipped the whole mess off to Patrol Headquarters—the Gtetan extradition party and their mess of judicial citations, Osborne Blatch and his umbrella, the biology textbook, the original bundle of pornographic pictures, and last but not at all least, two—count 'em, two—dewy young amoeboids. Call them L'payr sub-one and L'payr sub-two. Do anything you like with them when they get there, but please don't tell me what it is!

And if you can figure out a solution with the aid of some of the more ancient and wiser heads at headquarters, and figure it out before the Old One ruptures a gloccis-tomorpha, Pah-Chi-Luh and I will be pathetically, eternally grateful.

If not—well, we're standing by here at Outlying Patrol Office 1001625 with bags packed. There's a lot to be said for the Black Hole in Cygnus.

Personally, Hoy, I'd say that the whole trouble is caused by creatures who insist on odd and colorful methods of continuing their race, instead of doing it sanely and decently by means of spore-pod explosion!

Afterword

So I wrote a story about a seven-sexed creature. And it was damned complicated. So I wondered how complicated a story about a one-sexed creature might be.

So I wrote it.

Besides, I wanted to see what I could do with pornography for a one-sexed creature.

But, if I'm going to be perfectly honest, there was something else. Long after Ted Sturgeon had represented me, I had become involved with a literary agent who began embezzling money from me. (God knows, I had damn little to embezzle. But he, ingenious man, managed it.) As Ike Asimov put it, "Why should an agent pay his client ninety percent and keep only ten percent for himself? Isn't it more logical for him to keep ninety percent and pay *out* the ten percent? Anyone can write, after all, but how many people can *sell*?"

I looked up an old army buddy of mine, Milt Amgott, who had just sent me a card announcing that he was opening a law office with his partner, Phil Kassel. I told him that I had no money to pay him, but that was exactly why I needed him. He said that was okay, he'd represent me. And he got me everything I was owed from the agent.

The agent was so impressed that he retained Amgott as *his* lawyer. And so did his wife when she divorced him. And so, eventually, did a lot of other science fiction and mystery writers.

Meanwhile, I learned a lot about the law by hanging out with Milt Amgott and Phil Kassel. I got wistful about using some of that knowledge in a story. One day I used it—in a story about the legalities of amoeboid pornography.

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