

Trap

By FINN O'DONNEVAN

**Check your dictionary if you think "trap"
is a simple and uncomplicated word
... or read this for another definition!**

SAMISH, I am in some need of assistance. The situation is potentially dangerous, so come at once.

It shows how right you were, Samish, old friend. I should never have trusted a Terran. They are a sly, ignorant, irresponsible race, just as you have always pointed out.

Nor are they as stupid as they seem. I am beginning to believe that the slenderness of the

tentacle is not the only criterion of intelligence.

What a sorry mess, Samish! And the plan seemed so fool-proof ...

Ed Dailey saw a gleam of metal outside his cabin door, but he was still too sleepy to investigate.

He had awakened shortly after daybreak and tiptoed outside for a glimpse at the weather.

Illustrated by WEST

It was unpromising. There had been a heavy rain during the night and water dripped from every leaf and branch of the surrounding forest. His station wagon had a drowned look and the dirt road leading up the mountainside was a foot-thick in mud.

His friend Thurston came to the door in pajamas, his round face flushed with sleep and Bud-dhalike in its placidity.

"It always rains on the first day of a vacation," Thurston stated. "Rule of nature."

"Might be a good day for trout," Dailey said.

"It might. But it is a better day for building a roaring fire in the fireplace and drinking hot buttered rum."

FOR eleven years, they had been taking a short autumn vacation together, but for different reasons.

Dailey had a romantic love for equipment. The clerks in New York's fancier sports shops hung expensive parkas on his high, stooped shoulders, parkas such as one would wear on the trail of the Abominable Snowman in the fastnesses of Tibet. They sold him ingenious little stoves that would burn through a hurricane and wickedly curved knives of the best Swedish steel.

Dailey loved to feel a lean canteen against his side and a blued-

steel rifle over his shoulder. But the canteen usually contained rum and the rifle was used against nothing deadlier than tin cans. For in spite of his dreams, Dailey was a friendly man, with no malice toward bird or beast.

His friend Thurston was overweight and short of wind, and burdened himself only with the lightest of fly rods and the smallest of shotguns. By the second week, he usually managed to steer the hunt to Lake Placid, to the cocktail lounges that were his true environment. There, with an incredible knowledge of spoor and lair, he placidly hunted the pretty vacationing girls instead of the brown bear, the black bear, or the mountain deer.

This mild exercise was more than adequate for two soft and successful businessmen on the wrong side of forty, and they returned to the city tanned and refreshed, with a new lease on life and a renewed tolerance for their wives.

"Rum it is," Dailey said. "What's that?" He had noticed the gleam of metal near the cabin.

Thurston walked over and poked the object with his foot. "Odd-looking thing."

Dailey parted the grass and saw an open framework box about four feet square, constructed of metal strips, and

hinged on top. Written boldly on one of the strips was the single word TRAP.

"Where did you buy *that*?" Thurston asked.

"I didn't." Dailey found a plastic tag attached to one of the metal strips. He pulled it loose and read: "Dear Friend, this is a new and revolutionary design in a TRAP. To introduce the TRAP to the general public, we are giving you this model *absolutely free*! You will find it a unique and valuable device for the capture of small game, provided you follow *precisely* the directions on the other side. Good luck and good hunting!"

"If this isn't the strangest thing," Dailey said. "Do you suppose it was left during the night?"

"Who cares?" Thurston shrugged. "My stomach is rumbling. Let's make breakfast."

"Aren't you interested in this?"

"Not particularly. It's just another gadget. You've got a hundred like it. That bear trap from Abercrombie and Fitch. The jaguar horn from Battler's. The crocodile lure from —"

"I've never seen a trap like this," Dailey mused. "Pretty clever advertising, just to leave it here."

"They'll bill you for it eventually," Thurston said cynically. "I'm going to make breakfast. You'll wash the dishes."

HE WENT inside while Dailey turned the tag over and read the other side.

"Take the TRAP to a clearing and anchor it to any convenient TREE with the attached chain. Press Button One on the base. This primes the TRAP. Wait five seconds and press Button Two. This activates the TRAP. Nothing more is required until a CAPTURE has been effected. Then press Button Three to deactivate and open the TRAP, and remove the PREY."

"Warning! Keep the TRAP closed at all times except when removing the PREY. No opening is required for the PREY'S ingress, since the TRAP works on the principle of Osmotic Section and inducts the PREY directly into the TRAP."

"What won't they think of next?" Dailey said admiringly.

"Breakfast is ready," Thurston called.

"First help me set the trap."

Thurston, dressed now in Bermuda shorts and a loud sport shirt, came out and peered at the trap dubiously. "Do you really think we should fool with it?"

"Of course. Maybe we can catch a fox."

"What on Earth would we do with a fox?" Thurston demanded.

"Turn it loose," Dailey said. "The fun is in the catching. Here, help me lift it."

The trap was surprisingly heavy. Together they dragged it fifty yards from the cabin and tied the chain to a young pine tree. Dailey pushed the first button and the trap glowed faintly. Thurston backed away anxiously.

After five seconds, Dailey pressed the second button.

The forest dripped and squirrels chattered in the treetops and the long grass rustled faintly. The trap lay quietly beside the tree, its open metal framework glowing faintly.

"Come in," Thurston said. "The eggs are undoubtedly cold."

Dailey followed him back to the cabin, glancing over his shoulder at the trap. It lay in the forest, silent and waiting.

Samish, where are you? My need is becoming increasingly urgent. Unbelievable as it will sound, my little planetoid is being pulled apart before my very eyes! You are my oldest friend, Samish, the companion of my youth, the best man at my mating, and a friend of Fregl as well. I'm counting on you. Don't delay too long.

I have already beamed you the beginning of my story. The Terrans accepted my trap as a trap, nothing more. And they began to use it at once, with no thought to the possible consequences. I had counted on this. The fantastic

curiosity of the Terran species is well known.

During this period, my wife was crawling gaily around the planetoid, redecorating our hutch and enjoying the change from city life. Everything was going well. . . .

DURING breakfast, Thurston explained in pedantic detail why a trap could not function unless it had an opening to admit the prey. Dailey smiled and spoke of osmotic section. Thurston insisted that there was no such thing. When the dishes were washed and dried, they walked over the wet, springy grass to the trap.

"Look!" Dailey shouted.

Something was in the trap, something about the size of a rabbit, but colored a bright green. Its eyes were extended on stalks and it clicked lobsterlike claws at them.

"No more rum before breakfast," Thurston said. "Starting tomorrow. Hand me the canteen."

Dailey gave it to him and Thurston poured down a generous double shot. Then he looked at the trapped creature again and went, "Brr!"

"I think it's a new species," Dailey said.

"New species of nightmare. Can't we just go to Lake Placid and forget about it?"



"No, of course not. I've never seen anything like this in my zoology books. It could be completely unknown to science. What will we keep it in?"

"Keep it in?"

"Well, certainly. It can't stay in the trap. We'll have to build a cage and then find out what it eats."

Thurston's face lost some of its habitual serenity. "Now look here, Ed. I'm not sharing my vacation with anything like that. It's probably poisonous. I'm sure it has dirty habits." He took a deep breath and continued. "There's something unnatural about that trap. It's — inhuman!"

Dailey grinned. "I'm sure they said that about Ford's first car and Edison's incandescent lamp. This trap is just another example of American progress and know-how."

"I'm all for progress," Thurston stated firmly, "but in other directions. Can't we just —"

He looked at his friend's face and stopped talking. Dailey had an expression that Cortez might have worn as he approached the summit of a peak in Darien.

"Yes," Dailey said after a while. "I think so."

"What?"

"Tell you later. First let's build a cage and set the trap again."

Thurston groaned, but followed him.

WHY haven't you come yet, Samish? Don't you appreciate the seriousness of my situation? Haven't I made it clear how much depends upon you? Think of your old friend! Think of the lustrous-skinned Fregl, for whose sake I got into this mess. Communicate with me, at least.

The Terrans used the trap, which, of course, was not a trap at all, but a matter transmitter. I had the other end concealed on the planetoid, and fed into it three small animals which I found in the garden. The Terrans removed them from the transmitter each time — for what purpose, I couldn't guess. But a Terran will keep anything.

After the third beast passed through and had not been returned, I knew that all was in readiness.

So I prepared for the fourth and final sending, the all-important one, for which all else was mere preparation.

They were standing in the low shed attached to their cabin. Thurston looked with distaste at the three cages made of heavy mosquito netting. Inside each cage was a creature.

"Ugh," Thurston said. "They smell."

In the first cage was the original capture, the stalk-eyed, lobster-clawed beast. Next came a

bird with three sets of scaly wings. Finally there was something that looked like a snake, except that it had a head at each end.

Within the cages were bowls of milk, plates of minced meat, vegetables, grasses, bark — all untouched.

"They just won't eat anything," Dailey said.

"Obviously they're sick," Thurston told him. "Probably germ carriers. Can't we get rid of them, Ed?"

Dailey looked squarely at his friend. "Tom, have you ever desired fame?"

"What?"

"Fame. The knowledge that your name will go down through the ages."

"I am a businessman," Thurston said. "I never considered the possibility."

"Never?"

THURSTON smiled foolishly. "Well, what man hasn't? What did you have in mind?"

"These creatures," Dailey said, "are unique. We will present them to a museum."

"Ah?" Thurston queried interestedly.

"The Dailey-Thurston exhibit of creatures hitherto unknown."

"They might name the species after us," Thurston said. "After all, we discovered them."

"Of course they would! Our names would go down with Livingstone, Audubon and Teddy Roosevelt."

"Hmm." Thurston thought deeply. "I suppose the Museum of Natural History would be the place. I'm sure they'd arrange an exhibit —"

"I wasn't thinking merely in terms of an exhibit," Dailey said. "I was thinking more of a wing — the Dailey-Thurston Wing."

Thurston looked at his friend in amazement. There were depths to Dailey that he had never imagined. "But, Ed, we have only three of them. We can't equip a wing with three exhibits."

"There must be more where these came from. Let's examine the trap."

This time the trap contained a creature almost three feet tall, with a small green head and a forked tail. It had at least a dozen thick cilia, all of them waving furiously.

"The rest were quiet," Thurston said apprehensively. "Maybe this one is dangerous."

"We will handle it with nets," Dailey replied decisively. "And then I want to get in touch with the museum."

After considerable work, they transferred the thing to a cage. The trap was reset and Dailey sent the following wire to the Museum of Natural History:

HAVE DISCOVERED AT LEAST FOUR ANIMALS WHICH I SUSPECT TO BE NEW SPECIES STOP HAVE YOU ROOM FOR SUITABLE EXHIBIT STOP BETTER SEND A MAN UP AT ONCE.

Then, at Thurston's insistence, he wired several impeccable character references to the museum, so they wouldn't think he was a crank.

That afternoon, Dailey explained his theory to Thurston. There was, he felt sure, a primeval pocket isolated in this section of the Adirondacks. Within it were creatures which had survived from prehistoric times. They had never been captured because, due to their great antiquity, they had acquired a high degree of experience and caution. But the trap — operating on the new principle of osmotic section — had proved to be beyond their experience.

"The Adirondacks have been pretty well explored," Thurston objected.

"Not well enough, apparently," Dailey said, with irrefutable logic.

Later, they returned to the trap. It was empty.

I CAN just barely hear you, Samish. Kindly step up the volume. Or, better still, get here in person. What's the use of beaming me, in the spot I'm in? The situation is steadily becoming

more and more desperate.

What, Samish? The rest of the story? It's obvious enough. After three animals had passed through the transmitter, I knew I was ready. Now was the time to tell my wife.

Accordingly, I asked her to crawl into the garden with me. She was quite pleased.

"Tell me, my dear," she said, "has something been bothering you of late?"

"Um," said I.

"Have I displeased you?" she asked.

"No, sweetheart," I said. "You have tried your best, but it just isn't good enough. I am going to take a new mate."

She stood motionless, her cilia swaying in confusion. Then she exclaimed, "Fregl!"

"Yes," I told her, "the glorious Fregl has consented to share my hutch."

"But you forget we were mated for life."

"I know. A pity you insisted on that formality." And with one clever shove, I pushed her into the matter transmitter.

Samish, you should have seen her expression! Her cilia writhed, she screamed, and was gone.

I was free at last! A little nauseous, but free! Free to mate with the splendid Fregl!

Now you can appreciate the full perfection of the scheme. It

was necessary to secure the Terrans' cooperation, since a matter transmitter must be manipulated from both ends. I had disguised it as a trap, because Terrans will believe anything. And as my master stroke, I sent them my wife.

Let them try to live with her! I never could!

Foolproof, absolutely foolproof. My wife's body would never turn up, because the acquisitive Terrans keep what they get. No one could ever prove anything.

And then, Samish, then it happened. . . .

THE cabin's air of rustic serenity was gone. Tire tracks crossed and recrossed the muddy road. The grounds were littered with flash bulbs, empty cigarette packs, candy wrappers, pencil stubs and bits of paper. But now, after a hectic few hours, everyone was gone. Only a sour taste remained.

Dailey and Thurston stood beside the empty trap, staring hopelessly at it.

"What do you suppose is wrong with the damned thing?" Dailey asked, giving the trap a frustrated kick.

"Maybe there's nothing else to capture," Thurston suggested.

"There has to be! Why would it take four completely alien beasts and then no more?" He knelt beside the trap and said bit-

terly, "Those stupid museum people! And those reporters!"

"In a way," Thurston said cautiously, "you can't blame them —"

"Can't I? Accusing me of a hoax! Did you hear them, Tom? They asked me how I performed the skin grafts!"

"It's too bad the animals were all dead by the time the museum people got here," Thurston said. "That did look suspicious."

"The idiotic creatures wouldn't eat. Was that my fault? And those newspaper people . . . Really, you would think the metropolitan newspapers would hire more intelligent reporters."

"You shouldn't have promised to capture more animals," Thurston said. "It was when the trap didn't produce that they suspected a hoax."

"Of course I promised! How should I guess the trap would stop with that fourth capture? And why did they laugh when I told them about the osmotic section system of capture?"

"They never heard of it," Thurston answered wearily. "No one ever heard of it. Let's go to Lake Placid and forget the whole thing."

"No! This thing must work again. It must!" Dailey primed and activated the trap and stared at it for several seconds. Then he opened the hinged top.

Dailey stuck his hand into the trap and let out a scream. "My hand! It's gone!" He leaped backward.

"No, it's not," Thurston assured him.

Dailey examined both hands, rubbed them together and insisted, "My hand disappeared inside that trap."

"Now, now," Thurston said soothingly. "A little rest in Lake Placid will do you a world of good —"

Dailey stood over the trap and pushed in his hand. It disappeared. He reached farther in and watched his arm vanish up to the shoulder. He looked at Thurston with a smile of triumph.

"Now I see how it works," he said. "Those animals didn't come from the Adirondacks at all!"

"Where did they come from?"

"From wherever my hand is! Want more, do they? Call me a liar? I'll show them!"

"Ed! Don't do it! You don't know what —"

But Dailey had already stepped feet-first into the trap. His feet disappeared. Slowly he lowered his body until only his head was visible.

"Wish me luck," he said.

"Ed!"

Dailey held his nose and plunged out of sight.

SAMISH, if you don't come immediately, it will be too late! I must stop beaming you. The enormous Terran has completely ransacked my little planetoid. He has shoved everything, living or dead, through the transmitter. My home is in ruins.

And now he is tearing down my hutch! Samish, this monster means to capture me as a specimen! There's no time to lose!

Samish, what can be keeping you? You, my oldest friend . . .

What, Samish? What are you saying? You can't mean it! Not you and Freg! Reconsider, old friend! Remember our friendship!

—FINN O'DONNEVAN

NEVER, EVER BEFORE, ANYWHERE!!

7000 fantasy and science-fiction books and back-issue mags at 50% to 90% under what they've ever cost you before, here or anywhere, while they last! List free.

WEREWOLF BOOKSHOP

Shannon Rd., R.D. 2, Box 86F

Verona, Penna.