

# PROTECTED SPECIES

TO: PLUCITER FNEED, PRESIDENT, INTERSTELLAR LEAGUE OF GENTLEFOLK CONCERNED ABOUT ENDANGERED WILD-LIFE.

FROM: GRAUNCH QUIGLOW, CHIEF ANIMAL-BAGGER, MILHY WAY AND DISTRICT.

Dear Strontium-Breath,  
I quit.

Yeah, you heard. I'm all through, finished, retiring, slinging my Quark-Hook, the works. I'm sick of this business. I'm sick of snuffling around the spaceways looking for stupid obscure life-forms with too many legs and repulsive habits. I'm sick of rounding 'em up and jammin' 'em into stasis-prisms and haulin' them back to homeworld so you and your rich Tau-Cetian buddies can sit around at dinner parties and talk about how liberal you all are, putting these critters out to graze on some Wildlife Asteroid for the rest of their incomprehensible lives. I mean, what's the point? Nobody really gives a slithering Squork if these things live or die.

I mean, this has been building up for a long time. This isn't something I just decided in the heat of the moment. Look at the jobs I've been getting lately.



BY ALAN MOORE

Last season you sent me after those Lesser Iridescent Snicker-Fish that live out on the frozen Methane-Flats of Snorky's Planet. Yeah, I know there's only five of the things left in the whole Universe, but that's not the point. The point is that I had to spend three weeks wading thorax-deep in frozen, stinking methane, looking for some ugly, radioactive-looking little squirm-ball that just giggled at me when I finally found it.

Then there was that Ecto Wombat from Floobool IV. And the Exploding Marsupials from Prark. I still haven't finished cleaning out the ship after those little beauties, and that was months ago. But it wasn't any of those things that made me decide to hand in my notice. Oh no. It was that last job that did it. You've probably forgotten all about it, so allow me to refresh your memory.

You sent me out to Sol III, which has to be one of the most depressing places in known space. You can tell that by the name the locals have for their own planet. They call it "Dirt". Or was that "Mud"? I don't remember.

Anyway, you told me there was some life-form there that was so close to becoming extinct that there were only two left in the whole of space. According to my brief, they'd both come to this "Dirt" place when the world they originally came from blew up, which accounts for there being just two of them. What I say is, if these things can't look after their own planets in the first place, why give 'em another chance? But nobody listens to me. I'm just the guy who does all the work.

So anyway, there I am, just nosing my Zoo-Ship into the filthy disgusting atmosphere of this miserable little planet, and I'm running a check through on my computer just for I have all the background information I'm going to need for this job. Right there, I hit my first problem.

See, nobody had bothered to tell me, but it turned out that these two endangered animals looked more or less exactly the same as the natives of this "Mud" place, of which there were about umpteen billion. Same number of legs, same number of heads, absolutely identical in every detail.

But I'm a pretty resourceful guy. I did an Alpha-Wave brainscan on the entire lousy planet (which explains those overtime sheets you queried, you fat cheapskate) and I found just two brain-patterns that matched up with what I had on my species profile. One of 'em was a female, and the other one was a guy. The scan had the guy located in the middle of this big ugly city slap in the middle of one of the major continents.

Now, since in my line of business I usually find that female animals are bigger, tougher and more dangerous than the males, I decided it'd be easier if I went after the guy first. Logical, right? So I zero in on his scanner-blip and then, when I have him properly triangulated I pick up my nets and trunk-guns and stuff and teleport myself down to say hello.

I find myself in this tiny little room, I dunno, looks like some sort of storage area or something, and I'm looking at this guy, and he's looking at me and it's a toss-up which of us was most surprised.

Straight away I could see why he was on the endangered species list. I mean, he looked so pathetically puny. He had sort of hunched up shoulders and some of those little lenses over his eyes that certain types of animal wear when there's something wrong with how good they see. And of course, he

was a humanoid, and I always think they look kinda feeble in the best of circumstances.

So anyway, I switched on my translator so he could understand what I was saying, and I explained how I was going to take him away to somewhere much nicer than Planet Dirt, where he'd be happy and taken care of for the rest of his life. I mean, I was really polite to him. No sense getting threatening if there's no call for it, right?

Anyway, he sort of looked at me all amazed for a second or two, and then he starts laughing. Straight away I think "Uh-oh. A crazy." I haven't forgotten the trouble I had with those Psycho-Squids back on Voralb IX. Since then, if an animal starts acting crazy I trunk 'em first and reason with 'em when they're safely tucked up in a stasis-prism. So I haul out my sleepy-gun and let him have it. Both barrels. You know what happened?

Nothing. That's what happened. He just stood there as if I hadn't just shot him full of the most powerful tranquiliser in the galaxy. The only thing was, he stopped laughing.

Then, while I'm still trying to work out if the gun had jammed or something, he walks across to me and grabs it by the barrel.

And then he tears it up. Like paper. I still don't believe it. Rip, rip, rip, rip. Ten thousand plastons worth of hardware lying in tiny pieces on the floor. Obviously, I had trouble here.

Well, somehow I keep my cool. Maybe the gun had metal fatigue or something. Those trunk-guns are made by Altrovians, and they turn out such skuzzy handwork that probably a two year old kid could rip 'em to bits. I decide to use my net, which is Sirian-manufactured and will hold a full grown bull Granite-lizard during the height of the mating season. So I throw the net at this sickly little specimen with the eye-lenses.

It flies through the air towards him, right? He looks at it, right? Stares at it.

And it melts.

Melts into a puddle of grey gloop on the floor, right next to the bits of trunk-gun. Listen, you tell me, what in the cosmos can melt a Sirian manufactured animal net? With its eyes? You just tell me.

I'm considering my next move in light of these developments when this creature suddenly does something really strange... so strange that I know I was right about it being crazy. Know what it does?

It starts to take its shirt off. Only it's got more clothes on underneath... really lurid sort of colours and everything. I decide I better beam myself back to the ship for some heavier weaponry before it takes any more of its clothes off. I mean, if it can melt things with its eyes, no telling what it's gonna do with its navel, right?

So, Zappo, I'm back in the transporter booth on the ship and trying to work out what sort of weapons I'm gonna need to round up this critter. I load myself up with a Neutrino-Cannon and a belt of subspace grenades and some other stuff, and for some reason I happen to look up at the scan-screen, just to check if he's still in the building where I left him. He isn't.

At first, I figure that the instruments are faulty, because according to the read-out, this animal is about half a mile above the city and heading towards me at about three times the speed of sound. I'm just starting to bang the scanner to get it working right again when all of a sudden, the animal arrives.

Through the wall. Yeah, you heard. Straight through the wall of my ship. Ka-Grunch!



I hardly recognise him. He isn't wearing the lenses anymore, and he's dressed from head to toe in this sort of horrible garish suit with a big red flag flapping away at the back. But I know it's him, see, 'cause I got instincts for these things. So I let him have it with the Neutrino Bazooka.

Nothing.

And then the Subspace grenades. Still nothing. And then the Thermic Lance, The Laser Hammer, the Cellular Disruptor and sixteen fully-primed Bldggets.

Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing.

And then it was his turn.

He sort of puffed out his cheeks... those face-sacks that humanoids have... and he blew me across the... no. No, you wouldn't believe it. Let's just say it hurt when I went through the cabin partition and you'll be getting my damages claim.

While I was picking myself up, he somehow got back outside the ship, picked the entire vessel up in one hand and threw it! According to the instruments, he's thrown us at Andromeda, but since the ship hasn't slowed down enough yet for me to check, I'll let you know when I get there.

So anyway, I quit. I don't give a flying Fazuka if all the endangered species in the universe die out tomorrow. We're the ones who need protecting, not them.

The Snicker-Fish don't need protecting, the Ecto Wombats don't need protecting, the Exploding Marsupials don't need protecting.

And the Kryptonians definitely don't need protecting. Yours,  
Graunch Quiglow,  
Somewhere on the way to Andromeda.

»MESSAGE ENDS«