

**THIS
WORLD
IS
TABOO**

**MURRAY
LEINSTER**

Land on Dara? One might as well commit suicide!

Untouchable, like the Darans — that's what they'd call Calhoun if he broke the quarantine. And they'd wipe him out on sight.

But Dara needed him and that was the kind of challenge this Interstellar Med Serviceman would never dodge.

**THIS WORLD
IS TABOO**
by
MURRAY LEINSTER

FEAR RIDES THE ROCKETS

The Interstellar Medical Service was just about the only remaining galactic organization that every one of the hundreds of inhabited planets respected. So when their service broke down in Star Sector Twelve, it created a very dangerous situation.

When Calhoun took his Med ship out of overdrive near that sector's planet Weald, he was vaguely aware of the risks. But the crisis came home to him with a crash the moment he radioed in for landing coordinates.

"Contamination! Full mobilization! Red alert! Death to blueskins!" Such were the nature of his greetings.

And it began to look like a case of the cosmic jitters that only the most drastic of orbital surgery could cure.

Murray Leinster, whose real name is Will F. Jenkins, has been entertaining the public with his exciting fiction for several decades. Called the dean of modern science-fiction, he was writing these amazing super-science adventures back in the early twenties before there ever was such a thing as an all-fantasy magazine. His short stories, novelettes, and serial novels have appeared in most of the major American magazines, both slick and pulp, and many have been reprinted all over the world. He has made a distinguished name for himself (or rather two names) in the fields of adventure, historical, western, sea, and suspense stories.

THIS WORLD IS TABOO

1

The little Med Ship came out of overdrive and the stars were strange and the Milky Way seemed unfamiliar. Which, of course, was because the Milky Way and the local Cepheid marker-stars were seen from an unaccustomed angle and a not-yet-commonplace pattern of varying magnitudes.

But Calhoun grunted in satisfaction. There was a banded sun off to port, which was good. A breakout at no more than sixty light-hours from one's destination wasn't bad, in a strange sector of the galaxy and after three light-years of journeying blind.

"Arise and shine, Murgatroyd," said Calhoun. "Comb your whiskers. Get set to astonish the natives!"

A sleepy, small, shrill voice said: "*Chee!*"

Murgatroyd the *tormal* came crawling out of the small cubbyhole which was his own. He blinked at Calhoun.

"We're due to land shortly," Calhoun observed. "You will impress the local inhabitants. I will get unpopular. According to the records, there's been no Med Ship inspection here for twelve standard years. And that was practically no inspection, to judge by the report."

Murgatroyd said: "*Chee-chee!*"

He began to make his toilet, first licking his right-hand whiskers and then his left. Then he stood up and shook himself and looked interestedly at Calhoun. *Tormals* are companionable small animals. They are charmed when somebody speaks to them. They find great, deep satisfaction in imitating the actions of humans, as parrots and mynahs and parakeets imitate human

speech. But *tormals* have certain valuable, genetically transmitted talents which make them much more valuable than mere companions or pets.

Calhoun got a light-reading for the banded sun. It could hardly be an accurate measure of distance, but it was a guide.

"Hold on to something, Murgatroyd!" he said.

Murgatroyd watched. He saw Calhoun make certain gestures which presaged discomfort. He popped back into his cubbyhole. Calhoun threw the overdrive switch and the Med Ship flicked back into that questionable state of being in which velocities of hundreds of times that of light are possible. The sensation of going into overdrive was unpleasant. A moment later, the sensation of coming out was no less so. Calhoun had experienced it often enough, and still didn't like it.

The sun Weald burned huge and terrible in space. It was close, now. Its disk covered half a degree of arc.

"Very neat," observed Calhoun. "Weald Three is our port, Murgatroyd. The plane of the ecliptic would be ... Hm...."

He swung the outside electron telescope, picked up a nearby bright object, enlarged its image to show details, and checked it against the local star-pilot. He calculated a moment. The distance was too short for even the briefest of overdrive hops, but it would take time to get there on solar-system drive.

He thumbed down the communicator button and spoke into a microphone.

"Med Ship *Aesclipus Twenty* reporting arrival and asking coordinates for landing," he said matter-of-factly. "Purpose of landing is planetary health inspection. Our mass is fifty tons, standard. We should arrive at a landing position in something under four hours. Repeat. Med Ship *Aesclipus Twenty*...."

He finished the regular second transmission and made coffee for himself while he waited for an answer. Murgatroyd came out for a cup of coffee for himself. Murgatroyd adored coffee. In minutes he held a tiny cup in a furry small paw and sipped gingerly at the hot liquid.

A voice came out of the communicator:

"*Aesclipus Twenty*, repeat your identification."

Calhoun went to the control board.

"*Aesclipus Twenty*," he said patiently, "is a Med Ship, sent by the Interstellar Medical Service to make a planetary health inspection on Weald. Check with your public health authorities. This is the first Med Ship visit in twelve standard years, I believe—which is inexcusable. But your health authorities will know all about it. Check with them."

The voice said truculently:

"What was your last port?"

Calhoun named it. This was not his home sector, but Sector Twelve had gotten into a very bad situation. Some of its planets had gone unvisited for as long as twenty years, and twelve between inspections was almost commonplace. Other sectors had been called on to help it catch up.

Calhoun was one of the loaned Med Ship men, and because of the emergency he'd been given a list of half a dozen planets to be inspected one after another, instead of reporting back to sector headquarters after each visit. He'd had minor troubles before with landing-grid operators in Sector Twelve.

So he was very patient. He named the planet last inspected, the one from which he'd set out for Weald Three. The voice from the communicator said sharply:

"What port before that?"

Calhoun named the one before the last.

"Don't drive any closer," said the voice harshly, "or you'll be destroyed!"

Calhoun said coldly, "Listen, my fine feathered friend! I'm from the Interstellar Medical Service. You get in touch with planetary health services immediately! Remind them of the Interstellar Medical Inspection Agreement, signed on Tralee two hundred and forty standard years ago. Remind them that if they do not cooperate in medical inspection that I can put your planet under quarantine and your space commerce will be cut off like that!

"No ship will be cleared for Weald from any other planet in the galaxy until there has been a health inspection! Things have pretty well gone to pot so far as the Med Service in this sector is concerned, but it's being straightened up. I'm helping straighten it! I give you twenty minutes to clear this! Then I am

coming in, and if I'm not landed a quarantine goes on! Tell your health authorities that!"

Silence. Calhoun clicked off and poured himself another cup of coffee. Murgatroyd held out his cup for a refill. Calhoun gave it to him.

"I hate to put on an official hat, Murgatroyd," he said, annoyed, "but there are some people who demand it. The rule is, never get official if you can help it, but when you must, out-official the official who's officialing you."

Murgatroyd said "*Chee!*" and sipped at his cup.

Calhoun checked the course of the Med Ship. It bore on through space. There were tiny noises from the communicator. There were whisperings and rustlings and the occasional strange and sometimes beautiful musical notes whose origin is yet obscure, but which, since they are carried by electromagnetic radiation of wildly varying wave lengths, are not likely to be the fabled music of the spheres.

In fifteen minutes a different voice came from the speaker.

"Med Ship *Aesclipus!* Med Ship *Aesclipus!*"

Calhoun answered and the voice said anxiously:

"Sorry about the challenge, but we have the blueskin problem always with us. We have to be extremely careful! Will you come in, please?"

"I'm on my way," said Calhoun.

"The planetary health authorities," said the voice, more anxiously still, "are very anxious to be cooperative. We need Med Service help! We lose a lot of sleep over the blueskin! Could you tell us the name of the last Med Ship to land here, and its inspector, and when that inspection was made? We want to look up the record of the event to be able to assist you in every possible way."

"He's lying," Calhoun told Murgatroyd, "but he's more scared than hostile."

He picked up the order folio on Weald Three. He gave the information about the last Med Ship visit.

"What?" he asked, "is a blueskin?"

He'd read the folio on Weald, of course, but as the ship swam onward through emptiness he went through it again. The last medical inspection had been

only perfunctory. Twelve years earlier—instead of three—a Med Ship had landed on Weald. There had been official conferences with health officials. There was a report on the birth rate, the death rate, the anomaly rate, and a breakdown of all reported communicable diseases. But that was all. There were no special comments and no overall picture.

Presently Calhoun found the word in a Sector dictionary, where words of only local usage were to be found:

"Blueskin: Colloquial term for a person recovered from a plague which left large patches of blue pigment irregularly distributed over the body. Especially, inhabitants of Dara. The condition is said to be caused by a chronic, nonfatal form of Dara plague and has been said to be noninfectious, though this is not certain. The etiology of Dara plague has not been worked out. The blueskin condition is hereditary but not a genetic modification, as markings appear in non-Mendelian distributions."

Calhoun puzzled over it. Nobody could have read the entire Sector directory, even with unlimited leisure during travel between solar systems. Calhoun hadn't tried. But now he went laboriously through indices and cross-references while the ship continued to travel onward.

He found no other reference to blueskins. He looked up Dara. It was listed as an inhabited planet, some four hundred years colonized, with a landing-grid and, at the time the main notice was written out, a flourishing interstellar commerce. But there was a memo, evidently added to the entry in some change of editions: *"Since plague, special license from Med Service is required for landing."*

That was all. Absolutely all.

The communicator said suavely:

"Med Ship *Aesclipus Twenty!* Come in on vision, please!"

Calhoun went to the control board and threw on vision.

"Well, what now?" he demanded.

His screen lighted. A bland face looked out at him.

"We have—ah—verified your statements," said the third voice from Weald.

"Just one more item. Are you alone in your ship?"

"Of course," said Calhoun, frowning.

"Quite alone?" insisted the voice.

"Obviously!" said Calhoun.

"No other living creature?" insisted the voice again. "Of—oh!" said Calhoun, annoyed. He called over his shoulder. "Murgatroyd! Come here!"

Murgatroyd hopped to his lap and gazed interestedly at the screen. The bland face changed remarkably. The voice changed even more.

"Very good!" it said. "Very, very good! Blueskins do not have *tormals*! You are Med Service! By all means come in! Your coordinates will be...."

Calhoun wrote them down. He clicked off the communicator again and growled to Murgatroyd, "So I might have been a blueskin, eh? And you're my passport, because only Med Ships have members of your tribe aboard! What the hell's the matter, Murgatroyd? They act like they think somebody's trying to get down on their planet with a load of plague germs!"

He grumbled to himself for minutes. The life of a Med Ship man is not exactly a sinecure, at best. It means long periods in empty space in overdrive, which is absolute and deadly tedium. Then two or three days aground, checking official documents and statistics, and asking questions to see how many of the newest medical techniques have reached this planet or that, and the supplying of information about such as have not arrived.

Then the lifting out to space for long periods of tedium, to repeat the process somewhere else. Med Ships carry only one man because two could not stand the close contact without quarreling with each other. But Med Ships do carry *tormals*, like Murgatroyd, and a *tormal* and a man can get along indefinitely, like a man and a dog. It is a highly unequal friendship, but it seems to be satisfactory to both.

Calhoun was very much annoyed with the way the Med Service had been operated in Sector Twelve. He was one of many men at work to correct the results of incompetence in directing Med Service in this sector. But it is always disheartening to have to labor at making up for somebody else's blundering, when there is so much new work that needs to be done.

The condition shown by the landing-grid suspicions was a case in point. Blueskins were people who inherited a splotchy skin pigmentation from other people who'd survived a plague. Weald plainly maintained a one-planet quarantine against them. But a quarantine is normally an emergency measure. The Med Service should have taken over, wiped out the need for a quarantine, and then lifted it. It hadn't been done.

Calhoun fumed to himself.

The world of Weald Three grew brighter and brighter and became a disk. The disk had icecaps and a reasonable proportion of land and water surface. The ship decelerated, voices notifying observation from the surface, and the little ship came to a stop some five planetary diameters out from solidity. The landing field's force-field locked on to it, and its descent began.

The business of landing was all very familiar, from the blue rim which appeared at the limb of the planet from one diameter out, to the singular flowing-apart of the surface features as the ship sank still lower. There was the circular landing-grid, rearing skyward for nearly a mile. It could let down interstellar liners from emptiness and lift them out to emptiness again, with great convenience and economy for everyone.

It landed the Med Ship in its center, and there were officials to greet Calhoun, and he knew in advance the routine part of his visit. There would be an interview with the planet's chief executive, by whatever title he was called. There would be a banquet. Murgatroyd would be petted by everybody. There would be painful efforts to impress Calhoun with the splendid conduct of public health matters on Weald. He would be told much scandal.

He might find one man, somewhere, who passionately labored to advance the welfare of his fellow humans by finding out how to keep them well or, failing that, how to make them well when they got sick. And in two days, or three, Calhoun would be escorted back to the landing-grid, and lifted out to space, and he'd spend long empty days in overdrive and land somewhere else to do the whole thing all over again.

It all happened exactly as he expected, with one exception. Every human being he met on Weald wanted to talk about blueskins. Blueskins and the idea of blueskins obsessed everyone. Calhoun listened without asking questions until he had the picture of what blueskins meant to the people who

talked of them. Then he knew there would be no use asking questions at random.

Nobody mentioned ever having seen a blueskin. Nobody mentioned a specific event in which a blueskin had at any named time taken part. But everybody was afraid of blueskins. It was a patterned, an inculcated, a stage-directed fixed idea. And it found expression in shocked references to the vileness, the depravity, the monstrosity of the blueskin inhabitants of Dara, from whom Weald must at all costs be protected.

It did not make sense. So Calhoun listened politely until he found an undistinguished medical man who wanted some special information about gene selection as practised halfway across the galaxy. He invited that man to the Med Ship, where he supplied the information not hitherto available. He saw his guest's eyes shine a little with that joyous awe a man feels when he finds out something he has wanted long and badly to know.

"Now," said Calhoun, "tell me something? Why does everybody on this planet hate the inhabitants of Dara? It's light-years away. Nobody claims to have suffered in person from them. Why make a point of hating them?"

The Wealdian doctor grimaced.

"They've blue patches on their skins. They're different from us. So they can be pictured as a danger and our political parties can make an election issue out of competing for the privilege of defending us from them. They had a plague on Dara, once. They're accused of still having it ready for export."

"Hm," said Calhoun. "The story is that they want to spread contagion here, eh? Doesn't anybody"—his tone was sardonic—"doesn't anybody urge that they be massacred as an act of piety?"

"Yes-s-s-s," admitted the doctor reluctantly. "It's mentioned in political speeches."

"But how's it rationalized?" demanded Calhoun. "What's the argument to make pigment-patches involve moral and physical degradation, as I'm assured is the case?"

"In the public schools," said the doctor, "the children are taught that blueskins are now carriers of the disease they survived—three generations ago! That they hate everybody who isn't a blueskin. That they are constantly scheming

to introduce their plague here so most of us will die and the rest will become blueskins. That's beyond rationalizing. It can't be true, but it's not safe to doubt it."

"Bad business," said Calhoun coldly. "That sort of thing usually costs lives in the end. It could lead to massacre!"

"Perhaps it has, in a way," said the doctor unhappily. "One doesn't like to think about it." He paused. "Twenty years ago there was a famine on Dara. There were crop failures. The situation must have been very bad: They built a spaceship.

"They've no use for such things normally, because no nearby planet will deal with them or let them land. But they built a spaceship and came here. They went in orbit around Weald. They asked to trade for shiploads of food. They offered any price in heavy metals—gold, platinum, irridium, and so on. They talked from orbit by vision communicators. They could be seen to be blueskins. You can guess what happened!"

"Tell me," said Calhoun.

"We armed ships in a hurry," admitted the doctor. "We chased their spaceship back to Dara. We hung in space off the planet. We told them we'd blast their world from pole to pole if they ever dared take to space again. We made them destroy their one ship, and we watched on visionscreens as it was done."

"But you gave them food?"

"No," said the doctor ashamedly. "They were blueskins."

"How bad was the famine?"

"Who knows? Any number may have starved! And we kept a squadron of armed ships in their skies for years—to keep them from spreading the plague, we said. And some of us believed it!"

The doctor's tone was purest irony.

"Lately," he said, "there's been a move for economy in our government. Simultaneously, we began to have a series of overabundant crops. The government had to buy the excess grain to keep the price up. Retired patrol ships, built to watch over Dara, were available for storage space. We filled them up with grain and sent them out into orbit. They're there now, hundreds

of thousands or millions of tons of grain!"

"And Dara?"

The doctor shrugged. He stood up.

"Our hatred of Dara," he said, again ironically, "has produced one thing. Roughly halfway between here and Dara there's a two-planet solar system, Orede. There's a usable planet there. It was proposed to build an outpost of Weald there, against blueskins. Cattle were landed to run wild and multiply and make a reason for colonists to settle there.

"They did, but nobody wants to move near to blueskins! So Orede stayed uninhabited until a hunting party, shooting wild cattle, found an outcropping of heavy-metal ore. So now there's a mine there. And that's all. A few hundred men work the mine at fabulous wages. You may be asked to check on their health. But not Dara's!"

"I see," said Calhoun, frowning.

The doctor moved toward the Med Ship's exit port.

"I answered your questions," he said grimly. "But if I talked to anyone else as I've done to you, I'd be lucky only to be driven into exile!"

"I shan't give you away," said Calhoun. He did not smile.

When the doctor had gone, Calhoun said deliberately, "Murgatroyd, you should be grateful that you're a *tormal* and not a man. There's nothing about being a *tormal* to make you ashamed!"

Then he grimly changed his garments for the full-dress uniform of the Med Service. There was to be a banquet at which he would sit next to the planet's chief executive and hear innumerable speeches about the splendor of Weald. Calhoun had his own, strictly Med Service opinion of the planet's latest and most boasted-of achievement. It was a domed city in the polar regions, where nobody ever had to go outdoors.

He was less than professionally enthusiastic about the moving streets, and much less than approving of the dream broadcasts which supplied hypnotic, sleep-inducing rhythms to anybody who chose to listen to them. The price was that while asleep one would hear high praise of commercial products,

and might believe them when awake.

But it was not Calhoun's function to criticize when it could be avoided. Med Service had been badly managed in Sector Twelve. So at the banquet Calhoun made a brief and diplomatic address in which he temperately praised what could be praised, and did not mention anything else.

The chief executive followed him. As head of the government he paid some tribute to the Med Service. But then he reminded his hearers proudly of the high culture, splendid health, and remarkable prosperity of the planet since his political party took office. This, he said, despite the need to be perpetually on guard against the greatest and most immediate danger to which any world in all the galaxy was exposed.

He referred to the blueskins, of course. He did not need to tell the people of Weald what vigilance, what constant watchfulness was necessary against that race of deprived and malevolent deviants from the norm of humanity. But Weald, he said with emotion, held aloft the torch of all that humanity held most dear, and defended not alone the lives of its people against blueskin contagion, but their noble heritage of ideals against blueskin pollution.

When he sat down, Calhoun said very politely, "It looks as if some day it should be practical politics to urge the massacre of all blueskins. Have you thought of that?"

The chief executive said comfortably, "The idea's been proposed. It's good politics to urge it, but it would be foolish to carry it out. People vote against blueskins. Wipe them out, and where'd you be?"

Calhoun ground his teeth—quietly.

There were more speeches. Then a messenger, white-faced, arrived with a written note for the chief executive. He read it and passed it to Calhoun. It was from the Ministry of Health. The spaceport reported that a ship had just broken out from overdrive within the Wealdian solar system. Its tape-transmitter had automatically signaled its arrival from the mining planet Orede.

But, having sent off its automatic signal, the ship lay dead in space. It did not drive toward Weald. It did not respond to signals. It drifted like a derelict upon no course at all. It seemed ominous, and since it came from Orede, the

planet nearest to Dara of the blueskins, the health ministry informed the planet's chief executive.

"It'll be blueskins," said that astute person firmly. "They're next door to Orede. That's who's done this. It wouldn't surprise me if they'd seeded Orede with their plague, and this ship came from there to give us warning!"

"There's no evidence for anything of the sort," protested Calhoun. "A ship simply came out of overdrive and didn't signal further. That's all!"

"We'll see," said the chief executive ominously. "We'll go to the spaceport. There we'll get the news as it comes in, and can frame orders on the latest information."

He took Calhoun by the arm. Calhoun said sharply, "Murgatroyd!"

During the banquet, Murgatroyd had been visiting with the wives of the higher-up officials. They had enough of their husbands normally, without listening to their official speeches. Murgatroyd was brought, his small paunch distended with cakes and coffee and such delicacies as he'd been plied with. He was half comatose from overfeeding and overpetting, but he was glad to see Calhoun.

Calhoun held the little creature in his arms as the official groundcar raced through traffic with screaming sirens claiming the right of way. It reached the spaceport, where enormous metal girders formed a monster frame of metal lace against a star-filled sky. The chief executive strode magnificently into the spaceport offices. There was no news; the situation remained unchanged.

A ship from Orede had come out of overdrive and lay dead in emptiness. It did not answer calls. It did not move in space. It floated eerily in no orbit, going nowhere, doing nothing. And panic was the consequence.

It seemed to Calhoun that the official handling of the matter accounted for the terror that he could feel building up. The unexplained bit of news was on the air all over the planet Weald. There was nobody awake of all the world's population who did not believe that there was a new danger in the sky. Nobody doubted that it came from blueskins. The treatment of the news was precisely calculated to keep alive the hatred of Weald for the inhabitants of the world Dara.

Calhoun put Murgatroyd into the Med Ship and went back to the spaceport

office. A small spaceboat, designed to inspect the circling grain ships from time to time, was already aloft. The landing-grid had thrust it swiftly out most of the way. Now it droned and drove on sturdily toward the enigmatic ship.

Calhoun took no part in the agitated conferences among the officials and news reporters at the spaceport. But he listened to the talk about him. As the investigating small ship drew nearer to the deathly-still cargo vessel, the guesses about the meaning of its breakout and following silence grew more and more wild.

But, singularly, there was no single suggestion that the mystery might not be the work of blueskins. Blueskins were scape-goats for all the fears and all the uneasiness a perhaps over-civilized world developed.

Presently the investigating spaceboat reached the mystery ship and circled it, beaming queries. No answer. It reported the cargo ship dark. No lights anywhere on or in it. There were no induction-surges from even pulsing, idling engines. Delicately, the messenger craft maneuvered until it touched the silent vessel. It reported that microphones detected no motion whatever inside.

"Let a volunteer go aboard," commanded the chief executive. "Let him report what he finds."

A pause. Then the solemn announcement of an intrepid volunteer's name, from far, far away. Calhoun listened, frowning darkly. This pompous heroism wouldn't be noticed in the Med Service. It would be routine behavior.

Suspenseful, second-by-second reports. The volunteer had rocketed himself across the emptiness between the two again separated ships. He had opened the airlock from outside. He'd gone in. He'd closed the outer airlock door. He'd opened the inner. He reported—

The relayed report was almost incoherent, what with horror and incredulity and the feeling of doom that came upon the volunteer. The ship was a bulk-cargo ore-carrier, designed to run between Orede and Weald with cargoes of heavy-metal ores and a crew of no more than five men. There was no cargo in her holds now, though.

Instead, there were men. They packed the ship. They filled the corridors. They had crawled into every space where a man could find room to push

himself. There were hundreds of them. It was insanity. And it had been greater insanity still for the ship to have taken off with so preposterous a load of living creatures.

But they weren't living any longer. The air apparatus had been designed for a crew of five. It would purify the air for possibly twenty or more. But there were hundreds of men in hiding as well as in plain view in the cargo ship from Orede. There were many, many times more than her air apparatus and reserve tanks could possibly have taken care of. They couldn't even have been fed during the journey from Orede to Weald.

But they hadn't starved. Air-scarcity killed them before the ship came out of overdrive.

A remarkable thing was that there was no written message in the ship's log which referred to its takeoff. There was no memorandum of the taking on of such an impossible number of passengers.

"The blueskins did it," said the chief executive of Weald. He was pale. All about Calhoun men looked sick and shocked and terrified. "It was the blueskins! We'll have to teach them a lesson!" Then he turned to Calhoun. "The volunteer who went on that ship—he'll have to stay there, won't he? He can't be brought back to Weald without bringing contagion."

Calhoun raged at him.

2

There was a certain coldness in the manner of those at the Weald spaceport when the Med Ship left next morning. Calhoun was not popular because Weald was scared. It had been conditioned to scare easily, where blueskins might be involved. Its children were trained to react explosively when the word *blueskin* was uttered in their hearing, and its adults tended to say it when anything causing uneasiness entered their minds. So a planet-wide habit of irrational response had formed and was not seen to be irrational because almost everybody had it.

The volunteer who'd discovered the tragedy on the ship from Orede was safe, though. He'd made a completely conscientious survey of the ship he'd volunteered to enter and examine. For his courage, he'd have been doomed but for Calhoun.

The reaction of his fellow citizens was that by entering the ship he might have become contaminated by blueskin infectious material of the plague still existed, and *if* the men in the ship had caught it (but they certainly hadn't died of it), and *if* there had been blueskins on Orede to communicate it (for which there was no evidence), and *if* blueskins were responsible for the tragedy. Which was at the moment pure supposition. But Weald feared he might bring death back to Weald if he were allowed to return.

Calhoun saved his life. He ordered that the guardship admit him to its airlock, which then was to be filled with steam and chlorine. The combination would sterilize and even partly eat away his spacesuit, after which the chlorine and steam should be bled out to space, and air from the ship let into the lock.

If he stripped off the spacesuit without touching its outer surface, and reentered the investigating ship while the suit was flung outside by a man in another spacesuit, handling it with a pole he'd fling after it, there could be no possible contamination brought back.

Calhoun was quite right, but Weald in general considered that he'd persuaded the government to take an unreasonable risk.

There were other reasons for disapproving of him. Calhoun had been unpleasantly frank. The coming of the death-ship stirred to frenzy those people who believed that all blueskins should be exterminated as a pious act. They'd appeared on every vision screen, citing not only the ship from Orede but other incidents which they interpreted as crimes against Weald.

They demanded that all Wealdian atomic reactors be modified to turn out fusion-bomb materials while a space fleet was made ready for an anti-blueskin crusade. They confidently demanded such a rain of fusion bombs on Dara that no blueskin, no animal, no shred of vegetation, no fish in the deepest ocean, not even a living virus particle of the blueskin plague could remain alive on the blueskin world.

One of these vehement orators even asserted that Calhoun agreed that no other course was possible, speaking for the Interstellar Medical Service. And Calhoun furiously demanded a chance to deny it by broadcast, and he made a bitter and indiscreet speech from which a planet-wide audience inferred that he thought them fools.

He did.

So he was definitely unpopular when his ship lifted from Weald. He'd curtly given his destination as Orede, from which the death-ship had come. The landing-grid locked on, raised the small spacecraft until Weald was a great shining ball below it, and then somehow scornfully cast him off. The Med Ship was free, in clear space where there was not enough of a gravitational field to hinder overdrive.

He aimed for his destination, his face very grim. He said savagely, "Get set, Murgatroyd! Overdrive coming!"

He thumbed down the overdrive button. The universe of stars went out, while everything living in the ship felt the customary sensations of dizziness, of nausea, and of a spiraling fall to nothingness. Then there was silence.

The Med Ship actually moved at a rate which was a preposterous number of times the speed of light, but it felt absolutely solid, absolutely firm and fixed. A ship in overdrive feels exactly as if it were buried deep in the core of a planet. There is no vibration. There is no sign of anything but solidity and, if one looks out a port, there is only utter blackness plus an absence of sound fit