

Poachers

by Chip R. Yde

MINUS 005 and Counting

“They’re loose again!” The navigator, Hutner, almost tripped over his own tentacles racing onto the bridge.

“Not again.” Captain Rebo sighed. The old squid rose from his seat.

Captain Rebo activated the flight computer with his long, fat tentacles. He made sure the ship was on automatic before following his navigator, Hutner, off the bridge. The holding pins were in the aft area of the ship as far from the bridge as possible. The long walk allowed the captain’s anger to build.

“Did you lock their cages?” Rebo asked.

“I did.” Hutner was defensive. He did not like to take blame. “They are smart. Smarter than we originally thought.”

“Smart or not how did they get loose from the holding area?”

“It’s that fifth digit they have on their forward appendages. They are getting into everything.”

“They are not as good as tentacles.” Rebo said as he put up three of his and rolled them together. “Paws are no match for tentacles. I don’t care how well they can climb.”

“They are still smart.” Hutner argued.

“They don’t have tails. How smart could they be?”

The monkey men were all over the cargo hold when Rebo arrived. Many of the storage bins were turned over and their contents strewn about the floor. The monkeys were eating anything they could get into their mouths. They had nibbled on the wiring,



insulation and any fabric they could find.

“Wonderful. Just wonderful.” The captain said as he surveyed the damage. Disgusted with the mess he pulled an electric prod from his belt. “Let’s get them back in their cages.”

“Do you want me to activate the mechanicals?” Hutner asked as he too grasped his prod and activated it.

“No. We should be able to handle these primates without the robots.”

It took Rebo and Hutner a bit of time to capture the little creatures. They were the only two crewmembers on the research vessel.

“We have to get rid of these things. They will not make a suitable food source.”

“It is against the code. We have to bring them back home.” As if on cue one of the monkeys threw his excrement. A ball of liquid waste struck Rebo in the chest. It oozed off his space suit onto the floor.

“When they sent the fleet out to find a new form of sustenance I do not think they meant something like that. They smell awful when you cook them. The only thing worse than the smell is the taste when you eat them.”

“What would you have me do? Launch them into space.” Rebo raised his eyebrow.

“Yes.” Hutner said with enthusiasm.

“They would execute us when we get home.”

“Only you and I would know about it. The only thing you would have to do is change the log.”

“No. I will not tolerate a waste of life like that.”

“Well how about we take them back where we found them.”

“Their system is going to supernova remember.” Rebo said. There was a reason that he was the captain. “It would mean extinction for them.”

“So are you saying we’re stuck with them?”

“I am afraid so. “

Nothing else was said. There was tension between the old pilot and the young navigator as they returned to the bridge and their duties.

Time passed.

MINUS 004 and COUNTING

A star grew brighter and bigger on the view screen.
“How’s this new system look.” The captain broke the silence at last.

“Barren except for the third planet. It is abundant with life.”
“Every system seems to have at least one. Let us investigate. Prepare for landing.”

The ship navigated its way past the gas giants that made up the outer planets of the system. Getting through the asteroid field past the last gas giant was a bit tricky, but they made it without any bumps. The fourth planet was a vast red desert. At last the ship arrived at its destination.

The third planet of the system filled the view screen. Its seas were blue and the lands were green. It filled the pilot and navigator with hope.

“This might be the one.” Hutner declared.
“It looks good, but let’s not get too excited yet. We need to take a closer look. Prepare for landing.”

The ship descended into the atmosphere. The stars faded away and the ship was surrounded by blue skies.

“What looks good?”
“The coast of the second largest continent. By the green sea.”
The ship hovered above the jungle.
“It’s swampy. We could get bogged down.”
“We’ll take our chances. Put it in the water.”

The spaceship banked toward the ocean. Its saucer shape cut through the atmosphere like a knife. Making a precision approach the ship carefully descended. Once it was just over the water it flared and settled gently into the ocean.

The coast was devastated by the landing. Massive tidal waves sunk the beach underwater.

“While we investigate the planet have the computers start processing the sun’s data.” Rebo ordered.

“I already have them working on it.” Hutner looked around as they opened the hatch and took in the alien world. “Where do we start?”

“Let’s go deep inland. To the center of the continent and work our way back to the ship.”

The pilot and the navigator boarded the hovercraft. The craft shot out from the mother ship at blinding speed.

“This place stinks.”

“It is all the methane in the air. A product of chlorosynthesis.”

“I hate plants.”

“Me too. I am glad we got rid of them back home.” Their ancient ancestors had eradicated their home world’s plant life around the same time that the food shortages began. Now the squids were left having to search the universe for new food supplies.

They wandered the jungle now. A couple of locals wandered out of the trees to take a look at them. Intimidated by the explorer’s size they came no closer. The squids towered over even the largest of the natives. Raising their heads to get a better smell of them the creature’s nostrils flared. The two creatures disappeared back into the jungle.

“I guess we smell funny to them too.” The navigator remarked

“They are scrawny.” Rebo picked one up and examined it. The creature flailed in his hands.

“Let’s cook a few up and see how they taste.”

“Later. Continue the scan of the area.”

“This planet is thick with these things. They are all reptiles, but they are a very diverse group.”

They wandered deeper into the jungle making their way back to the coast. Another one of the locals came out of the jungle. He was not intimidated by their size or smell. The creature came at them fast with murder on his mind.

“Carnivore.” Rebo reached for his weapon.

“Yep.” Hutner was faster. He already had his death ray out and primed. “My kind of guy.”

“Watch out!”

The navigator aimed a medal box that looked like a suitcase at the creature. Pressing a black button on the side of it brought the device to life. An energy beam shot out of the box. The beam consumed the creature’s head. The blast turned the rest of the beast into a molten piece of flesh.

“Did you see those teeth?” Hutner was excited to get to do something other than chase monkeys.

“Do you smell that?” Rebo pointed at the air with his tentacle.

“I do. It smells like a slaughterhouse.”

“Hutner, this might work out pretty well.”

The two squids continued their trek back towards their ship. Along the way they picked up a variety of the local creatures. The water had receded by the time they reached the ocean. The beach was back where it was supposed to be.

MINUS 003 and COUNTING



“The computer is crunching the numbers on this system.”

“That’s fine let’s eat.”

The sun went down over the ocean. At last the stars appeared. In the sky to the north they could make out the star their home world circled. Sitting on that alien beach it seemed so far away.

Cooking up the locals took until late into the evening. They tried a little of each.

“Do you taste this? This is good.” Hutner smiled.

“It is like an orgy in my mouth.” Rebo replied. “I have never tasted anything so good.”

“Imagine bringing this home. We would be national heroes.”

“I think we have hit the jackpot.”

A buzzing came from the navigator’s space suit. The computers were getting their attention. Hutner returned to the ship to check it out. When he returned his mood had soured.

“What is it?” Rebo asked even though he already knew the answer.

“The sun.”

“It’s in good shape?”

“Yes. It has another few billion years left in it.”

“No.” The old squid was disappointed. This find could have meant a full cargo hold and a course to home. If this did not work out they could be out in space drifting from system to system for a long time to come.

“Let’s take them anyway. We’ll nuke the sun on the way out.” Hutner suggested.

“No.” It was not the right answer.

“Come on. We can do it.”

“No.” Rebo had an epiphany. “I have a better idea.”

“What?”

“We take the tasty locals. We dump the monkey men here.”

We change the logs and tell command that we got the locals from that system that exploded. Nobody has to be the wiser.”

“How is that better than dumping the monkeys into space?”

“No species get exterminated, no solar system’s destroyed and we get to bring a nice cargo home. It is pure goodness.”

“Let’s get to work.” Hutner said. The captain and navigator shared a smile. They felt like pirates.

MINUS 002 and COUNTING

Collecting the local reptiles was a big task and it took the two squids activating every mechanical they had onboard the ship. Even with all the technology it took the better part of the planet’s solar year for the machines to get the job done. The locals were herded onto the spaceship into and placed into pins. They had to take the vegetation as well in order to feed the herbivores. Rebo did not want them dying before they got them back home. The planet was irreparably changed when they were finished.

At last it was done.

“What about the monkeys. Do you want to spread them out or what?”

“Let’s just dump them here.”

“Roger.” Hutner set the mechanicals to the task.

The machines herded the monkey men from the ship’s holds with electric prods. The alien monkeys were dumped without ceremony into the remnants of the jungle. The two squids did not give them a second thought.

The ship took off and headed into the stratosphere. The engines coughed up so much smoke that no creature on that planet would be seeing the sun for some time.

“Now we change the log and we are home free. This is the greatest plan in history.” The captain was pleased.

The ship rocketed through space at the mercy of the speed of light. The crew settled in for the trip home.

Time passed.

MINUS 001 and COUNTING

The navigator was glad it was the pilot’s idea. That was the only reason he escaped execution.

They had felt like pirates. They thought they were smart. It

turned out Command was smarter.

They had not done as good a job on the logs as they should have. Command had a fit when they found out what they had done. The trial was short. Rebo's execution was long and excruciating.

Hutner, now captain, sat alone in the spaceship's bridge. He was headed back to the solar system with the blue third planet. His sentence was to return there with his cargo. The journey was long and lonely.

Command, universal justice being their mantra, decided the only thing to do was to return the natives to their planet regardless of how good they tasted. The monkey creatures were to be collected and brought back to the navigator's home world. They would eat them bad taste and all.

MINUS 000

The navigator had a lot of time to consider all these things. The journey back to the blue planet would take 100,000 of their solar years. It was a long time. Hutner wondered briefly how the monkeys had been getting along.

