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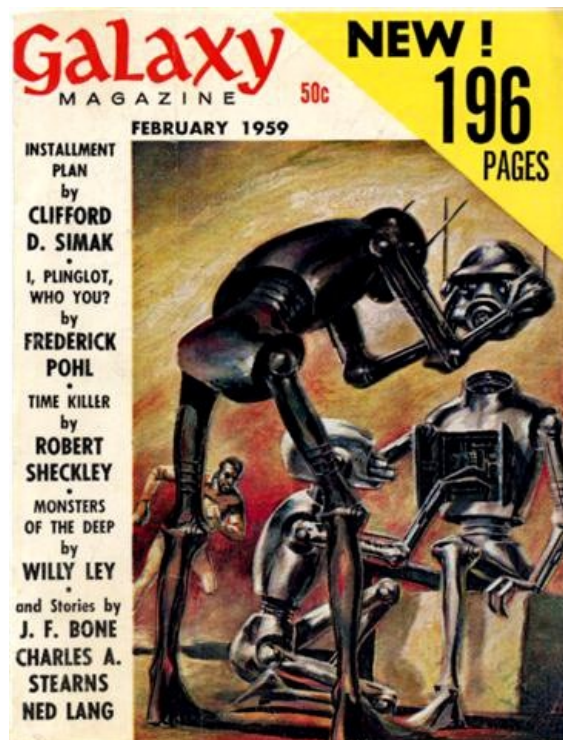
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PASTORAL AFFAIR ***



PASTORAL AFFAIR

By CHARLES A. STEARNS

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

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The seaplane cast its silhouette from aloft upon the blue Arabian Sea, left its white wake across the shallows, and taxied alongside the ancient stone jetty, clawing into the sandy bottom with its small fore and after anchors.

Colonel Glinka stepped out upon the wing, carefully measured the distance to the jetty, and sprang for it, wetting himself up to the seat of his voluminous khaki shorts.

No wonder Stefanik meant to fight to the last—he wasn't going to turn his kids over to an old goat like Glinka!

This lonely sandspit, these barren slopes and frowning, ochre cliffs, the oceanic silence around him, broken by the plaintive cries of wheeling Caspian terns that were badly in need of laundering, were not, he thought as he clambered ashore, exactly as one pictures a tropical paradise.

And it helped the desolation of his mood not at all that upon these same arid ridges scores of silent, burnoosed figures watched him as he stood there, allowing the water to drain from his perforated white oxfords and all unaware that his vast pith helmet, curiously heavy malacca cane and formidable fundament cast a centaur's shadow upon the rocks in the later afternoon sun.

Colonel Glinka took a pair of green sun goggles from his pocket and put them on, resolutely hitched up his shorts, assumed the stern yet conciliatory expression of a hedgehog in mating season, and set off up the rocky path.

Ahead of him, the burnoosed ones scrambled nimbly up the slope, looking over their shoulders, intent upon not missing a thing, yet endeavoring to keep their distance. But two there had been who either had not seen him arrive, or did not give a damn, for they suddenly appeared upon the rise before him, racing down toward the sea with very little regard for life or limb.

In the lead, a brown young man in flying green turban and white duck trousers appeared to be losing steadily to his pursuer, who, though swathed from head to foot in that featureless native garb of the others, might yet be identified by subtle conformations as a female.

Both of them stopped at once upon sighting Colonel Glinka in the pathway, the female hurriedly retreating to what might be deemed a safer distance, the young man standing as if petrified, with one foot upraised and a sun-snarl upon his mottled face, quivering at point.

"Oh, Effendi," he cried at last, "if you are looking for Aden, then you are lost, for Aden is five hundred miles that way. And if you are looking for Cairo—"

"I am hardly ever lost," Colonel Glinka said, and, eying the young female, added, "Tell me, what is the name of that rather tasteless game that you are playing?"

"No game, Effendi," the brown young man said. "That one chases me every time I go outside. They are worse than Tuaregs, these people."

"Are you not a native, then?"

"I?" The young man placed a hand of scorn upon his breast. "Hadji Abdul Hakkim ben Salazar? I am Saudi, and a Hadj besides. Say, Joe, have you got an American cigarette?"

"A great deal better than that," Colonel Glinka said, proffering an ornate golden cigarette case. "Try one of these, my boy."

Abdul Hakkim ben Salazar took two, sniffing them suspiciously. "They are very brown," he said.

Less critically, Colonel Glinka lighted one for himself. "You know," he said, "I was rather hoping that you might direct me to the house of a very old friend of mine."

"What handle?"

"I cannot tell you what name he is presently affecting, but he is a small, crooked man with a heavy black beard—or, at any rate, he once had such a beard. I know that he is somewhere on this island; therefore it will be useless for you to lie to me."

"Ah, that is the Sidi Doctor Stephens," Abdul said, puffing not too happily upon his cigarette. "His is the only house upon this island; also, I am his flunky and so I ought to know."

"Stephens' will do," said Colonel Glinka, thwacking him smartly with the Malacca cane. "Lead on. And you may dispense with the gutter American dialect. I am not American, and besides I speak Arabic fluently."

"But I not so well," Abdul said, "for I was raised in the Kuwait oil-fields."

"By whom? A camel breeder?"

"Socony Vacuum," Abdul said.

They toiled up the face of the cliff. At once, half a dozen of the white-robed gallery fell in behind them. When Colonel Glinka stopped and looked back, they stopped. When he continued upon his way, they continued.

"Have they no homes to which to go?" he complained. "Have they nothing to do?"

"They are a very backward people, who live in the open," Abdul said. "They do not work."

"How, then, do the wretches live? Wall Street charity, I presume."

"Oh, no, when they are not able to forage, the Sidi Doctor Stephens feeds them."

"The reactionary old fool! But you may be sure that they knew how to work in the old days,

before he came."

"I do not think so."

"And why, in your ageless wisdom, not?"

"Because the Sidi Doctor made them," Abdul Hakkim ben Salazar said.

Colonel Glinka did not reply, for they had reached the summit of the path by this time and were looking down upon a small, white villa that nestled in a green microcosm between the naked chimes of the dark, interior hills. A miniature Eden indeed, thought Colonel Glinka, of figs and cinnamons, of date palms and patchouli, all enclosed within a high wire fence.

They descended, and Abdul Hakkim ben Salazar, with a flourish, produced a great bronze key and unlocked the iron gate. "The Sidi Doctor," he said, "will doubtless be in his conservatory, making flowers."

"A godlike pastime," said Colonel Glinka with heavy irony. "And where may this hotbed of new life be found?"

"Over there," Abdul said, pointing toward a narrow, screened, quonsetlike annex which protruded from the rear of the villa. "Come with me and I will show you."

"You will not," Colonel Glinka said, smiting him upon the thigh once again with the heavy cane. "You will remain here and keep silent."

"Ouchdammit!" Abdul exclaimed. "You be careful with that thing, Joe, okay?"

"*You* be careful, my boy," Colonel Glinka said and marched swiftly around the corner of the house, opened the screen door of the conservatory, and entered.

Here, amid long, terraced rows of tropical plants, a bearded dwarf in a green coat crouched before an earthen tray of lilies of the valley, tranquilly puffing up a massive, tobacco-stained meerschaum. He did not look up at the sound of the intruder, for he was engaged in a delicate business, the transfer of pollen from corolla to corolla with a toothpick.

"So you are, after all, only a minor god," Colonel Glinka said.

"I heard your plane and I watched you come up the path," the black bearded little man said. "Glinka, is it not?"

"You remembered me!" Colonel Glinka, quite affectedly, removed his goggles and dabbed at his eye with a perfumed handkerchief. "A humble policeman, a fat little nobody, to be remembered by the great Dr. Stefanik who was once our greatest scientist—yes, our most brilliant geneticist—do not shake your head. Let me see, was it Ankara where last we met? Yes, eight years ago in Ankara. You got away from me in Ankara. I was so ashamed, Comrade, that I cried."

"Nine years," the other corrected. "For one remembers a mad dog. And do not call me 'comrade,' Comrade. You know that I was never anything other than a simple Cossack."

"And, as such, invariably troublesome to us," Colonel Glinka said. "Yet you were our white hope, Comrade Stefanik. We might have led the world, I am told, in organics as we now lead in physics. I have read all of your books upon the fascinating subject of chromosomal change and the morphology of rats. It was required reading for those of us who were assigned to you. Most interesting, though I confess I did not understand all of it."

Dr. Stefanik got slowly to his feet. His back was now revealed to be so cruelly deformed that his black beard curled against his smock, and he walked with a shuffling, crablike motion as he limped over to pick up a small rubber irrigation hose.

"Why did you leave us, Comrade Stefanik?" asked Colonel Glinka. "Why shame us, discredit your government, by running away?"

"I did not like it there," Dr. Stefanik said.

"We knew, of course, that you were on the verge of some great discovery, some new process, perhaps, of controlling human development. A genetical means, our biologists tell me, which might have made us all supermen, tall and brilliant, and immune to disease. A race of Pavlovs and Stakhanovs. Do you deny this?"

Dr. Stefanik merely sucked upon his pipe calmly, twisted a valve half hidden in the greenery. A spray of brilliant green liquid emerged from the nozzle of the hose, bathing the plants in a gentle emerald mist.

"It is true," he said at last, "that I had experimented in those days with a new process of allopolyploidy."

"And what is that?"

"Alloploidy is the manipulation of chromosomic patterns which allows us to superimpose the character of our most perfect specimens upon those of less fortunate hereditary traits within the species."

"I see," said Colonel Glinka, who had not really quite seen. "Exactly. A super-race, to rule the world. Imagine, Comrade!"

"Only super-rats and the like," Dr. Stefanik told him calmly, "for you may go home and tell them that I have never seen fit to experiment with human beings, Glinka, and I never will."

"I tell them *that*?" Colonel Glinka cried. "Would I dare? Oh, no, you must tell them yourself. That is why you will have to return with me."

"Never!"

Colonel Glinka sighed prodigiously. "I am afraid that our country is going to be dogs-in-the-manger in this matter," he said. "You see, we are a jealous people by nature, and if we cannot have you, no one shall." And, deliberately, he laid the Malacca cane across his left arm, so that its tip was pointed squarely at Dr. Stefanik and the sinister round hole there clearly revealed to him.

"How melodramatic that is," Dr. Stefanik said.

"I know it," said Colonel Glinka, "but you must remember that the customs officials in this part of the world are exceedingly tiresome about firearms. This little gem, now, is quite discreet, and very accurate, and it will shoot you three times before you can say 'Never.' Will you not change your mind?"

"No."

"I *did* so want to become tall and brilliant," Colonel Glinka said regretfully, and he started to press the handle of the cane.



"We are as tall as we stand," said Dr. Stefanik, and, swiftly focusing the nozzle of the irrigation hose to a thin stream, squirted the stinging green fluid in Colonel Glinka's right and left eye.

"I know that you are in here somewhere!" Colonel Glinka yelled. "Be assured that I shall find you, Comrade, and when I do, it will not be pleasant for you! Oh, my—no, indeed!"

His eyes were red and streaming. He wiped them with the lavender-scented handkerchief, got down upon his hands and knees and started to crawl along the terraced rows of tropical plants, looking under each bench as he came to it. When he had reached the end, he turned and crawled up the other side.

At the far end of the conservatory, he stood up with a baffled grunt. "I know that you are in here," he said.

Something tickled the back of his neck. He whirled like a Dervish, but found only a drooping,

blood-red plant like nothing ever created by nature confronting him.

"I am getting jumpy," Colonel Glinka growled. "A little jumpy in my business is good, but too much is bad for the health." And he went, straightway, and closed the back door of the conservatory and dragged a heavy rack of trailing orchids in front of it, humming a furious little march from *The Guardsman* as he worked.

"You must know," he said loudly, "that I do not altogether believe you, Stefanik, when you imply that you have abandoned this research. Nor will they. For who, then, are these degenerate wretches who stand upon the hills and gawk at us, and why must you feed them? I know that they were not created by you, but it is possible that they are paid to be your guinea pigs. Perhaps you are all in the pay of the British. Am I right?"

He listened. There was no answer.

Completing his examination of the conservatory, he entered the main villa and searched it thoroughly, as he had been trained to do, looking in every cupboard and closet and under the beds.

When he had exhausted these hiding places, he left by the front door and closed it after him, with a narrow, jamming wedge that he had made of half a lead pencil.

There were many places to hide in the garden, but Colonel Glinka took them one by one, glancing behind him from time to time in order to make certain that he was not being followed around and around the house in a grim sort of Maypole dance.

"I know that you are out here, Comrade," he said.

Presently he had arrived back where he had started, sweating profusely, and was about to retrace the entire circuit when he caught a glimpse of something moving in the undergrowth of patchouli near the gate. He aimed the Malacca cane and pressed a part of its handle with his thumb. A bullet whined off the steel gatepost.

"Stop there, my friend!" he commanded.

Abdul Hakkim ben Salazar slowly rose from the bushes with his hands high above his head.

"You got me, Joe," he said.

The gate was wide open; Stefanik's route of escape now painfully obvious.

Colonel Glinka stared thoughtfully up at the darkening ridges where the sun set in that sanguinary glory observable only in these latitudes, and the dusk crept swiftly up from the seaward-reaching ravines.

"So," Colonel Glinka said. "That is where he has gone, thinking to elude me forever. But you—" he wagged the cane at Abdul, who was already shaking his head in the negative—"will lead me to him. You know his habits, and, what is more, you are almost certainly familiar with every hiding place on this island, since it is your whim to be chased all over it by the females."

"Too dark, Effendi," Abdul said. "If we go out now, they will not only chase us; they will catch us, for they are able to see very well in the dark."

"Who will catch us?"

"These people. They are worse than Tuaregs. For all I know, they may be descended from the Tuaregs, and everyone knows that a Tuareg would as soon cut a man's throat as kiss the hem of his burnoose."

"So now they are Tuaregs." Colonel Glinka nodded, with a slow, ferocious smile. "Yet you have hinted that they are the spawn of Comrade Stefanik's genius, the children of genetical science, stamped with 'Made in the Seychelles' upon their bottoms. Perhaps they were grown in the conservatory, from Tuareg seed."

Abdul grimaced. "I do not remember saying that, though sometimes I say things that I don't remember later. Perhaps they are not Tuaregs, then. To tell the truth, they were already living here when I came to work for the Sidi Doctor Stephens, and so naturally I thought that he had made them, for there were no people upon this island in the old days. Only the seabirds and a few wild goats, perhaps."

Colonel Glinka clasped his hand to his forehead. "Stop, stop, or I shall go mad!"

Abdul Hakkim obediently sat down and crossed his legs, starting to light the second of the very bad cigarettes that he had cadged.

"What are you doing?" Colonel Glinka said softly.

"Nothing, Effendi."

"Get up! Get up and get moving, my boy, or make your peace with Allah! Did you suppose for one moment that I had forgotten what we were talking about?"

It was quite dark by the time they had reached the summit of the ridge, but Colonel Glinka still marched along behind Abdul, high good humor restored, prodding him from time to time with the Malacca cane and lecturing him upon social equalities and other Party doctrine.

"Are we nearly there?" he would interrupt himself to ask from time to time.

"I do not know."

"Call out, then."

"I am afraid."

A savage poke with the cane, a war whoop from Abdul Hakkim ben Salazar. No answer.

"We'll get him," Colonel Glinka would say. "Oh, my, yes."

But an hour had passed and still they had encountered no living thing upon the path.

At last Abdul stopped abruptly. They were in a little, narrow ravine, high above the sea, with looming red cliffs all about them, and the booming of the surf upon the distant, windward shore of the island plainly audible.

"Why have we stopped here?" Colonel Glinka said, bumping into him.

"Look there, Effendi!" Abdul whispered, gesturing toward a ledge not ten yards above their heads, where a burnoused figure stood looking down upon them.

"And there—and there—and there!" Abdul pointed at other little ledges where similar ghostly sentries stood, barely visible in the gloom.

Colonel Glinka looked behind him and saw that there were others that they had passed within a very few feet of, standing upon every shelf and ledge that afforded a foot-hold above the trail. Dozens and dozens of them.

"Maybe we had better scam out of here, Joe," Abdul suggested.

"I perceive that you are trying to frighten me," Colonel Glinka said. "It won't work."

A stone rattled behind them.

"What was that?" Colonel Glinka demanded, turning around quickly. "Who's there?"

Something moved in the shadows, edging into the deeper shadows of the rocks. It was the pursuing female of earlier that afternoon.

Abdul Hakkim ben Salazar, in deep, abdominal disgust, groaned.

"Come here, you!" Colonel Glinka commanded. "Come on over here. Don't be afraid, my little one—I won't hurt you."

She advanced ever so little, a shapeless white wraith attracted by the syrup in his voice. He took one step forward. Carefully she retreated a step.

"Come now," Colonel Glinka said. "Surely it is time that we met. For you may as well know that I am now the master of this island. Now and forevermore, so far as you are concerned, my child. Perhaps I may let you help me clear up a little of its mystery."

She kept a maddening five or six feet between them, somehow. He could not lessen the distance without alarming her. And so he balanced himself upon the balls of his feet and lunged.

She gave a little cry, stumbled and fell, rolling over and over into a dark little depression beside the path as he clutched at her robe. The garment, still in his hand, unwound easily, peeling her very much like an apple.

"I beg your pardon," Colonel Glinka said, scrambling after her upon his hands and knees, groping for her with outstretched arms. "I beg—" His hand touched something which might have been her ankle. He seized it, held it for a moment, and then, shuddering, let it go, drawing back his hand as if it had been stabbed. By now the night was quite dark.

Colonel Glinka scrambled to his feet, half instinctively raised the deadly Malacca cane.

"Don't do it, Joe!" cried Abdul, coming up from behind him and shoving him hard.

The shot went wild, but the sound of it, echoing up and down the ravine, started an ominous, new sound, the growing, staccato murmur of many voices, a rattling of stones, a hundred different movements in the blackness.

Colonel Glinka fired the last bullet more wildly still, hurled the Malacca cane at them, and ran.

Abdul Hakkim ben Salazar, who had been many leaps ahead of him, arrived breathless at the front gate of the villa, opened it, dived through, locked it behind him, and threw himself upon the grass to catch his breath.

There was a cheerful glow in the darkness. The slight, grotesque figure of Dr. Stefanik and his pipe emerged from the shadows.

"Ah," Abdul breathed, "where were you, Sidi, when I was out there dying for you?"

"Hiding up the tallest cinnamon tree, like a monkey," Dr. Stefanik said.

They sat there upon the grass for a long while in companionable silence, heeding the sounds of the night, which was balmy and infinitely peaceful.

There came a high-pitched, long-drawn-out scream from somewhere on the ridge.

"They got him," Abdul said.

"And now they will pluck him, I suppose," said Dr. Stefanik. "There, by the way, is a thing that even *I* have never completely understood about them. Their insatiable curiosity, of course, is a vestigial trait that will pass, but this other drive, I fear, this rather alarming passion that they have shown for the up-breeding of the species may be some universal of life itself that no man may touch or alter."

Down the path from the ridge, a small, white-robed figure came running, far ahead of the others, bent upon her own schemes of evolution.

Abdul crouched lower in the shadows. "That one makes even the heart of a man swell within his breast," he whispered, "for she does not ever give up."

"That no man may touch," Dr. Stefanik repeated, and nodded his shaggy head wisely. "As an idealist, I may have given them shoes and enlightenment, but I did not give them this, and so they are not altogether mine. *His* kind still professes to believe in the common denominator and the common level, seeking to drag down the few from their gilt palaces and haul up the masses from the muck. Tell me, as a Hadj who is, at the same time, undoubtedly vermin-ridden, do *you* believe in the equality of men—or can you honestly wish it?"

"All of us to be Effendis?"

"Something like that."

Abdul Hakkim ben Salazar thought about it for a time with furrowed brow. "No, Sidi," he said at last, "for then there would be no one to chase us."

The female stopped, knelt in the path.

"What is she doing now?" Dr. Stefanik asked.

"She is taking off her shoes, in order to run faster than me."

"... And cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind! And yet you told Glinka *I* made them!"

"Ah, but not out of *what*, Sidi," Abdul said.

The female, with a hopeful little bleat, arose and tucked her shoes under her arm, for youth is hope and kids will be kids, and off she went, clip-clop, clip-clop, down the rocky path to the sea.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PASTORAL AFFAIR ***

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