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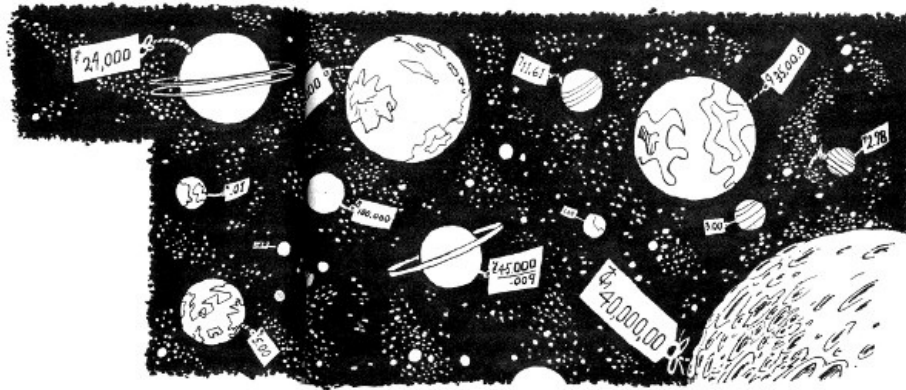


# **BAD MEMORY**

**BY PATRICK FAHY**

**illustrated by MARTIN**

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***Channing wanted a planet.  
Had they sold him a pup?***

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Ex-vector Commander Jim Channing strode purposefully to the reception desk of Planet Enterprises, Inc.

"I want," he told the well-built blonde who was making an interested survey of his lean features, "to buy a planet."

"Yes, sir." Her interest evaporated. She took a card from a filing cabinet and handed it to him. "If you will just fill this out."

It was a simple questionnaire—type, location, size—and Channing's stylo moved rapidly over it. He hesitated only at the last, stark question, "How much are you prepared to pay?" Then he wrote neatly in the space provided "One hundred thousand credits." That was exactly the amount of his signing-off bonus. It also represented his total finances. The unimaginative minds that calculated the pay of a red-blooded space officer didn't take into account all the attractive ways of spending it that a rumbustious pioneer Vector provided.

He gave the blonde the card and she wrote a name on it. The smile she gave him was altogether impersonal. She liked the look of the big, gangling fellow with "Space" written all over his bronzed face and crinkled blue eyes, but....

She said, "Will you come this way, please?"

The name on the desk identified him as "Mr. Folan" and he was a tall, affable man.

"I think we can suit you, Commander—er—Mr. Channing," he said, "though what we have in mind mightn't be quite as large as you wish. Earth-type planets come rather high, you know. Now if you were to choose a Sirius- or a Vega-type—"

"Thank you, no," Jim said firmly. He had heard too much about the hazards of alien-type planets.

"In that case," Mr. Folan said busily, "let's see what we have available."

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A month later the doors of the automatic shuttle slid across and admitted Jim Channing to the third planet of Phylox Beta. It also disgorged one spaceboat, a clutter of machinery, a thousand tons of strawberry plants and a fully equipped house. While he was still taking in the first glimpse of his future home, the massive doors slammed shut and the giant ship took off smoothly and silently. A moment later it winked into sub-space. He was in business.

The planet possessed only one sizable island—it could hardly be dignified by the name of continent.

The rest was covered by a vast ocean. Still, as Folan had explained, he couldn't really expect anything more—not in the line of an Earth-type, anyway—for the money.

He spent a week figuring out the remote controls that operated the planting machinery. Once it clanked into operation, it worked entirely on its own. He had only to push a few buttons to send it lumbering in new directions and the big island steadily took on a resemblance to a huge strawberry patch while Channing fished and lounged in the sun.

When the galactic trade agent came, the strawberries were waiting for him, neatly piled into a mountain of gleaming cans. He was a friendly, talkative little man, glad to exercise his tongue again after the lonely months in space.

"What are you growing here?" he asked Channing.

"Strawberries."

The friendly smile disappeared. "Every planet in the Galaxy seems to be growing strawberries this year. I can't even give them away."

"But I thought the Ursa Major colonies—"

The little man shook his head. "So does everyone else. There's a million tons of strawberries the colonies can't use headed there already. Now if it was upklin seeds—"

"Upklin seeds?"

The agent looked at him in surprise. "You mean you haven't heard about upklin seeds?"

"No. Not a thing."

"Well, of course, you are a newcomer. It's this new race that's been discovered somewhere in The Sack. They are as rich as all get-out and they have a passion for upklin seeds. Trouble is they can't grow them on local planets and they are offering fancy prices to anybody that can supply them. I paid a thousand credits a bushel for them to your next-door neighbor on the fourth planet last week. Got a hundred bushels."

Channing did a bit of mental arithmetic. A hundred thousand credits for one crop. Whew!

"Could I grow them here?"

The agent shook his head. "You need plenty of soft marsh and a Jupiter-type atmosphere."

Then he had a sudden idea and he spoke long and seriously to Channing, explaining quite a few things that were new to him. Channing was still considering them, staring thoughtfully at the ground, after the little man left.

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Next day Channing took off for the nearest sub-space center and a few hours later he was in Mr. Folan's office at Planet Enterprises, gingerly balancing his cap on his knee. Mr. Folan's sleek head nodded as Channing made his points and when he was finished the executive pressed a buzzer and called for the file.

"You realize, Mr. Channing," he said conversationally, as he turned over the pages, "that what you are asking will be a most expensive undertaking."

"I know that," Channing said eagerly, "but upklin seeds are such a sure-fire proposition that I thought Planet Enterprises might be willing to do the job on a percentage basis."

Mr. Folan wrote some figures on the margin of the folder and considered deeply. "Yes," he said at last, "I think it would work out on a seventy-thirty split."

"Seventy-thirty?"

Mr. Folan inclined his head graciously. "Seventy per cent for Planet Enterprises and thirty for yourself."

Channing said slowly, "That's a bit steep."

In a few brisk words, Mr. Folan showed just why he was an executive of Planet Enterprises, Inc. He gave Channing the figures for transforming the planet's characteristics to those of Jupiter; he told him what acreage of upklin seeds he could grow and the exact profit to be expected. Channing's share should be about one hundred and fifty thousand credits per crop.

Fighting a rearguard battle, Channing said, "Your three hundred and fifty thousand won't look so bad on the balance sheet, either."

Folan reeled off his figures again with practiced glibness. Channing had the sudden suspicion that his proposition wasn't entirely unexpected. But the figures sounded reasonable and he had to admit that Planet Enterprises was risking a great deal of money.

"Then there is the not inconsiderable cost of your own metamorphosis, Mr. Channing," Folan added.

"Huh?" said Channing.

There followed the most excruciating half-hour of Channing's life. Proposition followed explanation, counter-explanation followed counter-proposition. At the end of that time he emerged from the office with a stricken look and a small white card. The blonde receptionist read the look correctly and definitely and finally crossed him off her list.

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For a jube, Ckm Dyk wasn't at all bad-looking. His four legs growing directly from the bottom of the muscular, hairy trunk were strong and sturdy—always a mark of handsomeness in a male, for the legs had to take most of the strain of a gravitational pull several times that of Earth. He had three flexible tentacles, a thin melon slice for a mouth, but nothing resembling a nose. He didn't need one, since he breathed through a set of gills at the sides of his head.

He remembered vaguely that he had once been Jim Channing, an Earthman, but the memory had nearly faded. He had been warned of that, that he would soon forget he had ever been anything

except what he was now, but he had already forgotten the warning.

Phylox Beta III had changed, too, and in as great a degree. The wide ocean had become a turgid, soupy mush, covered by the trailing growths of the upklin flowers. The blue skies had turned an angry red and the sharp wind that rustled the hair on his squat body was almost pure methane.

He waddled down to the low disk-shaped skimmer and started the jets. As it pushed its way through the clinging masses of the upklin flowers, he surveyed his crop happily. This was his second crop and it promised to be even better than the first. He was going to be a very wealthy buk, he told himself. He could buy.... His mind floundered. He didn't know what Jubes longed for, what they sought wealth for. He was certain at the same time that there was a flaw in his contentment, that something was missing.

What he was missing dropped from the sky a few days later. It came in a spaceboat and was his neighbor from Phylox Beta IV. Her body hair was a rich golden brown and she wore pretty bracelets, studded with basim stones, on each of her four legs. Ckm Dyk's single eye, with its perpendicular outer eyelids and horizontal nictitating inner membranes to filter out the infra-red rays, shone with an emotion that was more than pleasure.

Her thoughts flooded his mind. There was a warm recognition of his admiration and a delicious suggestion that it wasn't unacceptable.

"The agent told me you were upklin farming. I came to see if I could be of any help," she told him.



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The sentences rang like golden bells within his burgeoning consciousness. He tried to shape his answering thought coherently, but his lack of telepathic experience betrayed him. She flinched momentarily beneath the raw, undirected stream of passionate love that overwhelmed her mind.

Then an answering wave of shy, tender awareness and acquiescence laved his senses. Without the clumsy barrier of speech between them, they had scaled in a few pulsating moments the shining heights of love and devotion that human passion sometimes cannot find in a lifetime of searching.

Ckm Dyk had never been so happy. They decided to farm the two planets together so they could be with each other always. There was sound economic sense in this; with both of them helping, the output of each planet would be nearly doubled. It meant a huge increase in administrative and paper work for Ckm Dyk, but he didn't mind that. Often, as he pored over account books and production figures, a tremulous, shy devotion would envelop him in a gauzy mental cloud and he would lay down his stylo and answer Aln Muh with all the great love that surged within him.

As the months passed, his happiness increased. The perfect attunement of their minds excluded all the scalding jealousies and the offended silences of misunderstanding that can mar the most loving human relationships. They did not need to see each other; the physical presence of the beloved was unimportant; they loved more with their minds than with their bodies.

It seemed improbable that such a glorious idyll should ever be disturbed. Then, one morning, a shuttle-spacer came silently out of the red sky and landed beside the house. Ckm Dyk waddled toward it, impelled by a carefully built-in series of reflexes which he had completely forgotten about and entered its gaping maw. He never once looked at Aln Muh and the passionate entreaties that echoed through his mind only roused in him a dull irritation.

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Jim Channing again found himself in Mr. Folan's office. The figures the tall, sleek-haired man was reading out to him made tuneful music. Even when Planet Enterprises' massive deduction was made, his share was comfortingly more than a million.

"Not bad payment, Mr. Channing, for five years of life! In any case, it's all over now—just a bad memory."

The executive smiled at him from his comfortable, familiar chair, aware of the torrents of

confused thoughts hidden behind the gray eyes.

When he had come out of the stupor that succeeded the almost disintegrating effects of his re-metamorphosis, Jim Channing remembered clearly the terms of the bargain he had made. He was to become a Jube, a living nightmare, living in a nightmare world, for five years. At the end of that time, Planet Enterprises promised him, he would be given back his humanity and he would have earned enough money to keep him in luxury for the rest of his life.

They had kept their promise—to the letter. He felt it ungrateful of him that his paramount emotion was fury. He had been happy; no human attachment could ever make him as happy again. He longed for the glorious love and trust he had shared during that tremendous five years. Perhaps he had been a repulsive monster from whom any woman would run screaming. But he didn't want a woman. He wanted Aln Muh.

He said, picking his words with the greatest care, "Would a further metamorphosis be possible?"

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Folan's jaw dropped. It was a question he'd never expected to hear from any of the men who had taken the terrible choice for the glittering reward he held out to them. Most of them had picked up their vouchers and asked the way to the nearest tavern; many of the alien races did not find alcohol compatible with their metabolisms. A few had inquired tentatively about his current receptionist. Planet Enterprises had a big turnover in pretty receptionists, but they didn't lose them to men who had been unhuman horrors for five years. One big red-haired character had wanted to start a private war against the Sirians, whose brother he had been until two days previously. But none of them had wanted to go back.

He said, "It's possible, Mr. Channing. But I must tell you that a second metamorphosis is very expensive—and it's permanent."

"You mean if I become a Jube again, I must stay one?"

The executive nodded.

Channing gestured toward the payment voucher.

"You said it was expensive. Is there enough there to cover it?"

Folan looked curiously at him. "Yes, more than enough."

He waited to hear what the big man would say next.

Channing licked dry lips. A terrible doubt assailed him. Maybe Aln Muh had been metamorphosed too. Maybe she had returned to her former self—whatever that may have been—while he sat here.

He looked down at the big, freckled hands resting on his knees. They were trembling and his palms felt moist. Without looking up, he asked, "Is the period of metamorphosis, always for a term of five years?"

"Invariably. No other term is possible in the present state of our knowledge of the technique—except permanency."

A great sigh escaped Channing. That was all right, then. Aln Muh was genuinely a Jube. The agent had told him about her—mentioned her by name, he remembered now—had said that she was upklin farming on the neighboring planet. If she had been metamorphosed, she would have been taken from him more than a year ago.

He tossed his cap on the table decisively and stood up.

"All right. I'll take the permanent treatment."

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Ckm Dyk sucked the methane through his gills with satisfaction. It was good to be home again. He had forgotten already that he had ever been Jim Channing, that he would never be human again.

He did not know that less than five minutes after the shuttle-ship had borne him off to Galactic Enterprises, Aln Muh had sent her spaceboat hurtling toward the fiery orb of Phylox Beta, mad with the grief of having lost him. It would not have concerned him much if he had known.

Jubes make tender and devoted lovers, but they are notorious for their exceedingly bad memories.

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