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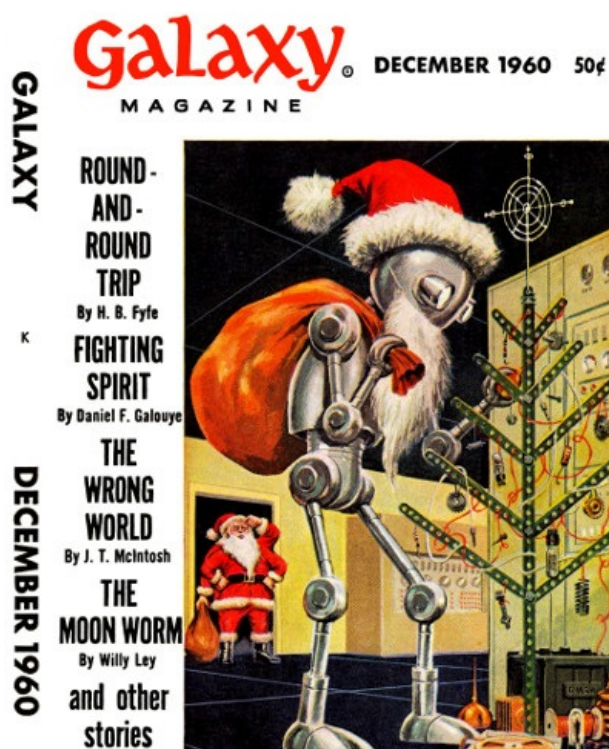
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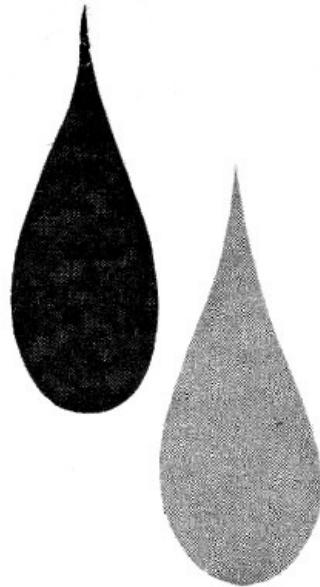


BLUEBLOOD

By JIM HARMON

Illustrated by WOOD

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BLUEBLOOD

*There were two varieties of aliens—blue
and bluer—but not as blue as the Earthmen!*

Even if I'm only a space pilot, I'm not dumb. I mean I'm not *that* dumb. I admit that Dr. Ellik and Dr. Chon outrank me, because that's the way it's got to be. A pilot is only an expendable part. But I had been the first one to see the natives on this planet, and I was the first one to point out that they came in two attractive shades of blue, light blue and dark blue.

Four Indigos were carrying an Azure. I called the others over to the screen.

"A sedan chair," identified Lee Chon. "Think the light-skinned one is a kind of a priest?"

Mike Ellik shook his head. "I doubt it. The chair isn't ornate enough. I think that's probably the standard method of travel—at least for a certain social elite."

"Do you notice anything unusual about those bully boys?"

"You tell me what you see," Ellik evaded.

"Three of them are mongoloid idiots," said Chon.

"I thought so," Ellik said, "but I wasn't quite sure—aliens and all."

"They're humanoids," Chon said, "and humanoids are my specialty. I know."

"The fourth one doesn't look much better."

"His features are slack and his jaw is loose, all right, but they aren't *made* that way. It's an expression he could change. His head isn't shaped like that."

"Um. The man in the chair is a striking specimen. No cerebral damage in him."

"I don't think the answer is brain damage. If the 'noble' trusts those four to carry him, their actions and reflexes must be pretty well coordinated. They can't have anything like palsy or epilepsy."

"They must breed a special type of slave for the job," Ellik suggested.

"They aren't slaves, Mike," I told him.

"No?" Ellik said, like talking to a kid. "And what are they, Mike?"

I breathed out hard, a little disgusted that big brains like Ellik and Chon couldn't see the translucent truth. "They are just four dumb slobs who can't get a better job, so they are hauling His Highness around because they have to make a living the hard way."

"That doesn't quite cover it, Johnny," Chon said. "The carriers are a completely different race."

"What's different about them?" I asked. "They've got hands to work with, eyes to see with, noses to smell with. If you kick one of them, I bet he'll hurt. It's just their bad luck to be dumb slob."

Ellik grunted. "Unfortunately, Johnny, there are subtler differences. The darker aliens, the indigo-colored ones, seem to be definitely down further on the scale of local evolution. They must be an inferior race to the lighter, azure species."

Chon had been looking at us and listening to everything. Finally he said, "You can't be sure of that, Mike. You haven't seen all of the Indigos. Some of them may not be as far down as the common carriers."

Ellik sighed. "Explorers have to make snap decisions on insufficient data. We don't have time to see the whole damned planet before we write up a report."

"Yes, explorers have to make snap decisions," Chon repeated to himself. "Are you going to take a look at those buildings, see if it's a village?"

"I thought I'd see if our blueblood friend out there wants to show it to me," said Mike Ellik.

"He won't," I said.

They both looked at me.

"You don't have any chair and nobody to carry you," I went on. "He'll think you're just a slob."

"Jonathan," Ellik said, "you show occasional flashes of genius."

I smiled and shrugged it off. "I know I'm not nearly as smart as you boys. But that doesn't mean I can't think *at all*."

Ellik clapped me on the shoulder. "Of course it doesn't."

But his grip was too strong.

"Johnny," Ellik said gravely, "do you think *you* could carry me?"

"Wait a minute. You want me to act like one of those slob? That's asking a lot."

"But could you?"

"Not all the way to those buildings. What was the gravity reading, Lee?"

Chon closed his eyes a second. "Point nine seven three."

"There!" I said. "I couldn't tote you three or four miles piggy-back."

"Look," Chon said, "we can strip down a magnetic flyer and you can ride the seat, Mike. Johnny can pretend to carry you, like on a platter. It'll impress the yokels with the strength of our flunkies."

"*Mike* could carry *me*," I pointed out.

Chon laid a delicate hand on my back. "But, buddy, Mike outranks you."

I shook my head. "Not that way, he doesn't."

"We may be going to a lot of trouble for nothing," Mike said. "That gang may jump us as soon as we decant and try to have us for dinner."

"There's always that risk," Chon agreed solemnly, "but naturally I will remain on duty at the controls of the stun cannon."

"Securely inside," Ellik added.

"Always on duty," Chon said.

"Always inside," Ellik said.

"It's in the records, Ellik. I took the last one." Lee said it a little too sharp and it cut the kidding.

"Go soak your soft head in brine," Ellik said, disgruntled.

"Wait a minute," Chon called.

Ellik turned back. "Yeah?"

"Don't forget to take your communicator with you." Chon's voice was choked. "You may get out of line of sight if you go off with that troupe."

"I know this business," Ellik said, turning away.

"Mike, I'm sorry if I offended you. Shake, huh?"

Ellik smiled sourly. "Forget it."

"Come on, shake."

"Okay, we're buddies. Do I actually have to pump your clammy paw?"

"Please!"

"Oh, for Pete's sake!" Ellik turned around and kissed Chon on the forehead.

Ellik was just sore, of course. But the manual warns against that sort of horseplay when you've

been out a long time.

"Satisfied now?" Ellik asked.

"No." Chon's voice was strained tight. "It should have been me to kiss you." Chon turned to me. "Luck out there, Johnny."

I grabbed his hand and levered it fast, before he could decide I needed kissing. "Sure thing, Lee. Thanks."

The buildings weren't much to see, but they were a step above primitive huts. They were adobe, or maybe plastic. The aliens understood the stress principles of the dome, Ellik said, because all the buildings had curved roofs. Unbaked pottery was what they looked like to me, and they looked as if they would be brittle as coffee-colored chalk. Actually, their ceramic surfaces were at least as hard as steel.

The Azure had welcomed Ellik with an outstretched hand. Mike wasn't one to jump to conclusions, so he just held out his own hand. The native grabbed and let it go after pulling it some.

The alien saw me apparently carrying Ellik on a seat cushion with one hand, and he kicked me in the leg. To test my muscles, I guess. I managed to keep from yelling or jumping. The Azure looked impressed and the Indigos did a bad job of hiding a lot of envy and hate.

As the Indigos toted their man along on the litter and I guided Ellik's seat cushion along the channel of magnetic feedback, the two riders began talking. Ellik's translator collar broke the language barrier, of course. It was a two-way communicator on a direct hook-up to our cybernetic calculator on the ship. The brain analyzed the phonetic structure of the alien language under various systems of logic or anti-logic and fed the translation into Ellik's ear. Then it went through its memory banks and played back the right sounds to translate Ellik's talk into the alien language. I understand things like that. I'm a pretty good mechanic.

I didn't have my translator turned on, but it seemed to me that somehow I could understand what the plug-uglies, the Indigos, were saying.

Ellik told me that it was because all their speech was based on the one universal humanoid sound, "mama." Everything good in the way of nouns and verbs (there were no other particles of speech) was some inflection of "m-m" and everything bad was "uh-m-m."

Ellik was pretty "uh-m-m."

I was *plenty* "uh-m-m." I threatened their jobs, they thought.

They were a real miserable bunch of slobs, those Indigos.

We passed through the wide places between the houses—I wouldn't call them streets—and saw a lot of Indigos crouched in doorways, watching us, and Azures being toted around.

The clothing they wore was also pretty universal for sentient bipeds—a tunic or sarong, kind of. For the Azures, it was smooth and colorful; and for the Indigos, a loincloth of some rough, dun-colored stuff.

Ellik chinned off his translator switch and leaned down toward my ear. "They are two distinct races, Johnny. Notice that *all* the Indigos are menials. There does not appear to be anything to correspond to a freedman or even a higher-ranked house servant. The Azures treat the Indigos only as animals."



"Slobs," I said. "Poor dumb slobs."

The nuclear flash washed over us, peppering us with a few excess roentgens.

We couldn't look at the spaceship going up, but we knew it was going. It was making a dawn.

The aliens were all frightened. They fell on the ground and started praying to the ship, all of them, the Azures and the Indigos.

"What's wrong with that crazy Chinaman?" Ellik yelled.

"Lee knows what he's doing," I said.

Ellik unsnapped his communicator from his belt. "Johnny says you know what you're doing, Chon. *Do you?*"

"I know." Chon's voice sounded right beside us, perfectly natural. Belt communicators work just as well as those consoles. People only buy consoles for prestige.

"Well?" Ellik demanded. "What *are* you doing, Lee?"

I thought maybe something had gone wrong with the communicator.

Chon's voice finally reached us.

"I'm leaving you and Johnny on this planet, Mike," he said.

An Indigo brought us in our morning supply of fruit.

Ellik kicked the Indigo. "It's overripe, blockhead. *Amum, amum.*"

The Indigo backed out, bowing, eyes very round.

Ellik felt me looking at him.

"Well, I don't *like* kicking the oaf, but that's all he's been conditioned to understand as a sign of disapproval."

"Sure," I said.

Ellik passed through the scimitar of gray shadow into the sunlight that washed lines and years out of his face. He braced a hand against the doorframe and craned his head back. It stopped and steadied.

"He's still there," Ellik said. "Sometimes I wish his orbit would decay enough to burn him up in this damned sour air." He coughed into his fist.

"He could probably correct," I suggested.

Ellik sneered. "He hasn't got the brains."

"Pretty hard for one man to manage a takeoff. He was lucky to make it into orbit."

"I just wish he would come down. Somehow, someday, I'd get to him, no matter where he went on this planet."

"I suppose that's why he stays up."

Ellik slammed his fist into his palm. "I'm going to call him again. He can't get away without us. If he fouled up a takeoff that badly, he's not going to try to solo into hyperspace."

"I don't think anyone would solo into hyperspace. I don't think he would be able to come back."

"Oh, what do you know about it?" Ellik said shortly. "He's just building up his courage to try the big jump. He's yellow, sure, but sooner or later he'll get desperate enough, or scared enough, to actually go. Then we'll be stranded for fair. This planet may not be colonized for centuries!"

"Probably never," I said. "Not after Lee's reports."

"You think he would falsify reports?" Ellik asked, blinking at me.

"I suppose he'll have to."

Ellik held his head with his hands. "Of course, of course. There's no limit to the depths to which he would plummet." He ran over to the corner and snatched a communicator off the pile of our gear. "I'm going to call him and tell him what I think of him and his wild obsession."

I didn't remind Ellik that he had been telling Chon just that at least once a day for a month. I knew his nerves got tighter and tighter and cussing out Chon helped release them and make him feel better.

"Come down, Lee!" Ellik called. "The three of us can make the jump together. You're martyring yourself for a crazy reason!"

"We've talked this over before," Chon answered. "This is the last time I'm going to respond to your call. I've made it clear to you that I think knowledge of this world will cause great suffering, a lot of death, among the majority of Earth's people."

"You're talking prejudice, Lee! *Your* prejudice. People aren't like that any more."

"We haven't gone *that* far, Mike. The bigots, the hatemongers, the pettiness and xenophobia lurking in everybody haven't been asleep that long. Just look at it from *my* side, Mike. What will the white people of Earth think about the Orientals, Negroes and Indians of Earth when they find out the dark-skinned humanoids of another planet are—measurably, unquestionably, vastly—*inferior* to the light-skinned race of the same world? I ask you, Mike!"

Mike Ellik said, "It's an inept analogy, Lee, and you know it."

"But most people reason by analogy," said Lee Chon. "No, Mike. I have to leave you and Johnny to prevent a recurrence of racial hatred, intolerance and all the ugly consequences on both sides. This is the last time I'll answer you, Mike. I'm getting lonesome. In a few years, I'll get hungry for human companionship. I don't want to be tempted down. Good-bye, Johnny. So long, Mike."

Ellik screamed. "Wait! Answer one more call, Lee. It's the least you can do for me. I don't know when I'll make it. It may be in a few weeks or a few years. It won't be just argument, Lee. I'll have something you'll *want* to tell Earth about this place and these people."

"I'm still here. Tell it to me now," Chon's voice said.

"No. I want to get proof. Let me rig up some kind of video circuit for you. I can use parts out of our tape camera and the translators. I want to get it all across to you."

I could hear Chon breathing. "Very well. I'll answer your next call."

"Lee," I called out, "Mike and me will be expecting you to answer."

Chon laughed. "I'm not going anywhere, Johnny. Only around this world every couple of hours."

"You couldn't make the jump through hyperspace without us, Lee," Ellik said.

"That's right, Mike. I'm—I'm sorry to quarantine you two down there."

"*Quarantine!*" Ellik stormed. "*We're* not sick, Lee. *You* are the sick one!"

There wasn't any sound, not even of breathing.

"You have an idea to change Lee's mind, Mike?" I asked.

He cupped his hand on the back of my neck. "Affirmative, Jonathan. A pretty damned good one, too."

Ellik stood staring out the door, gnawing on one of his knuckles, letting the sun turn the front of him into gold, so he looked like half a statue, and half a man.

"I suppose it had to come out in him sooner or later," he said.

"What, Mike?"

"What could we expect? It's the basic quality of treachery in the Oriental mind."

When the shadows were at their longest and the alien sun was down the closest to the horizon without actually going under, Ellik marched up the path shoving a new Indigo. The Azures

supplied Mike with all the flunkies he wanted to gather food and the like for him, as his natural right. But I thought we had enough of them hanging around our quarters. I couldn't imagine what he would want with another one.

The alien hovered at the door. Ellik kicked him in the calf to make him understand he was to go inside.

"Look at him, Johnny," Ellik said, pushing the fellow forward. "Not a mongoloid, would you say?"

"No."

The alien looked stupid—blue and stupid. His face was hanging there, but it wasn't pushed out of shape any more than the faces of the Azures. The Indigo blinked back at me. What he also looked was not friendly.

Ellik took the Indigo's cheeks in his hand and angled the face toward the light. "He's a half-breed, Johnny, or otherwise the gene was recessive. He wasn't damaged before birth, only after—when he started to breathe."

"What do you mean, Mike?"

"You ever hear of cyanosis, Johnny?"

"No."

"Well, these creatures have something like it. The Indigos don't get enough oxygen in their blood cells. It makes them sluggish; it turns them blue like the pictures of 'blue babies' in the old books."

"I never saw a picture like that in an old book," I said.

"Did you ever *see* a book? Sorry, Johnny. Just kidding." Ellik rubbed his hands together. "Well! I theorized that there is no basic difference in the Azures and the Indigos except improper aeration of their blood. So, you see, an Indigo is only a *sick* Azure, and I am going to make this Indigo *well*."

"How can you do that?"

"It's simple," Mike said irritably. "The Indigos must have a malformation of the heart causing an abnormal communication between the venous and arterial side of the circulation system. A little surgery and I adjust a valve in the heart. No more communication. Proper aeration. Enough oxygen. The deep blue color goes, leaving only the lighter blue of the natural pigmentation. The patient feels better, acts better, thinks better, looks better. In short, he is no longer an Indigo but an Azure."

"Is—is this what you're going to show Lee?" I ventured.

"Of course! It proves the Indigos *aren't* an inferior race. They are the same as the Azures except that they are sick. Their being sick can't reflect unfavourably on any terrestrial colored race. There is no analogy. But I have to prove it to Chon. We're going to tape the whole process and feed it to him."

"I think," I said, "that that might get to him."

"Sure it will." Ellik's jaw muscles flexed. "I should ruin Lee with this thing, but I won't. I'm not a vindictive man. Lee and I will probably be working together for years. But whenever he gets out of line—has some stubborn idea about doing something his way—don't think I won't remind him of this!"

Suddenly, he was smiling again. He turned to the gawking Indigo. He pointed two fingers at him.

"*Mmr?*" Ellik asked.

The alien tapped himself on his chest cavity twice. "*Mhaw*," he gave his name.

"*Mhaw M'i uh M'i m M'm'-uh?*" Ellik asked him, without even using the translators.

"*M-m-M-m-M*," the alien went, slapping himself on the chest with his opened palms.

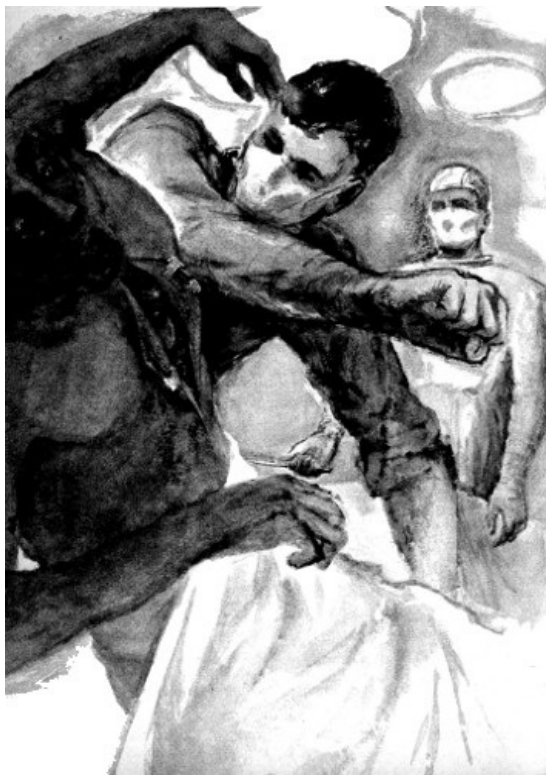
Ellik turned to me, grinning. "I asked him if he wanted to stop being an Indigo and become an Azure. He thinks I can do anything and he's all for it."

After we fed Mhaw a dose of null-shock from our packs, Doc Ellik started to slice him open with a ceramic knife he had borrowed from the Azures.

But Ellik had forgotten that the alien might get frightened seeing himself cut open, even if he couldn't feel any pain. It had never happened to him before.

The alien lumbered to his feet, his chest hanging open, showing his heart beating like some animal caught inside a blueberry pudding.

I drove a right cross into his jaw, and felt the jar all the way up to my shoulder.



He melted back down onto the pallet.

"Good work, Johnny," Ellik said, stooping and starting his work.

Right away, Mhaw started to lose that Indigo color and get real light—lighter than the Azures, in fact. None of the blue of the race was actually in the pigmentation, Mike found out. Even the Azures suffered some degree of improper aeration of the blood.

"You going to call Lee Chon now?" I asked Mike. "You going to show him the tape we had running during the operation and all?"

"Not quite yet, Johnny," he said. "First I want to educate Mhaw a bit, up to the Azure level or better. That should convince Lee."

Mhaw learned fast, probably faster than the Azures, even. Almost the first thing he wanted was for us to stop calling him Mhaw and start using an Azure name, Aedo.

Once a day, Ellik left our hut to take some exercise—a walk along the alien esplanade, he called it. I used to stay with the doctored alien, now Aedo, but we finally learned we could trust him to follow our orders—which were to stay inside, away from the others, since we didn't know how they would take him. So I got to walking along with Ellik.

As dusk lengthened, we could see the spark that was our ship in its orbit along the retreating horizon.

Ellik twisted back his head and the side of his mouth. "Look at him up there—*look!*"

The spark burned brighter and danced in another direction.

"He's gone! He left us!" Ellik said.

"It's okay. He's still there. Just corrected the orbit a little, I guess."

"No, no, no," Ellik said. "He started to make another try. But he got afraid to try to go into hyperspace alone."

"He was just correcting for orbital decay."

"You don't understand, Johnny. He's a coward. That makes him dangerous. He's getting desperate. That desperation will burst the dam of his own weakness and wash away our hope, *our lives.*"

His voice hushed. He stood staring starkly ahead, his palms outstretched at his sides.

"Maybe he isn't *that* cowardly," I said hopefully.

"Finished," Ellik announced. He meant he had finished editing the tape showing the operation on the alien and his recovery from his blue disease, from being an Indigo to better than an Azure.

"The transmitter is finished too," I said.

Ellik had suggested a way of switching the tape camera to a video converter for one of the audio

communicators, and I had been able to do it easy. It took parts from both our communicators and translators too.

Ellik fitted the coiled snake of tape into place. "This will be a great day for your people, Aedo. After our friend from heaven lands, we will be able to teach you a way to cure all of your sick, to make all the Indigos like you."

"Like me? Make like me?" Aedo said in the pidgin terrestrial that Mike Ellik had taught him.

"Yes. We'll show them how we cured you and how all can be cured."

"You make show fellow like me? Make tell make that fellow like fellow like me?"

"Everything's ready, Mike," I called.

"That's right, Aedo," Mike said. "You'll show your people the way to equality."

"Make all fellow like this fellow?" Aedo asked.

"Shall I call in Lee?" I asked Mike.

"Yes, that's right, Aedo. Just right."

"No," Aedo said.

The alien stomped the tape camera and the communicator to bits before I could get a hammerlock on him.

Ellik just stared at the complete wreck of our only means of communication with the spaceship.

"I be much man now. I much smart. Much smart than Azure hicks and Indigo slobs. I much smart all. I much man! Not to be all same now. *No*." The snarl hung on in Aedo's throat.

Ellik lifted his head and sort of smiled. But not quite.

"Well," he said slowly and sadly, "what could you expect in the way of gratitude from a dirty alien?"

The Azures did accept Aedo all right. They seem to think he must have come from some other tribe. They don't associate him with the Indigo that disappeared. No Indigo ever became an Azure before.

Of course, Azures sometimes become Indigos, we found out.

It seems there's a virus of what Ellik called pseudo-cyanosis in the air. The Azures have become a pretty resistant breed to it, while the Indigos are all easy victims. But once in a while an Azure will come down with it and turn Indigo.

Mike Ellik caught it too.

It happened pretty fast. By the time we realized what it was, he was already too stupid to finish the operation he started on himself. I had to sew him up, not very neatly.

Ellik is treated pretty much like the rest of the Indigos. So am I. He takes it all pretty calm. He can still talk a little Earth. Whenever anybody kicks him, Ellik just mutters something about, "What can fellow expect bunch lousy creeps like those fellow?"

I guess I'll get it too. I think I am getting it.

It won't be so bad for me. Just like maybe going around drunk all the time, not being able to think or coordinate very well.

It will be kind of bad being a member of an inferior race, but the thing I'll hate about it the most isn't that, or even leaving old Lee up there, circling around and waiting for our call forever.

No, the thing I hate is having it happen *now*, just when I'm beginning to *learn* something.

I'm not dead sure I know just exactly what I learned, but I think maybe I do:

You get just what you damned well expected all along from a bunch of blue-blooded mongrels!

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