

The  
BRAIN PIRATES

John W. Campbell, Jr.

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# The BRAIN PIRATES

A Penton and Blake Novelet

BY JOHN W. CAMPBELL, JR.

*Author of "The Double Minds," "The Tenth World," etc.*

Two Roving Planeteers Confront the Invisible Imps of an  
Empire  
From Beyond the Sun and Discover That Matter  
Is Mightier Than Mind

Intrepid Scientific Adventurers of the Thirtieth  
Century Explore the Far Regions of Space!

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## CHAPTER I

### *Double Gravity*

The *Ion* propelled itself powerfully through the void. Inside the craft, Rodney Blake's arm reached out in a dramatic gesture of disclosure. Half a hundred thousand miles away hung a dusty, underripe peach. It was dim and hard to see, here where the sun's light was diluted by five billion miles of space.

"There she is, skipper," he told his permanent partner, Ted Penton. "The only satellite of the Tenth World! Are we still going to investigate it?"

"We sure are. As long as we are this far out from the sun, we may as well see what's seeable," Penton answered firmly.

"We have those new suits rigged with atomic-powered lifting gadgets, so that'll protect us from the weight, if what our instruments say about that world's true. I still don't see how any member of this System could be so confoundedly dense. This satellite has a diameter of thirty-four hundred miles, yet the surface gravity is double that of Earth!"

Blake whistled softly.

"Incidentally," he said, "we ought to land in about half an hour. Any suggestions as to where to go? Try your telescope."

Penton disappeared into the observatory booth and came back presently with a rough-sketch map.

"I was up there just before I slept. That was nine hours ago, and this place here on the sketch was in the night-shade then, glowing faintly. I think it may be a highly radioactive section. Looking through the 'scope just now, I see it has moved into daylight, and the glow is hidden by the sunlight, weak as it is out here, but there is some funny, rainbow-colored mineral formation there. Let's land there. I'll go check up on those suits, and make some adjustments. I hadn't thought they'd have to handle any double-gravity worlds."

"That's a swell map," complained Blake. "You've drawn the thing from the image in an astronomical 'scope. It's inverted. I'm going to be too busy to figure out mirror images. And may I suggest that you make sure you don't get those drive-units in the suits backward? I'd hate to have them sit on me as well as a doubled gravity."

Penton grinned and went, down the corridor toward the airlock, picking up a kit of tools from the machine-shop bench as he passed. Presently he was deeply engrossed in the delicate task of readjusting the tiny atomic-power drive units he had fixed in the space suits. The mobility these would furnish would have been highly welcome at the time they had been visiting the Tenth World.

"Oh, Ted!" Penton raised his head abruptly from the work of fastening down the cover plate that engaged his attention for the past twenty minutes. The slightly metallic voice had issued from the air-lock speaker over his head.

"Yes?"

"We're about to land," said Blake's voice. "Help take over. Throw the switch. And I hope those suits suit us!"

Penton and Blake stared fretfully through the windows of the *Ion*. The inhabitants of the satellite were regarding the explorers with a mild curiosity.

"Those birds are waiting with remarkable patience," Penton said, somewhat annoyed. "And this seems to be the local Central Park, wherefore our landing may have annoyed them. Come on, you have a UV gun on one hip, and a disintegrator on the other, and—"

"Lead in both legs. Did you notice that local yokel to the left of us make a slow, stately bow? He snapped like a flag in

the wind. I'll bet they can move five times as fast as we can—or at least two times as fast. This gravity's faster."

"Not faster than 186,000 miles a second," Penton declared firmly. "Did you observe them closely? Mount one olive on one grapefruit. Two fat sausages protruding from the opposite sides of said grapefruit just below the olive, two fatter frankfurters at the nether end, all add up to equal one—Tenthworldsatelliteian."

"They do have a chubby air," Blake grinned, "but I don't claim to move 186,000 miles a second. And these boys do move fast."

"They're patient anyway, much more so than I am. Lift your blasted carcass and come on. They're a pretty human looking gang, even if they do look like prize-winners in the Fat Men's Club. Besides, fat men are always jolly. You know as well as I do that you're coming in the end, so let's go."

Reluctantly Blake heaved. He heaved harder, remaining curiously fixed to his seat.

"Boy, am I agile," he grunted softly, and gave in. Slowly he turned up the lift-control at his belt. A slow creaking of straps and an unhappy wriggling on Blake's part attested to the increasing power of the atomic drive mounted on the suit. Blake rose. "I can't even stand up without the aid of this thing. Let's go."

Penton opened the outer lock door. Blake stepped down, or better, floated down behind Penton. The gravity-equalizer



made him feel as if he were riding on a parachute. Penton faced the strange inhabitants and slowly raised both hands above his head in a gesture of friendship.

He'd intended to hold them out horizontally in front of him, but the effort, under that gravity, was distinctly uncomfortable.

"From a much lighter world, aren't you?" suggested a rather philosophically friendly telepathic voice. "From an inner planet? Well—I have always been convinced there were more than five inner planets."

"Ten," said Penton automatically. "We're from the third."

One of the immensely rounded inhabitants of this world nodded in pleased acknowledgement.

"Ah, interesting. Very. The third world, then, and there are twelve."

"Twelve?"

Blake stared at the moon-faced spokesman.

"Oh, so, so. Ah, yes. Two more. That makes twelve. That's even more interesting. There are two worlds further out. Remarkably small eyes you have, if I may say so. The bright light near the sun, I suppose."

Blake nodded vaguely. The moon-faced inhabitant did have large eyes; it was only the immense roundness of his face that made them appear small. Now at the ground level, Blake could better judge their height and size. About five feet tall, each was, and approximately six feet in circumference at the equator—which was quite marked. They resembled diminutive, but well inflated carnival balloons made in caricature shapes.

"It looks," said Penton softly, "as though we'll have to go way out before we go back toward the sun. We'll have to see those two worlds."

"Yes, see them. Interesting ship you have. We've been trying for some time to make one like it—atomic power, eh? Yes. Will you accompany us? ... I, by the way, am Terruns, associated with the Power and Mechanisms Department of Runal City. Oh, this world? We call our primary Turlun, and our satellite here is called Pornan.

"But I think we may go to the city. The members of the Power and Mechanisms Department have been very anxious to speak with you since your ship was first sighted. There was rather a flurry there as to where you would land. Very proud to have you in our city. You will come? Our cars are ahead."

"Why—yes," said Penton, slightly bewildered. Then, more firmly, "Yes, we will be very interested to see more of your civilization on this world so far from the sun. Our lives, our civilization, you understand, are all based on the movements or apparent movements of the sun."

Terruns waved briskly in a vertical plane. His remarkably rotund body did not crease, so far as Blake's closely watching, interested eye could determine, but simply contracted vertically, and spread laterally in front, with a reversal of this process in back. The queerly hectic bowing of the comically grapefruitish body fascinated Blake with the same childish wonder that the incomprehensible leg-work of the millipede inspires.

Terruns straightened abruptly and regarded Penton closely with large, dark eyes.

"The ship, by the way. It does not move in your absence?" he asked somewhat anxiously.

Penton looked at him somewhat blankly.

"No, it is manually controlled—it will stay where it is."

The round face parted in a somewhat fatuous smile of satisfaction.

"Ah, excellent. Yes, if it stays there, that will be well. You will know it is here. Come with us. Yes, a lighter world. The supports in the suits—very ingenious, very—" His mental speech faded off gradually. Blake and Penton watched with interest as the dozen or so Pornans' set off in perfect unison across the close-cropped turf. Each was dressed in a precisely uniform outfit of apparently skin-tight elastic fabric, of a rather pleasing, greenish hue in itself, but covered with a repetitive and complex pattern of spirals and sharp-angled zigzags.

The Pornans' legs were rather short, and distinctly over the "stout" classification. But they worked like frantic pumps, bouncing up and down at a flurried pace, while the associated body rocked and rolled in a manner curiously reminiscent of a round-bodied bell-buoy in a choppy sea. But they made progress, such progress, considering their girth, that for a moment Blake and Penton stood in astonished surprise, while their guides almost disappeared over a little pink swale of land.

"Did you notice the turf?" Penton asked Blake as they followed behind. "It's apparently a sort of moss, and a remarkably pink one at that. But then, the trees are, too. Incidentally, they don't use sunlight as a source of energy, of course. Look, our hosts seem to have arrived at their car."

A moment later, Penton and Blake had arrived also. There were, accurately, three cars. They were very commodious cars, until the Pornans climbed in. They accomplished that act with a surprising ease and actual grace, despite their immense girth. The cars themselves were merely open platforms, in effect, seating six Pornans in three cross seats, two to a seat. Each, place was equipped with a very solidly made rail, on which the passengers immediately placed both feet. Their hands settled comfortably, and firmly into handgrips in their seat-arms.

Four wheels, scarcely eighteen inches in diameter, and consisting exclusively of pneumatic tires supported the vehicle, and a small square case behind the rear-most seat

presumably contained the engine. From the size of its case, it was a wholly inadequate engine. But the two explorers clambered in.

"Hold fast," said Terruns, cheerily. "It's only about a fifteen-minute ride." Curiously, the time-designation was quite clear to the Terrestrials.

## CHAPTER II

### *The Invisible Car*

Terruns stabbed viciously at a red button on the panel that formed the front of the car. Something in the box at the rear muttered faintly, and began throbbing furiously. Rapidly, from the sides, a pinkish mass protruded, until inside of ten seconds a pneumatic bumper fully two feet thick had pushed out all about, front, side and rear.

"We're going," said their guide cheerfully, "to the center of the city. Power and Mechanisms Building; where all our broadcast energy is developed."

Blake understood suddenly the purpose of the rails and handgrips. The motor, whatever it was, was far from inadequate. The car moved to speed with a rush that snapped his head back viciously.

"We power nearly everything," continued Terruns, "by broadcast energy. Source of energy's the trouble. Very troublesome, because it's a frightful job concentrating the radio-active ores. Lasts a good while, but power demands growing faster than ore-concentrate available. Perhaps—"

Blake closed his eyes and held on as Terruns sailed blithely toward the side of another car coming out of a side street. Abruptly he was hurled from his seat, and draped over Terruns' immense shoulders. The Pornan yielded softly under him, but not sufficiently to cushion the violent shock. Blake opened his eyes to observe the details of the collision, and saw Terruns' head turned completely around on an amazingly flexible neck, regarding him in faint surprise.

"Ah, yes, light worlds. So. So sorry. I'll slow down more gently." The head pivoted outrageously, and the car jerked forward, depositing Blake in his seat once more.

"Penton," said Blake softly, bracing himself solidly, "can you find the way back? I want to walk." He closed his eyes again, for they had left the roadways of the park and entered the heavy, city traffic. It was, quite evidently, suicidally inclined, or else controlled solely by inspired maniacs.

Somewhere in the depths of his mind, the thought popped that here, evidently, the movies got those impossible scenes of a mad ride through New York traffic at impossible speed. Not that the cars moved rapidly. At their best, in fact, Terruns had maintained no better than twenty miles an hour; but the utter indifference to safety, the half-inch margins gleefully accepted by the drivers made that insane recklessness.

The purpose of the huge bumpers inflated about them seeped into Blake's mind. His eyes, refused to close again, because he wanted to know which way to jump. A brilliantly green vehicle tore down from a side street, swinging toward their rear as it appeared that they were to escape, then braked violently to permit them to move out of the way by a fraction of an inch.

"Traffic," said Terruns somewhat annoyedly, "always disturbs me. How do they control traffic in your world?"

"The problem is worse," said Penton through clenched teeth, "though less disturbing to us." He paused to grip violently and brace himself as Terruns braked the car to a dead stop in a distance that did not exist. "Traffic lights—not so disturbing to us, because braking—"

"Ah, yes. Very difficult on light world." Traffic moved again, jumping forward as though seen on a broken film, inexpertly patched. They were in motion. "The traction is much less, on a lighter world, is it not? The inertia to mass to weight ratio—"

Blake looked around with a sudden relief. He had been too startled and frightened to think. On this world, where great weight forced their tires solidly into the greenish glasslike pavement, brakes were infinitely more efficient, and—

They took a right-angle corner with an abruptness that had him half out of the car, his feet on the thick, pneumatic

bumper before he gripped the rail and pulled himself in again. And—cars gripped better on turns. The mad driving was comparatively sane on that basis.

"I have no patience with some drivers we have," Terruns told them. "Reckless. Use no judgment, and show no respect for other people." No sooner had he said this when he halted his vehicle a sickening half an inch from the bumper of the car ahead.

"Relative," said Penton softly, "All things are relative—especially, speed and acceleration," and gripped the rail in preparation for the next start.

The road narrowed, became a two-lane street. Blake was recovering, as the better understanding of local conditions penetrated. Suddenly there was a violent explosion from the empty air directly ahead of them, a flash of violet flame, and white smoke. Instantly Terruns jammed on the brakes, and a violent thud of pneumatic bumpers crashed the car to a halt so short that Penton and Blake both sailed into the air.

They sailed along for some hundreds of feet through the air before descending, their lifting units now advanced to support them entirely. A series of popping explosions like a string of firecrackers sounded behind them, and a howl like a dog whose paw has been stepped on followed and accompanied.

Together the Terrestrials looked back. Terruns and his followers were looking at them in mild bewilderment. Its great bumper hard against that of the machine they had so



recently quitted, a similar vehicle carrying two Pornans occupied the formerly vacant volume of air. These also were watching the Terrestrials with interest.

"I think I know," said Penton in slow disgust, "why they go only twenty miles an hour. Will you tell me what in hell is the idea of driving around in an invisible car? Or is that the police system here? If it is, I consider it notably screwier than even this wobble-eyed planet. Great Wavering Worlds!"

Terruns nodded toward them with evident relief on his face.

"Remarkable—very remarkable, your flight. For a moment I feared you might land rather heavily—but why didn't you just hold on? We usually do." For a man of his girth, he displayed a surprising ease in the agile jump that carried him over the enormous bumper to the roadway. The driver of the other car jumped down to meet him, and the two bowed jerkily in perfect unison. Together they walked to the point of collision.

The two cars nuzzled each other like amorous hippopotami. Terruns inspected the front of his machine as Penton and Blake approached, Penton's mouth somewhat angular.

"No damage?" suggested the driver of the second car.

Terruns beamed cheerfully.

"No damage," he agreed.

The second driver swung nimbly into his seat, nodded good-bye. His car swerved violently backward, braked, then swung forward and away with a savage acceleration.

"Is it customary to drive around in invisible cars?" interrupted Penton plaintively. "I should think it would make traffic more than a little confusing."

"Sorry, my friend. Very unusual now. But no damage, no damage at all. In the last six months, but two people have been killed in such collisions." Terruns looked rather proudly at the enormous inflated sausage that circled the car. "Some of my men developed that. Very effective—very simple."

"Excellent, no doubt. But why have invisible cars in the first place? You were, I assure you, no less surprised than we that we did not land heavily. And how do you accomplish that invisibility?"

Terruns sighed.

"Not by choice. We don't accomplish it. Look. Come—" Terruns started forward to meet the slowly approaching Terrestrials. Suddenly his immense body seemed to tangle in his feet, and he fell with a resounding crash. The force of the impact dented his pudgy body by several inches, and for a moment he lay there, rather startled eyes slowly winking. A queerly mischievous, chuckling gurgle came from the empty air beside him, and it seemed to Penton that a sort of vertical

heat wave in the air danced down the street, to vanish as suddenly as it had come into being.

Terruns' large eyes blinked once more, and he shook his head. He rose to his feet with a sigh of annoyance, just as one of the hurrying Pornans from the rear of the car reached him.

"Damn *krull*," he exclaimed. The frown faded from his moon face and his usual good-natured philosophy seemed to rule again. "Unusually persistent, wasn't he? I suppose he has gone. Ah, well. I could smell singed hair, I hope he learned something."

Blake stared at him in considerable wonder.

"What is a *krull*?" he asked.

For once, Terruns did not reply immediately. He looked thoughtfully at Blake, and even more thoughtfully at Penton.

"Monkey," he said at length. "Ape—no, monkey." Then he nodded, smiling as usual, somewhat vaguely. "A *krull* is somewhat like your monkey. A higher species. Quite intelligent. Delights in mischief. Smaller than we are, and very bony. Oh, very." Terruns rubbed his pudgy leg vigorously, the soft flesh denting deeply under his fingers.

"Are they—invisible?" Blake looked about him vaguely. "I gathered you had tripped over one, but unless they are a good deal smaller than you, I don't see how I missed it."

Terruns nodded sadly.

"They disrupt economic life. Mischievous, just mischievous. And they love excitement. When we first started using automobiles they caused no end of excitement. All our higher species have telepathic powers. *Krulls*, very sad, have great powers. Not intelligent, not quite reasoning, perhaps, but almost. And remarkable vision. Eyes unlike ours. One on each side of the head like—oh, your rabbit? Rabbits see in all directions also? Yes, so do *krulls*. And telepathic, marvelously so. That makes them invisible."

Penton looked at the Pornan thoughtfully for a moment.

"Sorry, my friend, you have skipped a step somewhere. How does that make them invisible?"

"Well, now see. You see me. Now—" Terruns grinned and wasn't there.

## CHAPTER III

### *The Stolen Ship*

Denton wiggled his head slowly, and looked more carefully. Definitely there was a large, and conspicuous hole in the landscape, a large, grayish mist that swirled and seethed with a curious riot of colors and angles and impossibly shaped buildings.

Abruptly Terruns was back. Blake looked at him with considerable distaste.

"Can all of you do that?"

"It's very simple," nodded Terruns. "But we can't see like a *krull*. I merely telepathized the idea that I wasn't there. Momentarily you were deceived, but quickly reasoned that I *must* be there, because of the hole in the landscape. Therefore you saw me again. A *krull*, of course, sees in all directions, and therefore can fill the hole in the landscape by telepathizing two things. He isn't there. You see the landscape. Very simple."

Blake looked at Penton from the side of his eyes.

"Ted, shall we go for a walk? Back to the ship, maybe. Somehow telepathizing imps don't promise well."

"They make themselves completely invisible in that way?" asked Penton.

"Quite," Terruns replied. A more serious expression crossed his face as he explained further the troubles of his people. "And worse, as you saw. They make automobiles invisible. Sit on the bumper in front. They like excitement, and that sometimes makes a lot of excitement." His face lighted a bit as he nodded toward the car, "But not so much since the fire-vents were installed."

"Oh. Explosives?"

"Yes. Serves two purposes. First, if I see a car coming toward me that doesn't seem to see me, I know a *krull* is riding in front. I press a button on the panel. Explosions warn other driver, and we both brake sharply. Also explosions immediately under *krull* usually induce him to move. Frequently the *krull* gets caught between cars, which is very good. Usually," he sighed, "they escape, merely somewhat singed. But they are intelligent. They learn."

"Why the devil don't you drive them away?"

Terruns smiled sadly.

"How? We would very much like to. Oh, no end. But no results. They steal our food, they steal anything that will move. Don't attack us, because we are very much stronger. Very hard to shoot what you can't see."

"Great Worlds, Terruns, can't you get rid of the creatures somehow? Use colored glasses so you see differently than they, and make them visible. Any trick like that?"

"Trick? Oh, my dear friend, the mind is tricked. It does no good to trick our eyes, when our minds are tricked. We have tried a truly remarkable assortment of mechanisms," Terruns sighed, "but none of them work."

"From your fall, I should think people would be badly injured tripping over the blamed things," Blake suggested.

"That's why we wear these suits," Terruns replied.

"Suits?"

The moon face split in a good-natured grin.

"I'm not quite as large as this. It's the protective suit. It bounces." The Pornan touched something somewhere in his suit. Rapidly the seemingly skin-tight suit shrank. It hung in folds, disconsolate droops and lumps all over him. Then the elasticity of the suit began to work, and slowly it crawled back to a skin-tight fit in fact.

An utterly different Terruns emerged. His body was squat and enormously powerful, the huge chest heavily banded with thick sheets and cords of muscle, great rippling cords of it flowing into thick, muscle-ridged arms. His torso tapered to a narrow waist, then expanded into blocky, corded legs. Far from pudgy, there was not an ounce of fat on that perfect specimen of the powerfully muscled denizen of this heavy-gravity world.

And with that alteration, his face seemed now subtly changed. The roundness was not the fulness of fat, but a roundness of differently shaped bones, and differently placed muscle-cords. The roundness differed from a human face as a bulldog's round face from the lean jaws of the wolfhound. Blake whistled softly.

The Pornan's good-natured smile reappeared.

"Different worlds—different people."

"Different worlds," repeated Penton with a gentle moan, "different people. I, Blake, am different for life."

"Do you still remember that—six long hours ago? Old Elephant Penton. Can you remember anything else that was said?"

"Little." Penton moved gingerly. The motion, inasmuch as he was floating in Terruns' salt-water-filled swimming pool, sent his nose under the surface. He straightened out with hasty caution and a soft, but heartfelt remark. "Damn little. Six hours under doubled gravity and—" He stopped and looked up. Terruns was standing on the edge of the pool looking down at them with sad reproof.

"I asked you," their host said reproachfully, "I asked you particularly, but you said the ship would not move if you weren't there."

"Right," agreed Penton, paddling gently to bring himself to a vertical position. "You asked, and it won't."

"Sorry," Terruns shook his head. "Report from the Park Department. They can't find it. They didn't expect to see it. We never see things like that, but they can't feel it. Very unusual, if it can't be moved."

"What? Can't find our ship?"

"You said," Terruns began. He stopped abruptly as he leaped violently and awkwardly into the air, to land in the pool with a mighty thunder, and a tidal wave that all but swamped the Terrestrials. Immediately the inflated suit brought him bobbing to the surface, lying on his stomach, his arms moving uselessly because of the airtight suit. They



would not grip the water. Simultaneously there was a chuckling chatter and a loud *thump*.

Terruns released a mighty "oof" and sank six inches into the water. The chattering went on excitedly from empty air, while a mad splashing began on both sides of the balloon-clad Pornan, as though an invisible side-wheeler in a frightful hurry had gone slightly askew. Terruns was gasping heavily, half stunned, while his body began to move in hurried circles to the accompaniment of much chattering.

Blake and Penton stared in paralyzed astonishment. Terruns recovered his wind, reached the tab on his suit, and Pornan and invisible rider plunged into the water. Instantly both struck out for the shore, and the *krull*, too busy otherwise to remain invisible, appeared.

A rabbit-eared, rabbit-faced, four-limbed creature the size of a ten-year-old child, it had a surprisingly chunky body. Details of arms and legs were rather blurred, as both were working with a truly amazing determination and efficiency. For a moment Terruns was handicapped as his suit shrank back to fit; then he too got into action. Arms churning like twin propellers, and both feet going in a white froth of water, he overhauled the shrieking *krull*, a six-inch bow wave curling about his ears.

The little creature bounced out of the water when it reached the pool edge, and disappeared the instant it hit the tiled floor. Immediately behind it, Terruns swarmed up the

lip of the pool and set off down the tile like a bloodhound on the trail. The wet animal was dripping revealingly. Halfway to the arched door at the far end he skidded to a halt, and grabbed at the air. A yowling shriek greeted his move, and triumphantly he raised his arm. The shrieks continued but nothing appeared as a source.

Terruns walked back toward the pool more leisurely.

"You said," went on the Pornan calmly, "that it couldn't be moved, but it was. It isn't there." He reached the edge of the pool, and bent down. The shrieking chatter mounted; as he lowered his hand a hole appeared in the water, then a white froth. "Presently, my friends, I shall show you a *krull*. Very reckless fellow. They love to go paddling, though." The shrieking chatter had changed to an unhappy glubbing and a thunder of splashing water. Slowly the glubbing and splashing reached a climax and died away. The pool-edge, the water and even Terruns wavered and twisted crazily in appearance. Then a wet, feebly kicking, half-drowned creature appeared, about six inches below the surface of the water.

"Oh," said Penton distastefully, "we have 'em on our world, too. They appear and disappear, and sometimes only one person can see them."

"You do?" asked Terruns with interest.

"Sure," said Penton. "We have a drug that makes them visible. Alcohol. We call them D.T.'s."

"Deetees," said Terruns mildly, looking down at the wet, slowly reviving creature. "Curious." The *krull's* rabbit ears drooped dejectedly, bright green rabbit ears drooping over a bright red face. The red faded gradually into a handsome purple body, marked by a large and unnaturally brilliant orange stripe down the middle of the back. Constant wear had removed all hair from feet, hands, and other parts frequently in contact with the ground, exposing the bright red skin.

"Maybe," said Blake, "you should leave it alone so it will recover rapidly. They really are more pleasant to look at when they are invisible."

"Could you tie that thing up somehow, Terruns, so we can experiment on it?" asked Penton wearily. "I have an idea that we'll have to hunt for our ship."

"Oh, yes. The medical staff is here, by the way. I'll tie it up, you can get out of the water, and they will strap you up more comfortably."

"You're sure that ship is gone? I don't see how a *krull* could move it."

"Not one *krull*. A troop of *krull*. We always fasten down anything movable. Even stones. They love to put them in the street, and sit on them. Very exciting crashes. A troop of *krull*, I'm afraid—but they won't carry it more than five miles or so. They lose interest quickly."

"Penton," said Blake softly, "you know, I left the lift-drive on seven-eighths, so the ship wouldn't mar the turf. I'll bet we are here three months looking for that blasted thing. Five miles and an invisible ship. More fun—"

"I'd take you up on that bet, Blake, but for one thing. I *know* we won't be here three months looking for it."

"Why?"

"Because we have emergency rations in the suits for only one week, and they use a mixture of copper selenate and potassium arsenate for fertilizer on the local crops. Laugh that off."

"You left out potassium cyanide," Blake groaned.

"I didn't leave out cyanide; that's about the only poison they don't use. All their plants want nice heavy metals like lead and copper and mercury. For non-metals they prefer the heavy ones like selenium and tellurium and arsenic. This world, it would seem, is lousy with heavy metals, and so are the plants. And due to a sad neglect in my education, I never learned to digest those compounds."

## CHAPTER IV

### *End of the Krull*

Blake looked down at himself thoughtfully. Elastic bandages wound in puttee fashion about each leg joined and wound up on his abdomen to his chest. He squeaked faintly when he moved.

"Did they give you the oil can, Ted?"

"No. But this should make a good shock-absorber. Step on it, will you? There's a chauffeur waiting to take us down to the Powers and Mechanisms Building again. Terruns said he'd meet us there."

"The bird that wrapped me ought to make a living as a mummy-maker. Did Terruns say how they go about looking for lost things?"

"Their search methods are simple and ineffective; gang of men with a long rope between them. Hurry up; I'll wait outside."

Half an hour later they joined Terruns at his office, slightly jittery, but somewhat to their own surprise, in one piece. Terruns, they had learned during this last ride, was a careful driver, indeed, for a Pornan.

"Ah. The Terrestrials," he greeted them. "Sit down." Terruns waved them to a seat with one hand. Thoughtfully, Penton noticed that Terruns' desk was of a rich, red wood finished with brightly chromium plated fixtures of quite familiar design.

"If," said Penton softly, "we don't find that ship in about three weeks, we'll be gone, because we use food faster here.

I've already eaten twice of those emergency rations."

"Feeding," acknowledged Blake unhappily, "but not filling. If you hear me grumble, it's my stomach, over which I'm losing all control. It is distinctly annoyed at what it righteously considers my perfidy. That one-inch lump of extinct sawdust, labeled 'one sirloin steak, 350 cal.', didn't fool it a bit. It's just as hungry as ever."

Penton nodded at a luscious-looking dark violet fruit that Terruns was toying with.

"If you ate that, Blake, your stomach would quiet down almost at once. Certainly within two hours. On Earth we mine ore that doesn't assay as high a mercury content as that thing has. Shut up and let me think."

"Why don't you rig up a radio doodle-bug?" suggested Blake. "The inductance of the ship should be darned easy to spot, and working the way they do with those—"

"Doodle-bugs are out," sighed Penton, "I thought of that. They're fine for finding buried metal, but they have two troubles here. Pornans broadcast power, which I have studied carefully while you were studying their ore-handling machinery. But they do not use radio methods. I gave Terruns complete data on radio. In six months or a year he'll make an effective radio tube, I'll bet.

"If you want to wait for that—in the meantime all our tools are in the ship. The electrical field method doesn't work because that requires an amplifier. The magnetic induction

won't work till we are already so near you'd find it quicker with the rope method they use."

"Yes," sighed Penton, "but no ship." Blake turned to Terruns.

"How long will it take them to run that search out to that five mile circle?" he asked.

"Ah," said Terruns hesitantly, glancing at some sheets in front of him, "two months and three days, the last time. But more men this time. A month, perhaps? Not quick enough—I'm truly sorry, but you have no idea how annoying these creatures are to a decent, civilized—"

"Stomach," suggested Blake unhappily. "We're rapidly finding out. You've no idea how annoyed we'll be as we slowly starve to death. Oh, no idea."

Penton interrupted.

"Listen," he begged Blake, "will you eat that fruit over there and shut up one way or another? I'm trying to think. There must be some way—this thing's gone on too damned long now."

"Oh, yes, much," agreed Terruns. "We're doing all we can —"

"I know. We're not blaming you or your people," Penton grinned. "You are doing your damndest, I realize, but the

thing's senseless. There must be some way to stop them. This world of yours is too monotonous for your own good. Always warm, everywhere. Always light, every—yeah. So it is. Sweet—Terruns!"

Suddenly Penton jumped out of his seat with all the speed of a Pornan, his hand flashing back to his pack. Abruptly his hand was leveling a short, lensed tube at Terruns' startled face. The Pornan first bent back in his chair hastily in startled amazement, then, thinking the tube a weapon, his hand darted out like a striking snake to twist the cold, crystalline eye of the tube away from him.

Penton dropped his tube with a howl of pain and leaped back, shaking his hand, but grinning sheepishly.

"Sorry, Terruns, must have startled you," he apologized. "Look—it's harmless—just a light." Again he picked up the tube, in his left hand this time, and turned it on Blake. The brilliant light beam of his atomic flashlight stabbed sharply into Blake's face forcing him to blink, squinting until his eyes became adjusted.

"Yes," said Terruns, uncertainly. "Most—er—confusing. Your thoughts are not at all clear."

Penton turned the beam of light into Terruns' face. The Pornan shut his eyes at once, throwing a hand up to his face.

"It's very brilliant, uncomfortably so. Could you turn—turn it somewhere else—oh. Yes, turn it away."

Penton turned away the light with a sigh of relief.



"That, Terruns, is all I want to know. Look, take these, and make 'em fit somehow. And come on, we're due for some good hunting." Penton passed over a pair of space goggles, and reluctantly Terruns adjusted them to his face.

"It's an unpleasant sensation," he told the explorers. "But yes, I think, my friend, that you have solved, with your other-world mind, a long outstanding problem. Just one moment and we will be on our way. Oh do you have another pair for my friend, Drunath, a very excellent gentleman? Spent his life finding quicker ways to kill *krull*. Just down the hall—"

Blake passed over his set of space goggles in blank wonderment. Presently the four started down, and out of the building, into a side street that Terruns recommended for a test. The test was wholly inconclusive.

"The park," said Drunath slowly, "is always infested with *krull*. There is a wood, a group of trees, that has not been properly searched in fifty years. Ropes cannot be used. Shall we go there?"

Half an hour later, cars had deposited them, together with a troop of Drunath's extermination squad. Penton and Blake for the first time had an opportunity to walk through the spot where the ship should have been, a remembered swale between a little hillock of pink turf and a vine-covered outthrust of black, glistening rock. It rose some hundred feet, to a huge, rugged boulder that looked strangely like a lop-eared *krull* with an ugly, grinning face.

"Krull Rock," explained Drunath. "Always search it first for anything smaller than an automobile. If there aren't any *krull* there, there aren't any in town."

Blake looked up. Black rock, jumbled boulders, and creeping vines. Bright metal testified to a complete ring of steel traps, all unoccupied. Penton was working with his flash, adjusting the tiny atomic generator it contained to maximum power. Then he pressed the little button.

A low hum came from the instrument, then, a shaft of light unbearable, coruscating brilliance. It shimmered from the black rocks in a scintillating, twinkling rain—and vanished as Penton released the flash. Slowly, Blake's eyes adjusted themselves. Then again the flash, and again, till it was on full, and Blake's eyes had readjusted to its light.

Penton was chuckling softly. The air was full of soft whimpers, and little screeches. They turned to howls of dismay as Penton and Blake, unsteady for laughter, picked off dozens of the crazy-quilt *krull*. Their UV pistols working methodically, they cleaned out the entire colony of the beasts perched on the rock.

Slowly, unsteadily, Terruns and Drunath were firing.

"Curse all Gods, destroy all devils, and particular maledictions of *krull*," Drunath exclaimed. "Your goggles are inadequate. I can hardly see through them. For the first time in my life I can dimly see a colony, a whole troop of *krull*,

and I cannot shoot straight!" Drunath threw down his weapon in disgust. "Can you," asked Blake, "see what is on top of that blasted rock?"

"Fire. It looks like fire to us."

"Not fire. Metal. A whole metal ship. Your idiotic krall didn't carry it two hundred yards, but just up above where your search methods weren't worth a damn. We will move it."

"You are leaving?" asked Terruns sadly.

"Not," Penton assured him, "by six planets and a dozen moons. We're staying for the shooting. And, oh, my friends, what royal and unadulterated joy I'll take in running the last of those *krull* out of this town." Penton and Blake lifted simultaneously into the air, and within a few seconds into the ship.

Alone in their space ship a day later, Blake puffed complacently at a cigarette.

"I would still like to know just how you thought of it. It's an excellent way, I don't dispute, but how did you figure it out, Ted?"

Penton smiled affably.

"What big eyes you have, Terruns. The better to see with five billion miles from the sun. Look, Rod, though their eyes are extremely sensitive, they are powerfully weak in accommodation. The inhabitants on this satellite never have

any real light out here. I was using a light so powerful that these unadapted fellows just couldn't see in it at all; we could, after a moment. But the *krull* were totally blinded by it, and suffered acute pain in the bargain. It's not surprising that an animal that depends so on its eyes should be paralyzed when its eyes won't work. When I flashed the light they could not wiggle a muscle, they were so scared. And they couldn't keep the ship invisible, either!"

"Nor," said Blake comfortably, "our food supply."

[The end of *The Brain Pirates* by John W. Campbell, Jr.]