

[Microphone Plays](#) >

The C-Chute

X Minus One
The C-Chute
Feb 08 1956

CAST:

ANNOUNCER
NBC ANNCR (2 lines)

STUART, sharp and cynical
VOICE (2 lines)
LEBLANC, young and French
COLONEL WINDHAM, old and British
ARISTIDES POLYORKETES, impulsive and Greek
DEMETRIUS POLYORKETES, his brother; the same
MULLEN, middle-aged, meek, and mild
KLORO, calm, cool, and reassuring

NBC ANNCR: In just a moment, X MINUS ONE. But first-- There's a certain water commissioner whose interest in the ladies sometimes overshadows his interest in civic affairs. His name is a familiar one -- Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve -- and he'll pursue his adventures tomorrow night when NBC Radio presents another comic episode of THE GREAT GILDERSLEEVE. So when you hear the familiar voice and hearty laugh of the water commissioner from Summerfield tomorrow, why, stay tuned and enjoy another romantic scramble with the one and only THE GREAT GILDERSLEEVE on this NBC station. (BEAT) And now stay tuned for X MINUS ONE on NBC.

SOUND: HIGH-PITCHED ELECTRONIC HUM ... JOINED BY ELECTRONIC BEEPING IN AGREEMENT WITH COUNTDOWN

ANNOUNCER: Countdown for blast-off. X minus five, four, three, two. X minus one. Fire.

SOUND: A MOMENT'S SILENCE ... THEN ROCKET SHIP BLASTS OFF

MUSIC: BUILDS VERTIGINOUSLY TO A CLIMAX ... THEN IN BG

ANNOUNCER: From the far horizons of the unknown come transcribed tales of new dimensions in time and space. These are stories of the future, adventures in which you'll live in a million could-be years on a thousand may-be worlds. The National Broadcasting Company, in cooperation with Galaxy Science Fiction Magazine, presents -- (HEAVY ECHO) X Minus One!

MUSIC: TO A CLIMAX ... THEN OUT

ANNOUNCER: Tonight's story, "The C-Chute" by Isaac Asimov.

MUSIC: INTRODUCTION

SOUND: SPACESHIP BACKGROUND

STUART: (NARRATES) We were on our way home to Earth when it happened. Six of us, coming home as passengers aboard the merchant spaceship Starfire, at the start of the Second Interstellar War, the one between Earth and the planet Kloro. And then it happened.

SOUND: EXPLOSION! ... ALARM BELL!

VOICE: (ON SPEAKER) Now hear this! Condition Red! Condition Red! We are under attack from a Kloran battle cruiser! All hands forward to battle stations! Passengers will remain confined to the after cabin! Condition Red! We are being attacked!

STUART: (NARRATES) The interception by the Kloran cruiser, the murderous running duel of energy blasts and force field defenses.

SOUND: EXPLOSION! ... SHARP HISS! OF STEAM ... REPEATS STEADILY ... THEN BEHIND STUART--

STUART: (NARRATES) We huddled in the passengers' after cabin -- terrified, not knowing how the battle was going. We could hear the desperate bursts of steam through the steering tubes as the Starfire maneuvered to dodge the enemy attacks. And then--

SOUND: BIG EXPLOSION! ... THEN SILENCE

LEBLANC: Now what?

STUART: Ah, beginning of the end, you might call it.

WINDHAM: Well, what does it mean, Stuart? You were a space pilot.

STUART: It means our generators have been drained of energy. We can't fight back.

LEBLANC: (NERVOUS) But, monsieur--

STUART: All right, don't worry, they won't destroy us. They need our ship too badly. They'll simply board us and take over.

WINDHAM: But what about the crew?

STUART: The crew, Colonel? If they have any sense, they'll surrender. If they choose to fight, they're--

SOUND: BANG! OF DOOR OPENING OFF

STUART: Well, they're coming aboard. Now be very still.

LEBLANC: Mother in heaven, help us!

STUART: (SHARP, LOW) Will you be still?

SOUND: THUMP-THUMP! OF KLOORO FOOTSTEPS THROUGH SHIP

STUART: (LOW) If only those fools on deck will surrender without a struggle.

SOUND: WHOOSH! OF DEATH RAY

VOICE: (BLOODCURDLING DEATH SCREAM)

ARISTIDES: (SHUDDERS) They are fighting!

STUART: (DRY) Yes, it's the end.

SOUND: EXPLOSION!

ARISTIDES: (AGITATED) We've got to help them.

STUART: (SHARP WARNING) All right, don't open that door!

ARISTIDES: We just can't let them die!

STUART: (INSISTS) You can't help them!

ARISTIDES: I'm going!

POLY: (UNHAPPY, TO ARISTIDES) Brother!

SOUND: DOOR OPENS ... ARISTIDES' HURRIED STEPS AWAY

STUART: Stop him!

SOUND: WHOOSH! OF DEATH RAY

ARISTIDES: (BLOODCURDLING DEATH SCREAM)

STUART: (SAVAGE) All right--!

POLY: (HORRIFIED) Aristides!

STUART: --shut the door quickly!

SOUND: DOOR QUICKLY SHUT

POLY: (IN DESPAIR) Aristides! My brother!

STUART: That poor fool.

POLY: I'll get them. My brother, I swear to you, I'll get them!

STUART: Yeah, you better cover his body.

WINDHAM: The brutes! The monstrous, green-skinned brutes!

STUART: They're no more brutes than we are, Colonel. This is a war.

WINDHAM: Are you defending them?

STUART: I'm merely pointing out the facts.

POLY: I ought to strangle you!

STUART: Why not save it for the Kloros?

POLY: (GRIM) I will. I promise you, I will.

STUART: They're probably deciding right now what to do with us. We might as well settle down and wait.

MUSIC: FOR AN UNCOMFORTABLE WAIT ... THEN BEHIND STUART--

STUART: (NARRATES) We sat there -- the five of us -- and listened while the Kloran invaders killed off the members of the Starfire's crew. Among us was Colonel Anthony Windham, an old Colonel Blimp-type with a lame leg. Windham had spent his life in the militia back on Earth, but had never seen a battle. There was Demetrius Polyorketes, who had just watched his brother being killed by a Kloro carbonizer. Poly was a huge man. He and his brother had tried truck farming in Arcturus and given it up after two seasons. Then there was Leblanc, a sensitive frightened young man of twenty-two. And Randolph Mullen who looked like somebody's caricature of a bookkeeper, a mild balding milquetoast little man. And there was myself, John Stuart. I was the only one who'd ever had contact with the Kloro people. I had a pair of artiplasm hands to prove it.

SOUND: SPACESHIP BACKGROUND

LEBLANC: It is quiet now.

STUART: Yeah, they've finished with the crew.

MULLEN: Mr. Stuart?

STUART: Yes, Mr. Mullen?

MULLEN: What do ya think'll happen next?

STUART: Well, they'll put a prize crew of two aboard and take us to one of their home planets -- as prisoners of war.

WINDHAM: Only two of the Kloros will stay aboard?

STUART: Two is all they'll need. (CHUCKLES) Why, Colonel? You're thinking of leading a gallant raid to retake the ship?

WINDHAM: Well, simply a point of information, dash it.

STUART: All right, then let me give you another point of information. If you want to commit suicide quick, just open that bulkhead door. Three steps inside, you'd fall on your face.

LEBLANC: But why?

STUART: Don't you smell anything, Leblanc? Get close to the door.

LEBLANC: (BEAT, SNIFFS TWICE) It - it smells like gas.

STUART: It is gas. Chlorine gas. They breathe it like we breathe oxygen. They've chlorinated the whole crews' compartment. One big whiff of that and we'd all be dead. So just forget about rushing the Kloros.

WINDHAM: How do you know so much about their habits, Stuart?

STUART: I lived on a Kloro planet for six months. You see these hands? They were mangled in the oxygenating machinery of my own quarters. They grew these artiplasm things and operated. They're weak, but at least I have hands again.

LEBLANC: Monsieur Stuart?

STUART: Yeah?

LEBLANC: Will they--? Will they kill us?

STUART: No.

POLY: Why do you say that?

STUART: Because, in their own way, they're gentlemen. Probably we'll be interned for the duration.

POLY: (OFFENDED) You call them gentlemen -- after they kill my brother in cold blood? You call them gentlemen?!

WINDHAM: You know, Stuart, you sound more and more like a blasted greenie sympathizer. Blast it, man, where's your patriotism and loyalty?

STUART: My loyalty is where it belongs. With honesty and decency, regardless of the shape of the being it appears in. This is a ridiculous war! Why are we fighting these people? We can live only on planets with oxygen and oxygen is poison to them. They can live only in chlorine atmosphere, which is deadly to us. And yet we're fighting them over a bunch of worthless asteroids that neither of us can live on comfortably.

WINDHAM: Well, it - it's a matter of principle!

STUART: It's a matter of stupid pride and greed!

POLY: I don't like what you say, mister!

STUART: Why not?

POLY: (INCREASINGLY ANGRY) Because you talk too nice about these greenie scum! They were good to you, eh? Well, they weren't good to my brother; they killed him. And I think maybe I'll kill you, you rotten greenie spy!

STUART: All right, Poly--

SOUND: SCUFFLE ... AS POLY ATTACKS STUART ... CONTINUES IN BG

WINDHAM: Mullen! Mullen, grab him!

MULLEN: (WITH EFFORT) I can't break his hold!

SOUND: WHACK-WHACK-WHACK AT DOOR

LEBLANC: (SCARED) They are coming in!

WINDHAM: Poly, let him go!

SOUND: WHACK-WHACK-WHACK AT DOOR ... SCUFFLE ENDS

STUART: (BREATHING HARD)

POLY: (TO STUART) They saved your life this time, but when I'm finished with them--!

WINDHAM: Quiet, quiet. I think they're opening the lock.

SOUND: DOOR UNLOCKS

POLY: (OMINOUS) Don't get between us.

WINDHAM: (TENSE) Poly, don't lose your head. They'll kill us all.

SOUND: DOOR SLIDES OPEN ... KLOORO STEPS IN

KLOORO: (FILTER) I greet you, Earth men.

MUSIC: FOR THE ARRIVAL OF THE KLOORO ... SOMBER ... THEN BEHIND STUART--

STUART: (NARRATES) The Kloro was not a pleasant sight to anyone unused to him. He was about the height of an Earth man, but the top of him was just a green stalk with eyes. He was still wearing a spacesuit to protect him from the oxygen in our compartment -- and in one of his tendrils he carried a Kloran gun. As he stood in the doorway, I could see Polyorketes' eyes begin to glisten with rage. Then with a bellow like a huge bull he threw himself at the Kloro.

SOUND: SPACESHIP BACKGROUND

POLY: (BELLOWS LIKE A HUGE BULL)

SOUND: Z-Z-Z-ZAP! OF KLORAN GUN

POLY: (BELLOW TURNS TO A WHIMPER)

SOUND: POLY'S BODY SLUMPS TO FLOOR

KLORO: (FILTER) He is not dead -- merely temporarily paralyzed. You five will remain together as prisoners of war. We expect to reach our own planet within several weeks, your time. There, you will be interned for the duration of the war. If any of you attempts to leave this compartment, we shall be forced to destroy you. That is all I have to communicate.

SOUND: KLORO STEPS AWAY ... DOOR SLIDES SHUT AND LOCKS

MULLEN: (BEAT) Hadn't we better do something for Mr. Polyorketes?

STUART: Oh, he'll be all right. Just hoist him up on the cot.

SOUND: GRUNTS AND CLATTER AS PASSENGERS HOIST POLY ONTO COT

STUART: All right, Poly--? Can you hear me -- you stupid brute?

POLY: (MOANS, TRIES TO SPEAK)

LEBLANC: His voice is coming back.

STUART: Yeah. (STERN, TO POLY) Now, I know what's going on in that thick skull of yours, Poly. You think that when the paralysis wears off, you'll ease your feelings by slamming me around some more. Well, if you do, it'll be curtains for all of us!

WINDHAM: How do you mean, sir?

STUART: None of you know the Kloros the way I do. Unlike us, they assume automatically that any group of Earth men they find together comprises a biological grouping -- like an ant colony. The result is that they consider the group as something-- Well, something holy. Now, they'd never break us up, and if one of us did any harm to another, they'd have us all executed as a bunch of Kloro-type perverts -- a nonfunctioning group. So call all the names you want, but keep your hands to yourself, or we're finished!

MUSIC: SOBER TRANSITION ... THEN BEHIND STUART--

STUART: (NARRATES) My little speech had a sobering effect on the group. For the next twenty-four hours we did little besides eat our rations and think. I tried to evaluate them. The colonel I had figured for an old windbag. Polyorketes was a hate-filled brute. Leblanc would crack first; he was like a frightened child. Mullen? Mullen was a nonentity -- a mouse instead of a man. Everything he did seemed prissyish. His voice had the quality of furtively rustling underbrush.

SOUND: SPACESHIP BACKGROUND

MULLEN: How long did you say the trip would take, Mr. Stuart?

STUART: Well, the Kloro said about two weeks.

WINDHAM: Gentlemen, if I may interrupt--?

STUART: Colonel?

WINDHAM: Now, it has occurred to me that perhaps you know of some - some weakness that might enable us to overcome these Kloros.

STUART: The only weakness they've got is that they can't stand oxygen.

WINDHAM: Oh, but there must be some way to get the best of them, man. After all, there are only two.

STUART: Now, look, before I answer, Colonel, I have to know your motive. Is it to save your own skin or help Earth win the war?

WINDHAM: Oh, dash it, man, to help our side, of course! What we're looking for is a way to save the ship for Earth without losing our lives, yes?

STUART: Well, all right, let's take a vote then. Leblanc?

LEBLANC: I - I have a wife waiting on Earth, Mr. Stuart. I do not want to die.

STUART: Uh huh. Hero Number One. What about you, Mullen?

MULLEN: I don't see how we could accomplish it without--

STUART: Uh huh. Hero Number Two. Well, Polyorketes?

POLY: When I kill Kloros, it will be with my bare hands. On their planet, I will kill dozens, I promise you.

STUART: Uh huh. Three down. Well, Colonel? Don't you want to march to glory, an old militia man like you?

WINDHAM: Your attitude is very cynical and unbecoming, Stuart--

STUART: I see. (SARCASTIC) Well, then, I'll have to blow the ship up myself.

WINDHAM: (ADMONISHES) Stuart!

STUART: Don't worry, Colonel. I don't intend to be a dead hero.

MULLEN: (THOUGHTFUL, HESITANT) Of course, there is a way we might do it.

WINDHAM: (BEAT, SURPRISED) What did you say, Mr. Mullen?

MULLEN: There's a spacesuit and magnetic boots stored in that locker over there. We might be able to reach the control room from the outside of the ship.

LEBLANC: The outside? But how would we get outside?

MULLEN: This compartment has a C-chute. It - it must.

LEBLANC: (PUZZLED) What is a - a C-chute?

STUART: A C-chute, my boy, is a "casualty chute." It doesn't get talked about much, but all the main compartments have them. They're just little airlocks down which you slide a corpse. Burial in space.

WINDHAM: Oh, blast it, Mullen, suppose you did get outside, how could you re-enter the ship?

MULLEN: Through the steam tubes -- the ones they use to guide the ship.

STUART: Wait a minute, Mullen. What do you know about steam tubes? I thought you were a bookkeeper.

MULLEN: Well, on Arcturus, I got interested in spaceship models. I - I studied all about them. (NERVOUS) On my own time, of course!

STUART: Yeah, yeah, naturally.

MULLEN: And at any rate, I learned that the steam tubes have an access vent directly to the control room for repairs, and - and so forth.

LEBLANC: And the Kloros, they are in the control room.

WINDHAM: Er, what do you think, Stuart?

STUART: Well, it's a video sort of idea, but it might just work. We could get permission from the Kloros to open the C-chute and bury Poly's brother. Then one of us could slip into it, work forward, and climb up through the steam tube. The question being: which one?

POLY: What about you? You, with your loud talk and your sneers?

STUART: I'm no hero, Poly, I've already said that. My object is to stay alive. If the steam tube let go while you were in it, you'd be broiled like a lobster. Well, how 'bout the colonel here?

WINDHAM: If I were younger, blast it, I'd trounce you! You know very well with my injured leg--

STUART: Yeah, of course. Not to mention my artificial hands. (SARCASTIC) Well, now, what unfortunate deformities do the rest of us have? Poly?

POLY: You just keep talking, Mr. Big Mouth, and pretty soon we'll kick your teeth in.

STUART: Of course! That's your standard reply to everything, isn't it? (TO LEBLANC) Leblanc? Will you do it?

LEBLANC: I - I cannot.

STUART: Not even to get back to Denise?

LEBLANC: Please, I - I cannot--

MULLEN: Leblanc needn't go. I'll do it.

STUART: (SURPRISED) What?

MULLEN: After all, it is my idea.

STUART: Wait a minute. Are you serious, Mullen?

MULLEN: Yes.

STUART: Well, how--? I don't understand. Why? Why you?

MULLEN: Well, it - it seems no one else'll do it.

STUART: But that's no reason, man.

MULLEN: I can't think of any other.

WINDHAM: Er, look here. Do you really intend to go through with it, sir?

MULLEN: Yes, I suppose I do.

WINDHAM: (OVERLY PLEASED) Well, dash it, man, let me shake your hand! You - you're an Earthman, by Heaven! You do this thing and, win or die, I'll bear witness for you!

MUSIC: TRANSITION ... THEN BEHIND STUART--

STUART: (NARRATES) It was quite a moment: Mullen the Mouse had suddenly turned into a man. He just stood there awkwardly while the colonel pumped his hand. Polyorketes seemed stunned. Leblanc was wide-eyed. And I? Well, I was in a peculiar position, one in which I rarely found myself: I had absolutely nothing to say.

SOUND: SPACESHIP BACKGROUND ... WHACK-WHACK-WHACK! AS WINDHAM KNOCKS ON INSIDE OF DOOR

WINDHAM: That ought to bring them.

POLY: I hear one.

SOUND: KLOORO STEPS APPROACH ... DOOR UNLOCKS AND OPENS ... KLOORO STEPS IN

KLOORO: (FILTER) What is it, Earth men?

STUART: (CAREFUL, DIPLOMATIC) One member of our unit is dead, as you know. We request permission to jettison his body out of the casualty chute.

KLOORO: (FILTER) You may do so.

STUART: You'll have to open the chute lock from the control room.

KLOORO: (FILTER) I will do so. Is there anything else?

STUART: No. Nothing else, thank you.

SOUND: KLOORO STEPS AWAY ... DOOR SHUTS AND LOCKS ... PASSENGERS SIGH AND 'WHEW!' AND "OH, BOY" AND EXHALE IN RELIEF

STUART: All right, come on now, we'll have to work fast. Mullen, get into a spacesuit from the emergency locker. Poly, help him on with those magnetic boots.

SOUND: LOCKER OPENS ... SUIT AND BOOTS REMOVED ... WITH HELP FROM THE OTHERS, MULLEN STRUGGLES TO PUT THEM ON, IN BG

POLY: (WITH EFFORT) Here, hurry.

MULLEN: (WITH EFFORT) I'm workin' as fast as I can. (BEAT) The arm. There.

STUART: All right, give me the helmet.

POLY: Here's the helmet.

STUART: Okay. Now, Mullen, better scratch your nose if you have to; it's your last chance for a while.

MULLEN: What about radio contact?

STUART: You can talk to us. We'll listen in on the helmet set in one of the other suits. The Kloros won't have theirs set on the inter-phone frequency.

WINDHAM: Wait a moment!

STUART: What for?

WINDHAM: Dash it, what's he going to use for a weapon? He isn't big enough to fight them barehanded!

STUART: No, no, that's true. Well, how about one of those oxygen cylinders?

POLY: Good idea! Use it to bash them over the head!

STUART: Give him one of the cylinders equipped with a reducing valve. Now, look, Mullen -- if your magnetic boots fail and you start drifting away into space, open this valve.

SOUND: SHARP PSST! OF AIR ESCAPING FROM VALVE

MULLEN: Mm hm.

STUART: See that? Now, you can use it like a miniature jet and try to blow yourself back to the ship. Understand?

MULLEN: I - I think so.

STUART: (EXHALES) Well, I only hope it works. All right, here goes the helmet.

LEBLANC: You'd better hurry. The light is on over the C-chute!

STUART: Yes. All right, that means they've opened the lock. (WITH EFFORT) Here. (EXHALES)

SOUND: HELMET PLACED ON MULLEN

STUART: Now, can you hear me?

MULLEN: (MUFFLED MURMUR)

STUART: (EXHALES) Leblanc, give me that other space helmet.

LEBLANC: Yes. Here.

STUART: Let me switch on the radio.

SOUND: CLICK! OF SWITCH

STUART: (INTO MIKE) Can you hear me, Mullen?

MULLEN: (FILTER) I hear you.

STUART: (INTO MIKE) Fine. Plenty of air?

MULLEN: (FILTER) Air's okay.

STUART: (INTO MIKE) Uh huh. (TO POLY) Poly, open the C-chute.

POLY: (GRUNTS WITH EFFORT AS--)

SOUND: C-CHUTE OPENS

STUART: Okay, now. Help him in.

SOUND: CLATTER! AND PASSENGERS GRUNT WITH EFFORT AS THEY LIFT MULLEN INTO CHUTE

STUART: (INTO MIKE) All ready?

MULLEN: (FILTER) Ready.

STUART: (INTO MIKE) Well, good luck. (TO OTHERS) Close the chute.

SOUND: CHUTE CLOSES

STUART: Pull the ejector valve!

SOUND: HISS! OF EJECTION

STUART: Now! He's out! (BEAT) Now, God help him.

LEBLANC: The light is out.

STUART: (SOBER) Yeah. The Kloros have closed the chute lock.

WINDHAM: I - I don't suppose he has much of a chance.

STUART: No.

WINDHAM: Do you think, er--? Do you think he knew it?

STUART: (EXHALES) I don't know. I just don't know.

LEBLANC: Should I try to contact him on the radio?

STUART: Yes, I think--

SOUND: KLOORO STEPS SLOWLY APPROACH, IN BG

STUART: Wait a minute.

WINDHAM: What is it?

STUART: Listen, the Kloro's coming.

WINDHAM: Good lord, he's sure to miss Mullen!

STUART: Yeah. (QUICKLY) Poly, get your brother's body on the cot. Put a blanket over it. Pretend it's Mullen asleep. (NO RESPONSE) Poly, for heaven's sake--

POLY: (RELUCTANT) My brother--

STUART: All right, you've got to do it, man. It's our only chance. Listen, if Mullen could go out there and risk his--

POLY: Very well. I will do it.

SOUND: POLY LOADS BROTHER ONTO COT AND COVERS HIM JUST AS DOOR UNLOCKS AND OPENS ... KLOORO STEPS IN

KLOORO: (FILTER) Earth men?

STUART: (NERVOUS, TENSE) Yes?

KLOORO: (FILTER) You have jettisoned the body?

STUART: Yes!

KLOORO: (FILTER) Good. Is there something further we can do?

STUART: No! I-- (REGAINS HIS COMPOSURE, CALM AND DIPLOMATIC) We are very tired. Our grief is very great - at losing one of our unit. We would like to rest, alone.

KLOORO: (FILTER) I will respect your wishes. I see that one of your units sleeps already.

STUART: Yes. Yes, Mr. Mullen was overcome with grief.

KLOORO: (FILTER) I leave you.

SOUND: KLOORO STEPS AWAY ... DOOR SHUTS AND LOCKS ... PASSENGERS SIGH AND EXHALE IN RELIEF

STUART: (RELIEVED) Oh, brother. (MARVELS) Poly, I thought sure you were gonna rush him.

POLY: With that brave little guy out there? What do you think I am, anyway? And to think I laughed at him. Makes me ashamed.

STUART: (SOBER) Yeah, I guess-- I guess I've been saying some things that maybe weren't too funny. I owe all of you an apology.

WINDHAM: (CLEARS THROAT) Do you think it's safe to try the radio?

STUART: Yeah, we better.

SOUND: CLICK! OF SWITCH

STUART: (INTO MIKE) Hello? Hello, Mullen, can you hear me?

MULLEN: (FILTER) Yes, I - I hear you.

STUART: (INTO MIKE) Where are you?

MULLEN: (FILTER) I'm standing on the outside of the ship.

STUART: (INTO MIKE) All right now, take care. One misstep and you'll be marooned in space. Now, can you find the steam tubes?

MULLEN: (FILTER) I think I've found one of them already. I can feel the rim. I just hope it doesn't let go when I get inside.

STUART: (INTO MIKE) Be careful.

MULLEN: (FILTER) I'm going into the tube now. I can feel the ladder rungs they use to repair the inside.

STUART: (INTO MIKE) Yeah, well, keep in contact.

MULLEN: (FILTER) I'm in the tube now.

SOUND: LONG SHARP HISS! OF STEAM THROUGH TUBE

WINDHAM: Good lord! They've let go with a blast!

STUART: Well, it may be the starboard tubes. (INTO MIKE) Mullen? Mullen?

MULLEN: (FILTER) Still here.

STUART: (EXHALES IN RELIEF)

MULLEN: (FILTER) They used the other tubes, fortunately. Now, if they don't try to correct for overdeflection--

STUART: (INTO MIKE) Yeah, keep moving.

MULLEN: (FILTER) I seem to be-- Wait. Yes, I'm at the end of the tube now -- where it opens into the control room.

STUART: (INTO MIKE) Good, good. Now, look, there's a small metal door there. Can you feel it?

MULLEN: (FILTER) Yes, I-- I'm afraid it's locked from the other side.

STUART: (DISAPPOINTED) Ohhh.

MULLEN: (FILTER) I can't budge it.

STUART: (INTO MIKE) Mullen? Mullen, listen to me--

MULLEN: (FILTER, NERVOUS) Stuart, I - I'm scared. I - I'm terribly scared.

STUART: (INTO MIKE, QUICKLY) Yeah, all right, all right, hang on, don't blow up, listen to me. Are you listening?

MULLEN: (FILTER, EXHALES) Yes.

STUART: (INTO MIKE) Take the spare oxygen tank, bang on the metal door that leads to the control room. The Kloros are bound to hear you. When one of them comes to investigate, try to hit him with the cylinder. Now, aim for the stalk on top of his body. Try to blind him. Will you do that?

MULLEN: (FILTER) I - I'll try.

STUART: (INTO MIKE) Well, now, go on. Only one can come. The other will stay at the controls. Now start banging.

SOUND: FILTERED CLINK! CLINK! CLINK! CLINK! OF OXYGEN TANK AGAINST METAL DOOR

STUART: (BEAT, INTO MIKE) Any luck?

MULLEN: (FILTER) No, I-- Wait, I - I hear something. Something's opening the lock. The door now. I hear-- (EXCLAIMS)

STUART: (BEAT, INTO MIKE) Mullen? (NO ANSWER) Mullen, what happened? (NO ANSWER) Mullen, can you hear me?! (NO ANSWER) Mullen?!

MUSIC: BRIEF TENSE BRIDGE

SOUND: SPACESHIP BACKGROUND ... CLICKETY-CLICK! OF HELMET RADIO BEING TUNED

STUART: (INTO MIKE) Mullen? Mullen! (SHUDDERS, TO OTHERS) Oh, it's no use. They must have gotten him.

POLY: Yeah, he was one brave little guy, that one.

LEBLANC: But suppose they have just got him in the control room? I mean, maybe he is not dead!

STUART: Well?

LEBLANC: Well-- Then maybe one of us could rush them. We could bang on the door and jump the Kloro!

STUART: Well, the first guy would be a cinch to die.

LEBLANC: I - I would be willing to take the chance.

STUART: You?!

LEBLANC: Why not? I could try.

POLY: Not you! I am the strongest. I do it!

WINDHAM: Now, listen - listen, you chaps. I'm an old man, I've got nothing to live for anyway. Suppose I throw myself at the ray gun.

STUART: Wait a minute, what's going on here? Twenty minutes ago there wasn't one of you who'd risk his little finger to get us out of here. Now you're falling all over each other.

POLY: Maybe Mr. Mullen teaches us a lesson, huh?

STUART: (BEAT) Yeah. (BEAT) Okay, Poly, give me the wrench. I'll start banging on the door!

MUSIC: BRIEF EXPECTANT TRANSITION ... THEN BEHIND STUART--

STUART: (NARRATES) They say that selflessness is contagious. I guess maybe it is. I'd been a cynic all my life, a man who believed in nothing. Well, I'd come face to face with four human beings who proved that I'd been living a lie. I knew what

I was going to do now. When the Kloro came to investigate our compartment, I had it all planned. If only my poor weak hands would hold out long enough.

SOUND: SPACESHIP BACKGROUND

STUART: Ready?

OTHERS: Ready.

STUART: Here goes.

SOUND: BANG-BANG-BANG! OF WRENCH ON DOOR

STUART: That should bring 'em.

LEBLANC: (BEAT) Try again.

SOUND: STEPS APPROACH, IN BG

WINDHAM: Wait, wait, listen--

LEBLANC: What?

STUART: Ssh!

SOUND: STEPS TO DOOR

WINDHAM: (LOW) It's at the door.

POLY: (LOW) Get ready.

SOUND: DOOR UNLOCKS

STUART: (LOW) It's opening the lock.

WINDHAM: (LOW) For poor old Mullen now.

STUART: (LOW) Steady.

SOUND: DOOR OPENS

STUART: Now!

SOUND: PASSENGERS RUSH FORWARD ... SCUFFLE, IN BG

LEBLANC: Let him have it!

STUART: Wait! Stop it! It's not the Kloro!

LEBLANC: Wait--!

SOUND: SCUFFLE ENDS

WINDHAM: Good lord! It's Mullen!

LEBLANC: Monsieur Mullen!

STUART: Get the helmet off.

SOUND: HELMET GRABBED

STUART: That's it. All right now, lift!

SOUND: HELMET LIFTED OFF

STUART: Mullen? Mullen, are you all right?

MULLEN: (SHAKEN) I - I seem to be quite all right.

STUART: Well, the Kloros--?

MULLEN: Both dead. At least I hope so.

STUART: What happened?

MULLEN: Well, I banged on the steam tube hatch and a Kloro opened it.

STUART: Yeah?

MULLEN: I hit him with the cylinder. It blinded him, I guess, but didn't kill him. He grabbed me and pulled me into the cabin. In the struggle, he broke my transmitter; that's why I couldn't talk to you. Finally, I managed to - to club him down.

STUART: Well, what about the other one?

MULLEN: The other one almost got me. It must have heard the scuffle and came into the cabin with a ray gun. What I did, I guess, was pure reflex. The cabin atmosphere was chlorine, of course, and the greenie didn't have a spacesuit on.

STUART: Uh huh.

MULLEN: So I just turned on the oxygen valve on that spare tube. (QUEASY) It was like spraying an insect with poison.

STUART: (BEAT) Well, you're a brave man, Mullen. I'd've been scared to death.

MULLEN: I - I -

STUART: Mullen, what is it?

MULLEN: (HYPERVENTILATES, THE SHOCK SINKS IN)

STUART: Mullen?

MULLEN: (HYPERVENTILATES)

MUSIC: TRANSITION ... THEN BEHIND STUART--

STUART: (NARRATES) An hour later, false hands and all, I was at the controls of the ship headed for Earth. We'd gotten rid of the chlorinating equipment and restored the oxygen naturally. Mullen was asleep in the cabin under a sedative. Or so I thought until the cabin door opened.

SOUND: CABIN DOOR OPENS ... MULLEN'S STEPS IN ... CONTROL ROOM BACKGROUND

STUART: Mullen, for Pete's sake, get back to bed!

MULLEN: No, I'm quite all right now, really. Do you mind if I watch how you operate the ship?

STUART: (AMUSED) No, no, not at all. Sit down.

SOUND: MULLEN SITS

STUART: You know, I guess, uh, I owe you an apology. I didn't think too much of you.

MULLEN: (SHRUGS) That's your privilege. (CHUCKLE)

STUART: (SERIOUS) No, it isn't anybody's privilege, Mullen, to despise another. For years now, I've abandoned hope of finding any decency in human beings. I owe you a vote of thanks.

MULLEN: You embarrass me, Mr. Stuart. I - I didn't do it for any heroic reasons, I assure you. Far from it.

STUART: Well, why did you do it, Mullen? That puzzles me very much.

MULLEN: Well, Mr. Stuart, I'm a bookkeeper. Seventeen years ago I left Earth to work on Arcturus. I never made much impression on anybody on Earth, although I wanted very much to have people like me. Well, about a year ago I started to write to my family again. Don't ask me why. And then I asked for a leave of absence to go home -- after seventeen years.

STUART: (BEAT) Well, I still don't understand. It wasn't patriotism, or love of a woman or money or any of those things. What was it?

MULLEN: (SIMPLY) Mr. Stuart, haven't you ever been homesick?

MUSIC: SNEAKS IN DURING ABOVE ... THEN UP FOR A WARM CURTAIN

ANNOUNCER: You have just heard X MINUS ONE, presented by the National Broadcasting Company in cooperation with Galaxy Science Fiction Magazine, which this month features "A Gun for Dinosaur" by L. Sprague DeCamp, a story of hunters in the bloodiest and most ferocious arena of all prehistoric Earth, where hunting reptile heavyweights is no job for human lightweights. Galaxy Magazine, on your newsstand today.

MUSIC: SNEAKS IN UNDER FOLLOWING--

ANNOUNCER: Tonight, by transcription, X MINUS ONE has brought you "The C-Chute," a story from the pages of Galaxy written by Isaac Asimov and adapted for radio by George Lefferts. Featured in the cast were Lyle Sudrow, Stan Early, Bob Hastings, Mercer McLeod, Danny Ocko, and John Gibson. Your announcer, Bill McCord. X MINUS ONE was directed by Daniel Sutter and is an NBC Radio Network production.

MUSIC: UP AND OUT

NBC ANNCR: Next week, on a distant planet in a forgotten colony of Earth, a man is ordered to commit a murder. Listen to "Skulking Permit" on X MINUS ONE next week.

MUSIC: NBC CHIMES

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