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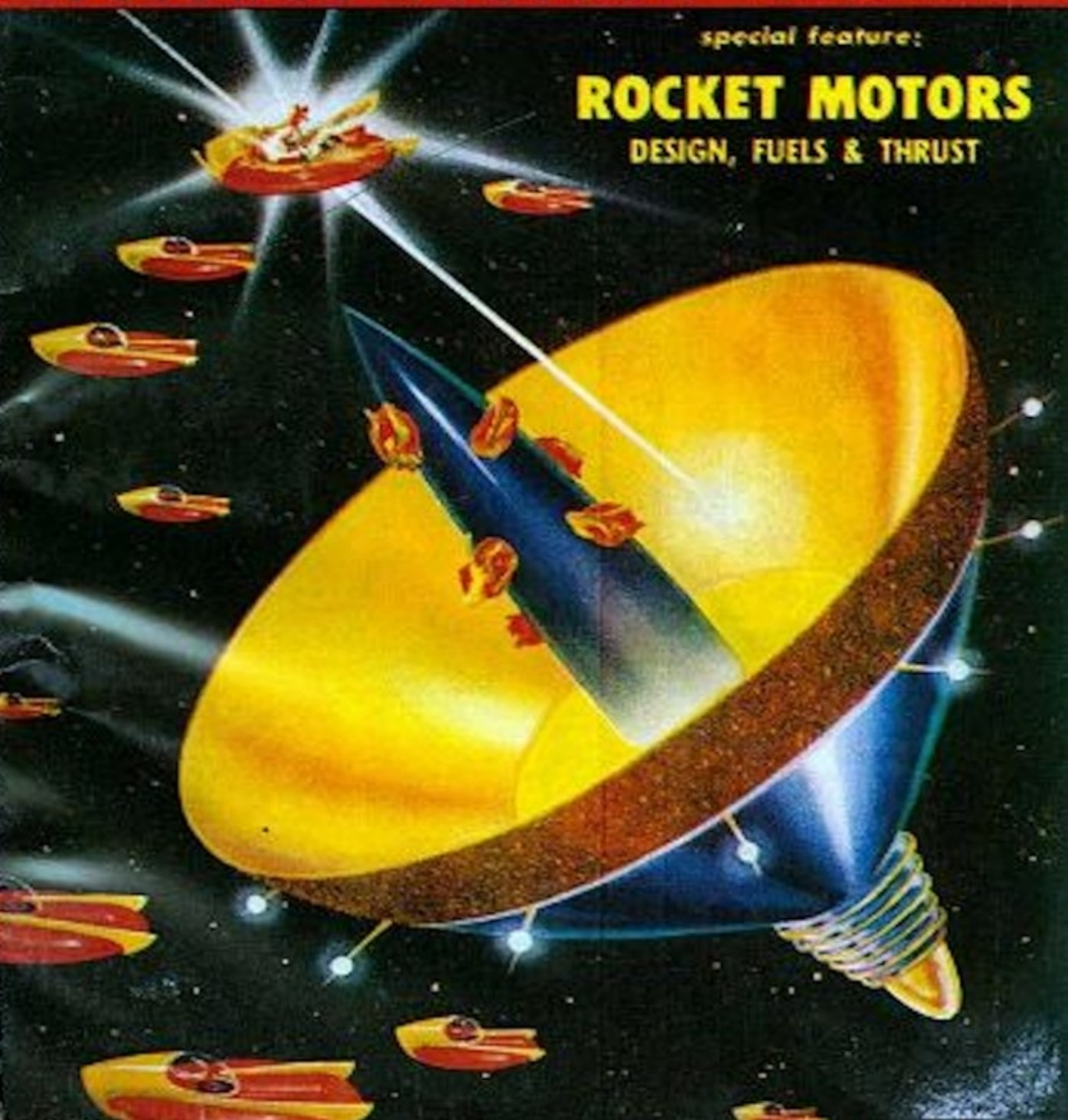
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Title: Come Into My Brain!

Author: Alexander Blade

Release Date: April 27, 2021 [eBook #65177]

Language: English

Character set encoding: UTF-8

Produced by: Greg Weeks, Mary Meehan and the Online Distributed  
Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

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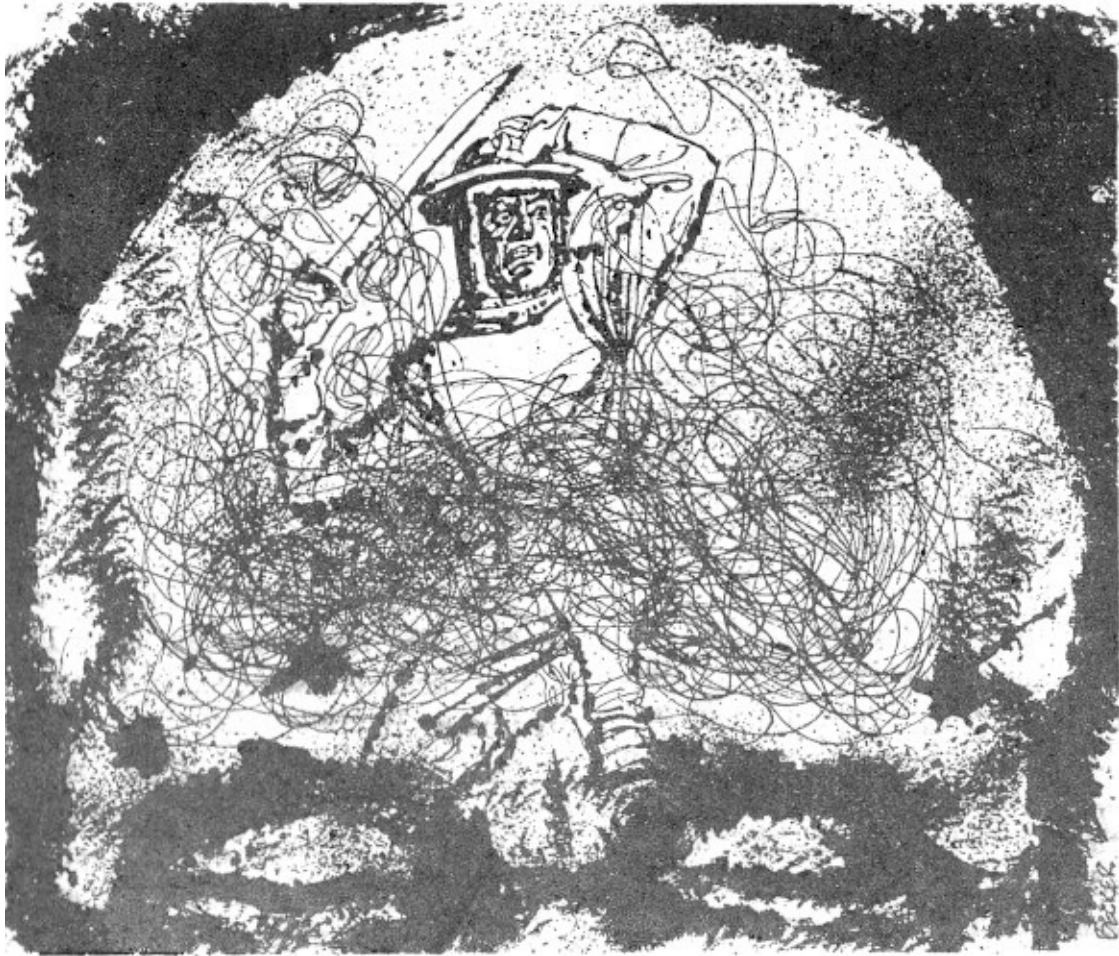
## **Come Into My Brain!**

**By Alexander Blade**

**Fitted with the new thought-helmet, Dane  
Harrell plunged into the venomous brain of the  
alien. It was a fast way to commit suicide!...**

**[Transcriber's Note: This etext was produced from  
Imagination Stories of Science and Fantasy  
June 1958**

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Dane Harrell held the thought-helmet tightly between his hands and, before putting it on, glanced over at the bound, writhing alien sitting opposite him. The alien snarled defiantly.

"You're sure you want to go through with this?" asked Dr. Phelps.

Harrell nodded. "I volunteered, didn't I? I said I'd take a look inside this buzzard's brain and I'm going to do it. If I don't come up in half an hour, come get me."

"Right."

Harrell slipped the cool bulk of the thought-helmet over his head and signalled to the scientist, who pulled the actuator switch. Harrell shuddered as psionic current surged through him; he stiffened, wriggled, and felt himself glide out of his body, hover incorporeally in the air between his now soulless shell and the alien bound opposite.

*Remember, you volunteered,* he told himself.

He hung for a moment outside the alien's skull; then, he drifted downward and in. He had entered the alien's mind. Whether he would emerge alive, and with the troop-deployment data—well, that was another matter entirely.

The patrol-ships of the Terran outpost on Planetoid 113 had discovered the alien scout a week before. The Dimellian spy was lurking about the outermost reaches of the Terran safety zone when he was caught.

It wasn't often that Earth captured a Dimellian alive and so the Outpost resolved to comb as much information from him as possible. The Earth-Dimell war was four years old; neither side had scored a decisive victory. It was believed that Dimell was massing its fleets for an all-out attack on Earth itself; confirmation of this from the captured scout would make Terran defensive tactics considerably more sound.

But the Dimellian resisted all forms of brainwashing until Phelps, the Base Psych-man, came forth with the experimental thought-helmet. Volunteers were requested; Harrell spoke up first. Now, wearing the thought-helmet, he plunged deep into the unknown areas of the Dimellian's mind, hoping to emerge with high-order military secrets.

His first impression was of thick grey murk—so thick it could be cut. Using a swimming motion, Harrell drifted downward, toward the light in the distance. It was a long way down; he floated, eerily, in free-fall.

Finally he touched ground. It yielded under him spongily, but it was solid. He looked around. The place was alien: coarse crumbly red soil, giant spike-leaved trees that shot up hundreds of feet overhead, brutal-looking birds squawking and chattering in the low branches.

It looked just like the tridim solidos of Dimell he had seen. Well, why not? Why shouldn't the inside of a man's mind—or an alien's, for that matter—resemble his home world?

Cautiously, Harrell started to walk. Mountains rose in the dim distance and he could see, glittering on a mountaintop far beyond him, the white bulk of an

armored castle. Of course! His imaginative mind realized at once that here was where the Dimellian guarded his precious secrets; up there, on the mountain, was his goal.

He started to walk.

Low-hanging vines obscured his way; he conjured up a machete and cut them down. The weapon felt firm and real in his hand but he realized that not even the hand was real; all this was but an imaginative projection.

The castle was further away than he had thought. He saw this after he had walked for perhaps 15 minutes. There was no telling duration inside the alien's skull, either. Or distance. The castle seemed just as distant now as when he had begun and his 15-minute journey through the jungle had tired him.

Suddenly demonic laughter sounded up ahead in the jungle. Harsh, ugly laughter.

And the Dimellian appeared, slashing his way through the vines with swashbuckling abandon.

"Get out of my mind, Earthman!"



The Dimellian was larger than life and twice as ugly. It was an idealized, self-glorified mental image Harrell faced.

The captured Dimellian was about five feet tall, thick-shouldered, with sturdy, corded arms and supplementary tentacles sprouting from its shoulders; its skin was green and leathery, dotted with toad-like warts.

Harrell now saw a creature close to nine feet tall, swaggering, with a mighty barrel of a chest and a huge broad-sword clutched in one of its arms. The tentacles writhed purposefully.

"You know why I'm here, alien. I want to know certain facts. And I'm not getting out of your mind until I've wrung them from you."

The alien's lipless mouth curved in a bleak smile. "Big words, little Earthman. But first you'll have to vanquish *me*."

And the Dimellian stepped forward.

Harrell met the downcrashing blow of the alien's broad-sword fully; the shock of

impact sent numbing shivers up his arm as far as his shoulder but he held on and turned aside the blow. It wasn't fair; the Dimellian had a vaster reach than he could ever hope for....

No! He saw there was no reason why he couldn't control the size of his own mental image. Instantly he was 10 feet high and advancing remorselessly toward the alien.

Swords clashed clangorously, the forest-birds screamed. Harrell drove the alien back ... back....

And the Dimellian was eleven feet high.

"We can keep this up forever," Harrell said. "Getting larger and larger. This is only a mental conflict." He shot up until he again towered a foot above the alien's head. He swung downward two-handedly with the machete....

The alien vanished.

And reappeared five feet to the right, "Enough of this foolishness, Earthman. Physical conflict will be endless stalemate, since we're only mental projections. You're beaten; there's no possible way you can defeat me, or I defeat you. Don't waste your time and mine. Get out of my mind!"

Harrell shook his head doggedly. "I'm in here to do a job and I'm not leaving until I've done it." He sprang forward, sword high, and thrust down at the grinning Dimellian.

Again the Dimellian sidestepped. Harrell's sword cut air.

"Don't tire yourself out, Earthman," the alien said mockingly, and vanished.

Harrell stood alone in the heart of the steaming jungle, leaning on his sword. Maybe he was only a mental projection, he thought, but a mental projection could still get thoroughly drenched with its own mental sweat.

The castle still gleamed enigmatically on the distant mountain. He couldn't get there by walking—at least, it hadn't seemed to draw any nearer during his jaunt through the jungle. Hand-to-hand combat with the alien appeared fruitless. A fight in which both participants could change size at will, vanish, reappear, and do other such things was as pointless as a game of poker with every card wild.

But there had to be a way. Mental attack? Perhaps *that* would crumble the alien's defenses.

He sent out a beam of thought, directed up at the castle. *Can you hear me, alien?*

Mental laughter echoed mockingly back. *Of course, Earthman. What troubles you?*

Harrell made no reply. He stood silently, concentrating, marshalling his powers. Then he hurled a bolt of mental energy with all his strength toward the mocking voice.

The jungle shuddered as it struck home. The ground lurched wildly, like an animal's back; trees tumbled, the sky bent. Harrell saw he had scored a hit; the alien's concentration had wavered, distorting the scenery.

But there was quick recovery. Again the mocking laughter. Harrell knew that the alien had shrugged off the blow.

And then the counterblow.

It caught Harrell unawares and sent him spinning back a dozen feet, to land in a tangled heap beneath a dangling nest of vines. His head rocked, seemed ready to split apart. He sensed the alien readying a second offensive drive, and set up counterscreens.

This time he was ready. He diverted the attack easily, and shook his head to clear it. The score was even: one stunning blow apiece. But he had recovered and so had the alien.

Harrell aimed another blow and felt the alien sweep it aside. Back came the answering barrage of mental force; Harrell blocked it.

*Stalemate again*, the alien said.

*We're evenly matched*, Harrell replied. *But I'll beat you*. He looked up at the far-off castle on the mountainside. *I'll beat you yet*.

*That remains to be proven, troublesome Earthman*.



Harrell tramped on through the jungle of the alien's mind for a while, and then, realizing he was getting no closer to the all-important castle on the hill, stopped by a brook to wipe away his perspiration. It was hot on this accursed world—hot, muggy, dank.

He knelt over the water's surface. It looked pure, cool. A sudden thought struck him and he ripped a strip from his shirt and dipped it in the water.

The plasticloth blackened and charred. He let it drop and the "water" quickly finished the job. Pool? No. Concentrated sulphuric acid or something just as destructive.

Smiling grimly at his narrow escape, he wiped his perspiration with another strip torn from his sleeve and kept going. Several hours, at least, had passed since he had entered the strange world within the alien's mind.

That meant one of two things: either the time-scale in here was different from that outside or his half-hour limit had elapsed in the outer world and Dr. Phelps had been unsuccessful in bringing him back.

That was a nice thought. Suppose he was stuck here indefinitely, inside the mind of an alien being, in a muggy jungle full of sulphuric acid brooks?

*Well, he thought, I asked for it....*

The stalemate couldn't continue indefinitely. If he had swallowed some of the acid that would have ended the contest without doubt; he wouldn't have had time to cope with the searing fluid.

The answer lay there—*surprise*. Both he and the alien were mental entities who could do battle as they pleased—but in this conflict it was necessary to take the opponent by surprise before he could counterthrust or vanish.

He began to see a solution.

Up ahead lay the castle—unreachable, through some trick of the alien's. Very well. Harrell's brows drew together in concentration for a moment; his mind planned a strategy—and formed men to carry it out.

There were six of him, suddenly.



Six identical Harrells—identical in size, shape, form, purpose. They would attack the Dimellian simultaneously. Or, at least, five of them would, creating a diversionary action while the sixth—Harrell-original—made a frontal assault on the castle.

Harrell-original faced his five duplicates and briefly instructed each in his job. They were like puppets.

"Harrell-one, you're to attack in conjunction with Harrell-two, on the mental

level. Take turns heaving mental bolts at the alien. While one of you is recharging, the other is to unload. That won't give him time to get any sort of defense organized and certainly no counter-attack.

"Harrell-three and Harrell-four, you're to attack physically, one armed with sword and one with blaster, from opposite sides at once. *That* ought to keep him busy, while he's fighting off the rest of you.

"Harrell-five, your job is to serve as front runner—to find the Dimellian and engage him in conversation while the other four are getting ready to attack. Make him angry; get him concerned about what you're saying. The instant his defenses drop the other four of you jump in. All of you got that?"

They nodded in unison.

"Good. Meanwhile I'll make an assault on the castle and maybe I can get through with you five running interference for me."

He dismissed them and they set out in different directions. He didn't want the Dimellian to find out what was up; if the alien saw the strategy and had time to create duplicates of its own the conflict would end in stalemate again.

Harrell waited, while his five duplicates went into action.

Through the mental link with Harrell-five, he listened as his duplicates said, "The time has come to finish you off, alien. I'm glad I found you. That acid trick almost got me but not quite."

"A pity," the alien replied. "I was hoping the ruse would finish you. It's becoming quite irritating, having you in here. You're starting to bore me."

"Just you wait, you overstuffed wart-hog. I'll have those tentacles of yours clipped soon enough."

"Empty words, Earthman. You've run out of strategies; your best course is to get out of my mind and forget this entire silly affair."

"Oh, no. I'll have those secrets pried out of you quicker than you think."

"How?"

"I'm not giving away *my* secrets, alien. I'm here after yours."

Harrell readied himself. He gave the signal: *now*.

Harrell-one and Harrell-three appeared. Harrell-one loosed a bombardment of mental force that shook the alien; Harrell-three dashed forward, wielding a

machete.

Harrell-two and Harrell-four went into action, Harrell-two following up with a second mental bolt, Harrell-four firing a blaster. The bedeviled alien looked from side to side, not knowing where to defend himself first.

The scenery began to rock. The alien was going down.

Harrell took to the air.

Levitating easily above the jungle, he found the castle and zeroed in on it. As he dropped downward it changed—from a vaulting proud collection of spires and battlements to a blocky square building and from that into an armored box with a padlock.

The Dimellian stood before it, struggling with the five duplicate Harrells.

Harrell stepped past—*through*—the writhing group. The Dimellian's defenses were down. The secrets were unguarded.

He wrenched the padlock off with a contemptuous twist of his hand. The box sprang open. Inside lay documents, neatly typed, ready for his eye.

The alien uttered a mighty howl. The forest dissolved; the universe swirled around Harrell's head.



He woke. It seemed to be months later.

Dr. Phelps stood by his side.

Harrell took two or three deep breaths, clearing his head. He grinned. "I've got them," he said. "Information on troop movements, plan of battle, even the line of journey across space."

"Good work," the psychman said. "I was worried at first. You had some expressions of real terror on your face when you put the helmet on."

"Dead?"

"I'm afraid so."

Harrell grinned weakly. "I guess I was just too many for him. The shock of having the core of his mind penetrated—" Tiredly he said, "Doc, how come you didn't get me out at the half-hour mark?"

"Eh?"

"I told you to pull me out after half an hour had gone by. Why didn't you? I was in there half a day, at least—and I might have stayed there forever."

The psychman was looking at him strangely. "Half a day, you say? No, Lieutenant Harrell. The total time elapsed from the moment you donned the helmet to the instant the alien screamed—why, it was less than 10 seconds!"

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