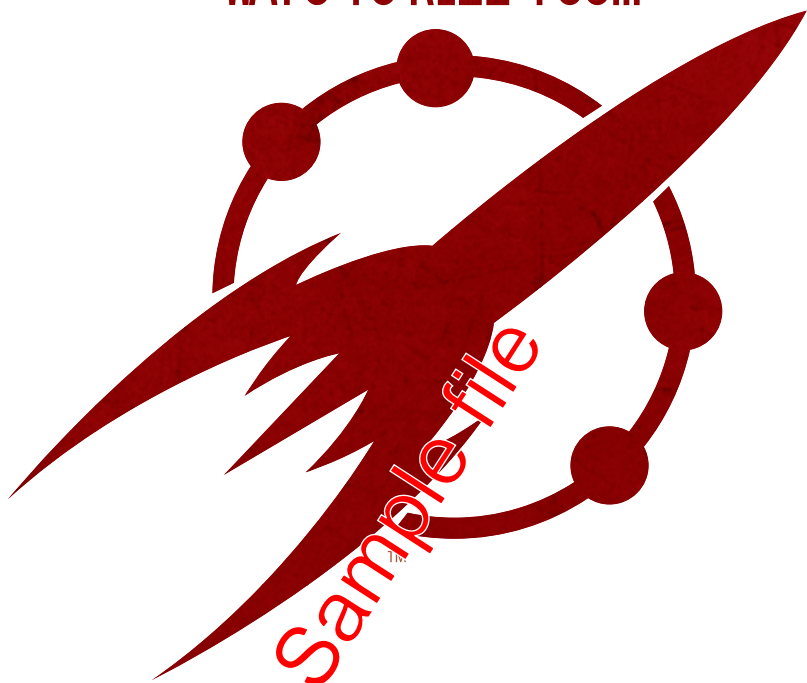


THE COSMOS HAS A MILLION  
WAYS TO KILL YOU...



JOIN THE PATROL!

ROCKETS • RAYGUNS • ROBOTS



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Sample file

# COSMIC PATROL™

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## Dedication

*Cosmic Patrol* is dedicated to all those writers and artists from sci fi's Golden Age. They let their imaginations run free, and took us along for the ride.



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# ONE MILLION AND ONE

BY JASON SCHMETZER

Lieutenant Hamish Roark tried to resist. He really did. But after a few minutes it was really too much, and he toggled the suit radio. "Abex! Enough with the heavy breathing already." He twisted his head in his fishbowl to look at the Patrolman behind him. The big Martian's shaved head shined with sweat, and his angry eyes looked up from the craggy ground and narrowed at Roark. His hands moved, making a chopping motion with the large, wide-bladed axe he carried. Roark stifled his laugh. *Axes in space—only on Mars.*

"We came on a rocketship," Abex grunted. "You could have landed *closer*." He clanged his axe against the steel of his chestplate. "This suit is heavy."

"Too heavy for the big Martian," Roark quipped.

"It's not my fault you landed at the bottom of the hill," Abex said. "Besides, I don't see Vantine out here." He gestured behind them, where the rocketship rested in the valley Roark had landed it in. "Why does the Venusian get to stay with the ship?"

Roark laughed. His patrol—

Abex, Vantine, and himself—had been sent out to the Asteroid Belt to check a funny scanner return. The Patrol was always careful about asteroids—the Uth liked to linger around them, always on the lookout for a new warren or a base from which to raid the inner system. Vantine stayed behind on the rocketship *Caliban* because she was best at reading the scanners. She'd warn them if another ship appeared near the asteroid.

"Because the Venusian can read," Roark said. "Now come on. We're almost to the cave mouth."

The rocky ground was broken and craggy, but there was a small semi-path that led up to the cave. The rock was too hard to tell whether it was a natural path or one worn by Uth footpads. The lizardmen's vacsuits were cobbled-together things, oftentimes with actual Uth-hide soles on their boots. Roark shook his head. *Lizardmen*. His hand touched the automatic pistol holstered on his left thigh unconsciously.

He waited just beneath the lip of the cave mouth for Abex to catch up. The Martian stooped next to

him, both hands wrapped around the axe's haft. His eyes never left the cave but his mouth crooked upward in a grin. "We came all this way for nothing?"

Roark shrugged. "We haven't been inside yet, have we?"

"So? You see any trash laying outside?"

Roark pursed his lip. The Martian had a point. Uth lairs were invariably dirty—the scaly bastards were scavengers like no other, but they didn't really clean up after themselves. If a place got too dirty, they just found a new place until that one got too dirty, too. Still...

"Let's go," Roark said. He stepped onto the ledge and drew his automatic.

Abex followed him. The Martian's chuckle came across the suit radios just fine, just as his heavy breathing had. "Yes, oh lieutenant of the Cosmic Patrol. It looks very dangerous. You go first."

Roark grinned.



The scanner station of *Caliban's* control room was a quiet, serene area filled with the melodious chimes of sensors sweeping the near-empty heavens and finding... near-emptiness. For all of their vaunted intellect, the Venusians' best strength lay in their acceptance

of the obvious. *Caliban* swept skies that were the solid emptiness of vacuum; all the scanners had to do was look for not-empty, and report it when not-empty was found. Vantine of Venus lay back in the crash couch, eyes closed, listening to the steady sounds of her sensors finding nothing.

It was peaceful. Certainly better than stuffing herself into a vacsuit and climbing all over craggy, dirty rocks and finding an Uth lair. She sniffed. At least an Automan's bay would be organized. Robots didn't hide clutter. And if they did find the piled leftovers of an Uth hive, Lieutenant Roark would almost certainly make her catalogue the mess and try to identify where it had come from. All of the senior Patrolmen—the Earthmen, really—were like that. Obsessive.

As if she really wanted to dirty her hands with the cast-offs of lizardmen. A minuscule shudder twitched her fingertips, as if she'd found a speck of dust on her nails and tried to fling it off.

*Honestly.*

Vantine hadn't joined the Cosmic Patrol to sort through bits and pieces of lizard-trash. She'd done it because the Patrol was going places, exploring, and the one thing the long-limbed girl who'd never seen through the clouds of Venus wanted more than anything was to see the stars and visit them. A hitch on a torch-only tramp like