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OR DIE!**

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE
INCOMPLETE THEFT ***

The Incomplete Theft

By Ralph Burke

**Stealing a new space ship principle from
Earth seemed like an easy enough task for the
alien. But how does one deliver a principle?**

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Torlyn Khy smiled grimly to himself as he thought of the approaching completion of the new Earth spaceship. Thus far, his disguise had completely fooled the Earthmen; they didn't even begin to suspect that a Valdorian spy was among the engineers who were building the *Skyjumper*.

High above the spacefield it loomed, a great sphere of metal that housed the new teleportation drive. Torlyn Khy looked up at its impressive bulk. Unlike the common type of spaceship, which had a top speed of ten thousand lights, the new drive could take the ship from Earth to any point in the galaxy in a fraction of a microsecond. If it were successful, Earth would win the war against Valdor in a matter of months.

And if not—

John Mitchell, the Chief Engineer of Sahara Spaceport, said: "She's a beauty, isn't she, Pete?"

Torlyn Khy, in his disguise as Earthman "Peter Blane," smiled and said, "Yes. She's a real beauty. When will she be finished?"

"This afternoon," Mitchell said. "The boys are tightening the last bolts and putting in the final wiring now. The job's just about over, Pete."

Good! thought Torlyn. *I'll be able to take it tonight.* To be able to bring both the spaceship's plans and the ship itself back to Valdor would be a major feat. It would result in a fine promotion.

The ship was entirely different from any other vessel ever built. The hyperkinetic generator in its center generated a spherical force field around the ship which projected it to wherever it had been aimed for.

It was simple to operate; all the pilot had to do was set up the co-ordinates of his target, turn on the hyperkinetic generator, and press the activator button. The generator itself did the rest. The field enclosed the ship, and instantaneously the ship was a hundred or a thousand light-years away.

That evening, Torlyn Khy stepped out of his room and strolled over toward the spaceship. It was surrounded by guards, and it was bathed in the blaze of a battery of searchlights, but that did not bother the Valdorian. Earthmen were such stupid fools! It would be a blessing for them if the Valdorians took them over and showed them how to run their lives efficiently. On Valdor, everyone had a job and he did it. He obeyed his superiors without asking questions, and the society, therefore, was efficient.

But these Earthmen! Such a lax, sloppy, inefficient society! They needed more regimentation, more precision. They needed to learn to obey orders. And they *would* learn—after the Valdorian victory.

"Evening, Mr. Mitchell."

"Good evening, Captain. Nice night, isn't it?"

Torlyn Khy looked around warily and saw the lean, spare figure of John Mitchell standing some distance away. He was talking to a man in a military uniform, one of the guards posted on the project. The Valdorian ducked away; he didn't care to be seen. Not tonight, of all nights.

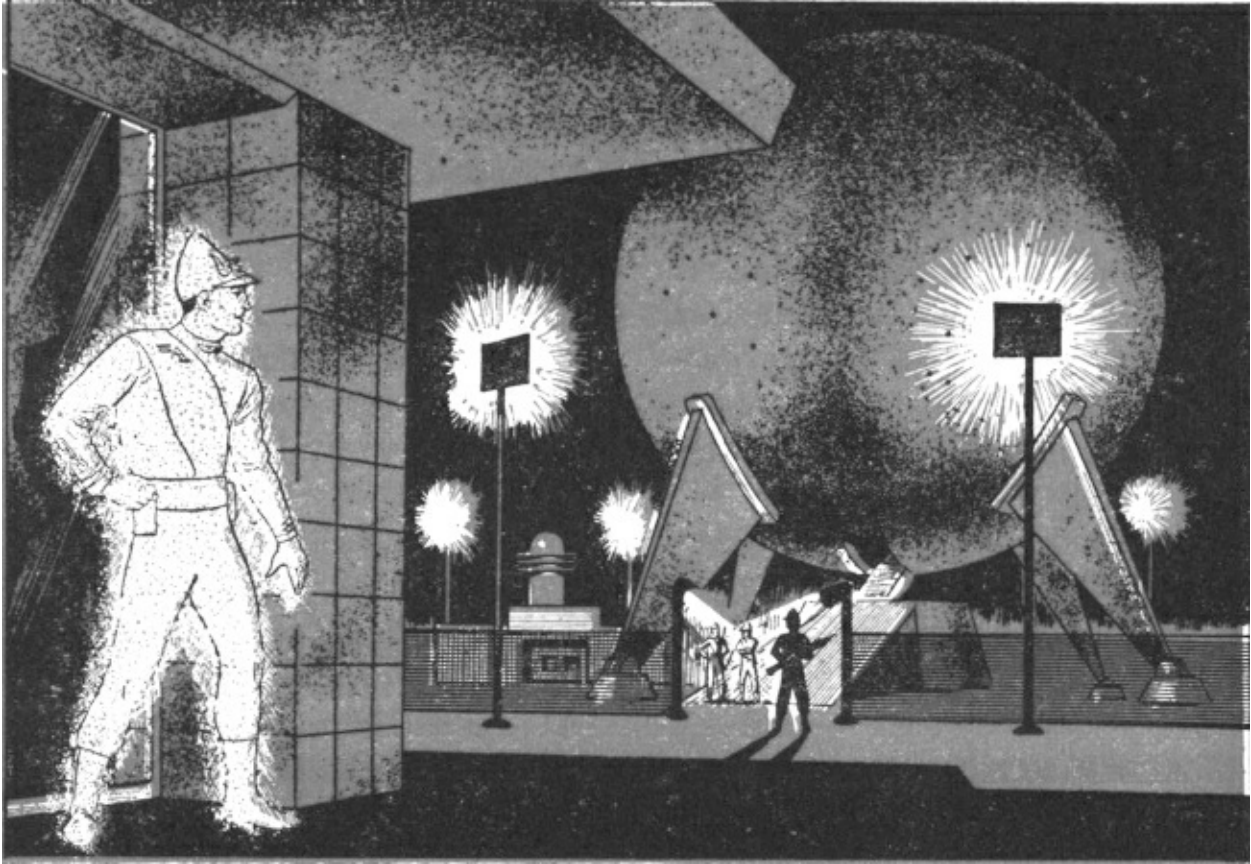
He walked all around the spaceship, studying it carefully from all angles, keeping well out of sight of the guards that surrounded it.

The ship appeared to be ready to go; all he had to do was get inside and take off. Simple. Very simple, Torlyn Khy thought. The greatest victories are always simple.

The ship was supposed to be lifted above the atmosphere on her jets before the hyperkinetic generator was used, but the generator could, in an emergency, be used on the ground. Torlyn Khy smiled. As far as he was concerned, this *would* be an emergency. The Earthmen, he thought pleasantly, would feel very foolish when their greatest ship simply vanished from under their noses.

After making a thorough reconnaissance of the area, the Valdorian decided he was ready. He switched on the tiny power pack at his waist, and the invisibility belt he was wearing was energized. If anyone had been watching the shadows where Torlyn Khy was standing, they would have seen a faint blue glow as the Valdorian faded slowly from sight.





Then, boldly, the alien strode toward the *Skyjumper*. Nothing stood in the way of success now.

He walked directly across the well-lighted safety area, and the guards paid not the slightest attention.

At the airlock door, he paused to take stock of the situation. He had to move fast now. The success of the whole mission depended on timing from here on out. The guards, naturally, would see the airlock door swing open; they would know something was wrong. It would take them, he estimated, about four minutes to bring up heavy armament to blast the door open.

Moistening his lips nervously, he decided to correct the estimate. *Better make*

it three minutes for safety's sake, he thought.

In that time, he would have to warm up the generator and punch the co-ordinates for the planet Valdor into the big guiding computer. Doing that would require, say, two minutes—giving him a minute's leeway. Good!

He waited until the guards all seemed to be looking away from the airlock door. Then he pressed the lock. The door swung open, and Torlyn Khy stepped quickly inside.

There was a shout from one of the guards below, but they were too late to do anything; the Valdorian had the airlock door closed before they could see what had happened. He turned the master switch on the inside of the door, which locked the door against any outside interference.

He grinned sardonically. The fool Earthmen would have a devil of a time doing anything now!

The next thing was to switch off his invisibility belt. It was difficult to do delicate work if you couldn't see your own arms and fingers, and punching co-ordinates into a computer was a delicate job.

He turned toward the inner door—and, at that moment, the door opened! An Earthman stepped out, an engineer named Harris who had apparently been making some last-minute adjustments on the ship.

"Oh, hello, Blaine," Harris said. "I—"

Without a word, the Valdorian leaped forward, taking the Earthman by surprise. He slammed his fist into Harris' abdomen, and he doubled up in pain.

Torlyn Khy jumped back as the Earthman's foot suddenly sliced toward him. The toe of the engineer's foot hit him stingingly alongside the jaw, but the Valdorian managed to grasp the foot and twist.

Then he bent and picked Harris up, and knocked him down again with a crashing blow to the chin.

He left the unconscious Earthman on the floor, locking him inside the airlock. He would be no trouble there.

The real trouble was that the fight had delayed his timing; it must have taken all of a minute, and in a split-second operation such as this an interval of a

minute could be fatal. Without wasting any more time, he got moving. His jaw hurt where the Earthman had slugged him, and his fingers felt stiff.

He ran down the corridor to the control room. The big automatic computer was ready to go. Torlyn Khy switched it on, waited for a moment, and then hastily began punching co-ordinates into the computer. He had to hurry; the Earthmen might blast their way into the ship at any moment. Still, he dared not make an error; if he did, the ship might end up a thousand light-years from where it was supposed to materialize—perhaps in the heart of a sun.

There was perspiration dripping from his brow by the time he was finished. He turned on the hyperkinetic generator and waited for it to warm up. Still there was no sound from the airlock.

A red indicator light on the control panel came on, telling him that the generator was ready. With a triumphant smile, Torlyn Khy reached out and pressed the activator stud.



Outside the ship, the guards watched the airlock door.

"I wonder why Dr. Harris did that?" said a lieutenant.

"Who knows?" a sergeant replied.

They had seen the airlock open and close, but knowing that Harris was still inside, they had thought little of it. Still, it was odd.

The airlock door swung open again. Harris stepped out, looking dazed. The lieutenant ran toward him, and quickly the engineer explained what had happened.

"You mean he's inside there? We've got to stop him!"

"It's too late," Harris said. "He didn't know that I was doing some adjusting inside there. Go ahead and look."

The lieutenant went to the inner door of the airlock and peered in. The whole inside of the ship was gone, vanished as though it had never been.

"I had just made a slight adjustment of the generator." Harris said quietly. "The power field was cut down, so the projector field was smaller. I'm afraid

our spy simply projected the inside of the spaceship out into the interstellar vacuum and left the hull behind."

He shook his head grimly. "Poor devil. He'll have quite a surprise in store for him—unless he can live without air!"

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