

Reynolds Mack

Off Course



Mack Reynolds

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First on the scene were Larry Dermott and Tim Casey of the State Highway Patrol. They assumed they were witnessing the crash of a new type of Air Force plane and slipped and skidded desperately across the field to within thirty feet of the strange craft, only to discover that the landing had been made without accident.

Patrolman Dermott shook his head. "They're gettin' queerer looking every year. Get a load of it – no wheels, no propeller, no cockpit."

They left the car and made their way toward the strange egg-shaped vessel.

Tim Casey loosened his .38 in its holster and said, "Sure, and I'm beginning to wonder if it's one of ours. No insignia and – "

A circular door slid open at that point and Dameri Tass stepped out, yawning. He spotted them, smiled and said, "Glork."

They gaped at him.

"Glork is right," Dermott swallowed.

Tim Casey closed his mouth with an effort. "Do you mind the color of his face?" he blurted.

"How could I help it?"

Dameri Tass rubbed a blue-nailed pink hand down his purplish countenance and yawned again. "Gorra manigan horp soratium," he said.

Patrolman Dermott and Patrolman Casey shot stares at each other. "'Tis double talk he's after givin' us," Casey said.

Dameri Tass frowned. "Harama?" he asked.

Larry Dermott pushed his cap to the back of his head. "That doesn't sound like any language I've even *heard* about."

Dameri Tass grimaced, turned and reentered his spacecraft to emerge in half a minute with his hands full of contraption. He held a box-like arrangement under his left arm; in his right hand were two metal caps connected to the box by wires.

While the patrolmen watched him, he set the box on the ground, twirled two dials and put one of the caps on his head. He offered the other to Larry Dermott; his desire was obvious.

Trained to grasp a situation and immediately respond in manner best suited to protect the welfare of the people of New York State, Dermott cleared his throat and said, "Tim, take over while I report."

"Hey!" Casey protested, but his fellow minion had left.

"Mandaia," Dameri Tass told Casey, holding out the metal cap.

"Faith, an' do I look balmy?" Casey told him. "I wouldn't be puttin' that dingus on my head for all the colleens in Ireland."

"Mandaia," the stranger said impatiently.

"Bejasus," Casey snorted, "ye can't – "

Dermott called from the car, "Tim, the captain says to humor this guy. We're to keep him here until the officials arrive."

Tim Casey closed his eyes and groaned. "Humor him, he's after sayin'. Orders it is." He shouted back, "Sure, an' did ye tell 'em he's in technicolor? Begorra, he looks like a man from Mars."

"That's what they think," Larry yelled, "and the governor is on his way. We're to do everything possible short of violence to keep this character here. Humor him, Tim!"

"Mandaia," Dameri Tass snapped, pushing the cap into Casey's reluctant hands.

Muttering his protests, Casey lifted it gingerly and placed it on his head. Not feeling any immediate effect, he said, "There, 'tis satisfied ye are now, I'm supposin'."

The alien stooped down and flicked a switch on the little box. It hummed gently. Tim Casey suddenly shrieked and sat down on the stubble and grass of the field. "Begorra," he yelped, "I've been murdered!" He tore the cap from his head.

His companion came running, "What's the matter, Tim?" he shouted.

Dameri Tass removed the metal cap from his own head. "Sure, an' nothin' is after bein' the matter with him," he said. "Evidently the bhoy has niver been a-wearin' of a kerit helmet afore. 'Twill hurt him not at all."

"You can talk!" Dermott blurted, skidding to a stop.

Dameri Tass shrugged. "Faith, an' why not? As I was after sayin', I shared the kerit helmet with Tim Casey."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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