



COLONY

ADAPTED FROM A SHORT STORY BY
PHILIP K. DICK

CAST

HALL	<i>Scientist on Planet Blue Base</i>
FRIENDLY	<i>Soldier on Planet Blue Base</i>
MORRISON	<i>Commander of Planet Blue Base</i>
WOODS	<i>Vice-Commander on Base</i>
TAYLOR	<i>Soldier on Planet Blue Base</i>
GUARD	<i>Soldier on Planet Blue Base</i>
ROBOT	<i>Robotic Voice</i>
DODDS	<i>Soldier on Planet Blue Base</i>
FULTON	<i>Soldier on Planet Blue Base</i>
TENNER	<i>Soldier on Planet Blue Base</i>
UNGER	<i>Scientist</i>
DAVIS	<i>Captain of a Cruiser</i>

NARRATOR: Major Lawrence Hall bent over the binocular microscope, correcting the fine adjustment.

HALL: Interesting.

NARRATOR: Lieutenant Friendly sat down on the edge of the lab table.

FRIENDLY: Isn't it? Three weeks on this planet and we haven't found a single harmful lifeform. What kind of place is this? No disease germs, no lice, no flies, no rats...

NARRATOR: Hall straightened up.

HALL: It's quite a place. I was sure this specimen would show something—some virus or bacteria.

FRIENDLY: But the whole planet's harmless. You know, I'm wondering whether this is the Garden of Eden our ancestors fell out of.

HALL: Or were pushed out of.

NARRATOR: Hall wandered over to the window of the lab and contemplated the scene beyond. He had to admit it was an attractive sight—rolling forests and hills, green slopes alive with flowers and endless vines, waterfalls and hanging moss, fruit trees, acres of flowers, lakes. Every effort had been made to preserve intact the surface of Planet Blue—as it had been designated by the original scout ship, six months earlier.

HALL: *(sigh)* It's quite a place. I wouldn't mind coming back here again sometime.

FRIENDLY: Makes Terra seem a little bare. It's all so beautiful—and pure.

HALL: Don't worry. The colonists will be along soon enough—to ruin it. I'll try a few

more cultures. Maybe I'll find a lethal germ yet.

NARRATOR: Hall went back to the microscope. Friendly hopped off the table.

FRIENDLY: Keep trying. I'll see you later and find out if you've had any luck. There's a big conference going on with the commander. They're almost ready to give the go-ahead to the Emigration Agency for the first load of colonists to be sent out.

HALL: *(sigh)* Picnickers!

FRIENDLY: Afraid so. See you later. I'm off to the meeting. Keep searching!

NARRATOR: The door closed, and Hall was alone in the lab. He bent down and removed the slide from the stage of the microscope, selected a new one and held it up to the light to read the marking.

HALL: Colonists. *(sigh)* All of them ready to come in and cut down the trees, tear up the flowers. There's not even the common-cold virus around to keep them from—
(wheezing)

NARRATOR: He stopped, his voice choked off. It was choked off because the two eyepieces of the microscope had twisted suddenly around his windpipe and were trying to strangle him.

HALL: *(strangling noise)*

NARRATOR: Hall tore at them, but they dug relentlessly into his throat, steel prongs closing like the claws of a trap.

HALL: Argh!

NARRATOR: Throwing the microscope onto the floor, Hall leaped up. *(scuttling sound)* The microscope crawled quickly toward him, hooking around his leg. He kicked it loose with his other foot, and drew his blast pistol. The microscope scuttled away, rolling on its coarse adjustments. Hall fired. It disappeared in a cloud of metallic particles. *(Shazam!)*

HALL: Good God! What was that?

NARRATOR: Meanwhile, the council room was packed solid. Every officer of the Planet Blue unit was there. Commander Stella Morrison tapped on the big control map with the end of a slim plastic pointer.

MORRISON: This long flat area is ideal for the actual city. It's close to water, and weather conditions vary sufficiently to give the settlers something to talk about. There are large deposits of various minerals. The colonists can set up their own factories.

NARRATOR: She looked around the room at the silent men.

MORRISON: Let's be realistic. Some of you have been thinking we shouldn't send the okay to the Emigration Authority, but keep the planet our own selves, to come back to. I'd like that as much as any of the rest of you, but we'd just get into a lot of trouble. It's not *our* planet. We're here to do a certain job. When the job is done, we move along. And it is almost done. So let's forget it. The only thing left to do is flash the go-ahead signal and then begin packing our things. There's no reason why they can't start bringing in loads of settlers.

NARRATOR: (*booming of a door*) Heads turned toward the door. Major Hall had just burst in—gasping for breath. Commander Morrison frowned.

MORRISON: Major Hall, may I remind you that when the council is in session no one is permitted to interrupt!

NARRATOR: Hall swayed back and forth, supporting himself by holding on to the door knob. His glassy eyes picked out Lieutenant Friendly, sitting halfway across the room.

HALL: (*hoarsely*) Come here!

FRIENDLY: Me?

NARRATOR: Friendly sank farther down in his chair.

MORRISON: Major, what is the meaning of this? Are you drunk? Or just insane?

NARRATOR: Then they all saw the blast gun in Hall's hand. Alarmed, Lieutenant Friendly got up and grabbed Hall's shoulder.

FRIENDLY: What is it? What's the matter?

HALL: Come to the lab.

FRIENDLY: Did you find something? What is it?

NARRATOR: Lieutenant Friendly studied his friend's rigid face.

HALL: Just come with me.

NARRATOR: Hall started down the corridor, Friendly following. Hall pushed the laboratory door open and stepped inside slowly.

FRIENDLY: What is it?

HALL: My microscope.

FRIENDLY: Your microscope? What about it? I don't see it.

HALL: It's gone.

FRIENDLY: Gone? Gone where?

HALL: I blasted it.

FRIENDLY: You blasted it? I don't get it. Why?

NARRATOR: Hall's mouth opened and closed, but no sound came out.

FRIENDLY: Are you all right?

NARRATOR: Friendly bent down and lifted a black plastic box from a shelf under the table.

FRIENDLY: Hey! Is this a joke?

HALL: A joke! How could this be a joke?

NARRATOR: Friendly removed Hall's microscope from the box.

FRIENDLY: What do you mean, you blasted it? Here it is—in its regular place. Now, tell me what's going on! You saw something on a slide? Some kind of bacteria? Lethal? Toxic?

NARRATOR: Hall approached the microscope slowly. It was his all right. There was the nick just above the fine adjustment knob, and one of the stage clips was slightly bent.

HALL: Five minutes ago this microscope tried to kill me! I know I blasted it out of existence.

FRIENDLY: You sure you don't need a psych test? You look post-trauma to me, or worse.

HALL: (*muttering*) Maybe you're right.

NARRATOR: Twenty minutes later, Hall was seated in front of the robot psyche tester. The tester whirred, and at last its color-code lights changed from red to green.

HALL: Well?

ROBOT: Severe disturbance. Instability ratio up above ten.

HALL: That's over danger level?

ROBOT: Yes. Eight is danger. Ten is unusual, especially for a person of your index. You usually show about a four.

NARRATOR: Hall nodded wearily.

HALL: I know.

ROBOT: If you could give me more data—

NARRATOR: Hall clicked the tester off. He went back to his own quarters. His head whirled.

HALL: Am I out of my mind? I fired the blast gun at *something*.

NARRATOR: Afterward, Hall had tested the atmosphere in the lab, and there were metallic particles in suspension, especially near the place he had fired his blast gun at the microscope.

HALL: But how could a thing like that be? A microscope coming to life, trying to kill me! And how did it get back in the box? Friendly found it.

NARRATOR: Hall stripped off his uniform and entered the shower. While he ran warm water over his body, he meditated. The robot psyche tester had showed his mind was severely disturbed, but that could have been the result, rather than the cause, of the experience.

HALL: How can I expect anyone to believe a story like that—if I don't believe it?

NARRATOR: He shut off the water and reached out for one of the towels on the rack. The towel wrapped around his wrist, yanking him against the wall.

HALL: (*cry of surprise*) Ah!

NARRATOR: Rough cloth pressed over his mouth and nose. He fought wildly, pulling away. (*sounds of a struggle*) All at once the towel let go. He fell, sliding to the floor, his head striking the wall. Stars shot around him then violent pain. Sitting in a pool of warm water, Hall looked up at the towel rack.

HALL: What the—?

NARRATOR: The towel was motionless now, like the others with it. Three towels in a row, all exactly alike, all unmoving.

HALL: Did I just dream that?

NARRATOR: He got shakily to his feet, rubbing his head. Carefully avoiding the towel rack, he edged out of the shower and into his room. He pulled a new towel from the dispenser in a gingerly manner. It seemed normal. He dried himself and began to put his clothes on.

HALL: Maybe I am crazy.

NARRATOR: Just then his belt got him around the waist and tried to crush him.

HALL: *(cry of surprise)* Argh!

NARRATOR: It was strong—it had reinforced metal links to hold his leggings and his gun. He and the belt rolled silently on the floor, struggling for control. The belt was like a furious metal snake, whipping and lashing at him. *(sounds of a struggle)*

HALL: *(grunting and struggling)*

NARRATOR: At last he managed to get his hand around his blaster. At once the belt let go. *(Shazam!)* He blasted it out of existence and then threw himself down in a chair, gasping for breath.

HALL: What is going on?

NARRATOR: It was then that the arms of the chair closed around him. But this time the blaster was ready.

HALL: Not again!

(six laser blasts: Shazam! Shazam! Shazam! Shazam! Shazam! Shazam!)

NARRATOR: He had to fire six times before the chair fell limp, and he was able to get up again. He stood half dressed in the middle of the room, his chest rising and falling.

HALL: It isn't possible! I must be out of my mind.

NARRATOR: Finally he got his leggings and boots on. He went outside into the empty corridor. Entering the lift, he ascended to the top floor.

Commander Morrison looked up from her desk as Hall stepped through the robot clearing screen. It pinged. *(pinging of a door)*

MORRISON: You're armed!

NARRATOR: Hall looked down at the blaster in his hand. He put it down on the desk.

HALL: Sorry.

MORRISON: What do you want? What's the matter with you? I have a report from the testing machine. We've known each other for a long time, Lawrence. What's happening to you?

NARRATOR: Hall took a deep breath.

HALL: Stella, earlier today, my microscope tried to—strangle me.

NARRATOR: Her blue eyes widened.

MORRISON: What?

HALL: Then, when I was getting out of the shower, a bath towel tried to smother me. I got by it, but while I was dressing, my belt—

NARRATOR: He stopped. The Commander had got to her feet.

MORRISON: Guards!

HALL: Wait, Stella. Listen to me. This is serious. There's nothing wrong. Four times things have tried to kill me. Ordinary objects suddenly turned lethal. Maybe it's what we've been looking for. Maybe this is—

MORRISON: Your microscope tried to kill you?

HALL: It came alive. Its stem got me around the windpipe.

MORRISON: Did anyone see this happen besides you?

HALL: No.

MORRISON: What did you do?

HALL: I blasted it.

MORRISON: Are there any remains?

HALL: No. As a matter of fact, the microscope seems to be all right, again. The way it was before. Back in its box.

MORRISON: I see.

NARRATOR: The Commander nodded to the two guards who had answered her call.

MORRISON: Take Major Hall down to Captain Taylor and have him confined until he can be sent back to Terra for examination.

NARRATOR: She watched calmly as the two guards took hold of Hall's arms with magnetic grapples.

MORRISON: Sorry, Major. Unless you can prove any of your story, we've got to assume it's a psychotic episode on your part. And the planet isn't well enough policed for us to allow a psychotic to run loose. You could do a lot of damage.

NARRATOR: The guards moved Hall toward the door. He went unprotestingly. His head rang, rang and echoed.

HALL: Maybe she is right. Maybe I am out of my mind.

NARRATOR: They came to Captain Taylor's offices. One of the guards rang the buzzer. The robot door answered.

ROBOT: Who is it?

GUARD: Commander Morrison has orders that this man is to be put under the Captain's care.

ROBOT: The Captain is busy.

GUARD: This is an emergency.

ROBOT: You may enter.

NARRATOR: The robot conceded finally. The guard pushed the door open—and stopped. On the floor lay Captain Taylor, his face blue, his eyes gaping.

TAYLOR: (*gasping*) Wheeze.

NARRATOR: Only his head and feet were visible. A red-and-white rug was wrapped around him, squeezing, straining tighter and tighter.

HALL: Hurry! Grab it!

NARRATOR: Hall dropped to the floor and pulled at the rug. The three of them pulled together. The rug resisted. (*sounds of a struggle*)

TAYLOR: (*weakly*) Help!

HALL: We're trying!

NARRATOR: They tugged frantically. At last the rug came away in their hands. It flopped off rapidly toward the open door.

HALL: Don't just stand there! Blast it!

NARRATOR: One of the guards blasted it. (*Shazam!*) Hall ran to the vidscreen and shakily dialed the Commander's emergency number. Her face appeared on the screen.

HALL: Look! See?

NARRATOR: She stared past him to Taylor lying on the floor, the two guards kneeling beside him, their blasters still out.

MORRISON: What—what happened?

HALL: A rug attacked him.

NARRATOR: Hall grinned without amusement.

HALL: Now who's crazy?

MORRISON: We'll send a guard unit down. Right away. But how—

HALL: Tell them to have their blasters ready. And better make that a general alarm to *everyone*.

NARRATOR: An hour later, Hall and Taylor were standing before Commander Morrison's desk. They had placed four items upon it: a microscope, a towel, a metal belt, and a small red-and-white rug.

MORRISON: Major, are you sure—?

HALL: They're all right, *now*. That's the strangest part. This towel. A few hours ago it tried to kill me. I got away by blasting it to particles. But here it is, back again. The way it always was.

MORRISON: Harmless.

NARRATOR: Captain Taylor poked the red-and-white rug warily.

TAYLOR: That's my rug. I brought it from Terra. My wife gave it to me. I—I trusted it completely. (*pausing*) I mean, I trusted it as much as you can trust a rug. It did always look a little shifty.

HALL: We blasted the rug, too.

TAYLOR: Then what was it that attacked me—if it wasn't this rug?

HALL: It looked like this rug. And what attacked me looked like this towel.

NARRATOR: Commander Morrison held up the towel to the light.

MORRISON: It's just an ordinary towel! It couldn't have attacked you.

HALL: Of course not! We've put these objects through all the tests we can think of. They're just what they're supposed to be, all elements unchanged. Perfectly stable non-organic objects. It's impossible that *any* of these could have come to life and attacked us.

TAYLOR: But something did! Something attacked me. And it if wasn't this rug, what was it?

NARRATOR: Meanwhile, in another part of the base, Lieutenant Dodds was preparing to leave his quarters. He felt around on the dresser for his gloves. He was in a hurry. The whole unit had been called to emergency assembly.

DODDS: Where did I put those? (*pause*) What the—?

NARRATOR: For on the bed were *two* pair of identical gloves, side by side. Dodds frowned, scratching his head.

DODDS: Huh? How could that be? I only own one pair. Those must be somebody else's. Bob was over here last night playing cards. Maybe he left them.

NARRATOR: The vidscreen flashed again.

DOOR: All personnel, report at once! All personnel, report at once! Emergency assembly of all personnel.

DODDS: All right!

NARRATOR: Dodds grabbed up one of the pairs of gloves, sliding them onto his hands. As soon as they were in place, the gloves carried his hands down to his waist.

DODDS: (*in shock*) What's going on?

NARRATOR: The gloves clamped his fingers over the butt of his gun, lifting it from the holster. The gloves brought the blast gun up, pointing it at his chest. The fingers squeezed.

DODDS: Well, I'll be—

NARRATOR: (*Shazam!*) Half of Dodd's chest dissolved. What was left of him fell slowly to the floor, the mouth still open in amazement.

ROBOT: This is an emergency! This is an emergency!

NARRATOR: The sound of the emergency alarm filled the complex and even the courtyard outside. Corporal Tenner hurried across the ground toward the main building as soon as he heard. At the entrance to the building he stopped to take off his metal-cleated boots.

TENNER: Huh?

NARRATOR: By the door were two safety mats instead of one. Well, it didn't matter. They were both the same. He stepped onto one of the mats and waited.

ROBOT: Hold still please. Decontaminating. Decontaminating.

NARRATOR: The surface of the mat sent a flow of high-frequency current through his

feet and legs, killing any spores or seeds that might have clung to him while he was outside.

ROBOT: (*ding*) Thank you.

NARRATOR: Tenner passed on into the building. A moment later Lieutenant Fulton hurried up to the door. He yanked off his hiking boots and stepped onto the first mat he saw.

FULTON: Hurry up! What's taking so long?

NARRATOR: As he looked down, the mat folded over his feet.

FULTON: Hey! Let go!

NARRATOR: He tried to pull his feet loose, but the mat refused to let go. Fulton became scared. He drew his gun, but he didn't care to fire at his own feet.

FULTON: Help! Help!

NARRATOR: Corporal Tenner opened the door from the inside.

TENNER: What's the matter, Lieutenant?

FULTON: (*frightened*) Get this darn thing off me!

TENNER: (*laugh*) Got your feet caught in the mat?

FULTON: It's no joke!

NARRATOR: Fulton's face went suddenly white.

FULTON: It's breaking my feet! It's— (*hellish scream*) Argh!

NARRATOR: Tenner grabbed frantically at the mat. Fulton fell, rolling and twisting, still screaming.

FULTON: (*screaming at the top of his lungs*)

NARRATOR: At last the soldiers managed to get a corner of the mat loose from his feet. Fulton's feet were gone. Nothing but limp bone remained, already half dissolved.

Soon after these reports made their way to Commander Morrison. She called in all the witnesses.

MORRISON: So what do we know exactly?

HALL: We know it's a form of organic life.

MORRISON: Corporal Tenner, you saw two mats when you came into the building?

TENNER: Yes, Commander. Two. I stepped on—on one of them. And came in

MORRISON: Well, then you were lucky. You stepped on the right one.

HALL: We've got to be careful. We've got to watch for duplicates. Apparently *it*—whatever it is—imitates objects it finds. Like a chameleon. Camouflage.

MORRISON: Two.

NARRATOR: Commander Morrison looked suspiciously at the two vases of flowers, one at each end of her desk.

MORRISON: It's going to be hard to tell. Two towels, two vases, two chairs. There may be whole rows of things that are all right. All multiples legitimate except one.

HALL: That's the trouble. I didn't notice anything unusual in the lab. There's nothing odd about another microscope. It blended right in.

NARRATOR: The commander pointed to the identical vases of flowers.

MORRISON: How about those? Maybe one is—whatever they are.

HALL: Maybe. There's two of a lot of things. Natural pairs. Two boots. Clothing. Furniture. I didn't notice that extra chair in my room. Equipment. It'll be impossible to be sure.

NARRATOR: The vidscreen lit. Vice-Commander Woods's features formed upon it.

WOODS: Commander, another casualty.

MORRISON: Who is it this time?

WOODS: Lieutenant Dodds. He was almost completely dissolved. All that was left was a few buttons.

MORRISON: That makes three.

HALL: If it's organic, there ought to be some way we can destroy it. We've already blasted a few and apparently killed them. They *can* be hurt! But we don't know how many more there are. We've destroyed five or six. Maybe it's an infinitely divisible substance. Some kind of protoplasm.

MORRISON: And meanwhile—?

HALL: Meanwhile we're all at its mercy. Or *their* mercy. It's our lethal life form, all right. That explains why we found everything else harmless. Nothing could compete with a form like this.

FRIENDLY: There are plenty of lifeforms that mimic other things to catch their prey—things back on Terra like insects and plants—but there's never been anything like this. Nothing goes this far.

MORRISON: It can be killed, though. That means we have a chance.

HALL: If it can be found.

NARRATOR: Hall looked around the room. Two walking capes hung by the door.

HALL: Were there two of those there a moment before? Nevermind.

NARRATOR: He rubbed his forehead wearily.

HALL: We've got to try to find some sort of poison or corrosive agent—something that'll destroy them wholesale. We can't just sit and wait for them to attack us. We need something we can spray. That's the way we got the twisty slugs on Venus.

NARRATOR: The commander gazed past him, rigid. Hall turned to follow her gaze.

HALL: What is it?

MORRISON: I never noticed two briefcases in the corner over there. There was only one before—I think.

NARRATOR: She drew her blast gun and then shook her head in bewilderment.

MORRISON: How are we going to know? I want to blast everything in sight.

HALL: The worst thing we can do is panic.

FRIENDLY: Or sit here and do nothing—until we're picked off, one by one.

NARRATOR: Miles away from the complex, Captain Unger got the emergency call over his headphones.

ROBOT: All personnel, return to base. Return to base.

NARRATOR: Unger stopped work at once, gathered the specimens he had collected in his arms and hurried back toward his vehicle.

UNGER: Uh-oh. Emergency. I parked a ways over there, I think. *(pause)* Huh?

NARRATOR: He stopped, puzzled. There it was, the bright little cone-shaped car with its treads firmly planted in the soft soil, its door open.

UNGER: I guess it was closer than I remembered.

NARRATOR: Unger hurried up to it, carrying his specimens carefully. He opened the storage hatch in the back and lowered his armload. Then he went around to the front and slid in behind the controls. He turned the switch. But the motor did not come on. That was strange. While he was trying to figure it out, he noticed something that gave him a start.

UNGER: Huh? What's going on?

NARRATOR: A few hundred feet away, among the trees, was a second vehicle, just like the one he was in.

UNGER: I knew I parked it over there! Hey, wait. Someone else must have come along, and I got into their vehicle by mistake.

NARRATOR: Unger started to get out again. *(slimy sound)* But the door closed around him. The seat folded up over his head. The dashboard became plastic and oozed.

UNGER: *(screaming)* Ah!

NARRATOR: Unger gasped—he was suffocating. He struggled to get out, flailing and twisting. There was a wetness all around him—a bubbling, flowing wetness, warm like flesh.

UNGER: Glub. Glub. Glub.

NARRATOR: His head was covered. His body was covered. And then the pain began. He was being dissolved. All at once he realized what the liquid was. Acid. Digestive acid. He was in a stomach.

Back at the base, Commander Morrison was worried. She stood with Hall in his lab.

MORRISON: We've got to act! Reports just keep coming in! Lives are being lost!

HALL: At least now we know what we're up against. It's a form of protoplasm, with infinite versatility.

NARRATOR: He lifted the spray tank.

HALL: I think this will give us an idea of how many exist. This contains a compound of arsenic and hydrogen in gas form. Arsine.

MORRISON: What are you going to do with it?

HALL: Lock your helmet into place. I'm going to release this throughout the lab. I think there are a lot of them in here, more than anywhere else. This is where all samples and specimens were originally brought, where the first one of them was encountered. I think they came in with the samples, or as the samples, and then infiltrated through the rest of the buildings.

NARRATOR: The Commander locked her own helmet into place.

HALL: If they *are* infinitely divisible, then we're going to have to think twice about leaving here. It would be better to stay and get picked off one by one than to run the risk of carrying any of them back to Terra.

MORRISON: What are you trying to find out here?

HALL: I'm trying to find out what we're up against. Maybe there are only a few of them. Or maybe they're everywhere. Maybe half the things in this room are not what we think they are. It's bad when they attack us. It would be worse if they didn't.

MORRISON: How could that be worse?

HALL: Their mimicry is perfect. Of inorganic objects, at least. I looked through one of them when it was imitating my microscope. It enlarged, adjusted, reflected,

just like a regular microscope. It's a form of mimicry that surpasses anything we've ever imagined. It carries down below the surface, into the actual elements of the object imitated.

MORRISON: You mean one of them could slip back to Terra along with us? In the form of clothing or a piece of lab equipment?

HALL: Exactly. Here goes.

NARRATOR: He held the spray canister tightly against him, depressed the trigger, aimed the nozzle slowly around the lab. After a moment he let the trigger up again. (*hissing of arsine gas*) Nothing moved.

MORRISON: Nothing. Are you sure you that actually did anything? (*suddenly*) Wait! Look! Look!

NARRATOR: At the far end of the lab a slide cabinet wavered suddenly. (*oozing sound*) It oozed, buckling and pitching. It lost its shape completely—a homogeneous jellylike mass perched on top of the table. Abruptly, it flowed down the side of the table on to the floor, wobbling as it went.

MORRISON: Over there!

NARRATOR: A Bunsen burner melted and flowed along beside it. All around the room objects were in motion. A rack of test tubes, a shelf of chemicals settled down into blobs.

HALL: Look out!

NARRATOR: Hall pulled Morrison back as a huge bell jar dropped with a soggy splash in front of them. It was a single large cell, all right. He could dimly make out the

nucleus, the cell wall, the hard vacuoles suspended in the cytoplasm.

Half the equipment in the room was in motion. The lifeforms had imitated almost everything there was to imitate. For every microscope there was a mimic. For every tube and jar and bottle and flask...

Commander Morrison pulled her blaster out.

HALL: Don't fire! Arsine is flammable. Let's get out of here. We know what we wanted to know.

NARRATOR: They pushed the laboratory door open quickly and made their way out into the corridor. Hall slammed the door behind them, bolting it tightly.

MORRISON: It's bad, isn't it?

HALL: We haven't got a chance. The arsine disturbed them. Enough of it might even kill them. But we haven't got that much arsine. And, if we could flood the planet, we wouldn't be able to use our blasters.

MORRISON: What if we left the planet?

HALL: We can't take the chance of carrying them back to Terra.

MORRISON: But if we stay here we'll be absorbed, dissolved, one by one. *(pause)* I'm going to call the System Monitor. I'm going to get the unit off here, out of danger.

HALL: You'll run the risk of carrying one of them back to Terra?

MORRISON: Can they imitate us? Can they imitate living creatures?

HALL: Apparently not. They seem to be limited to inorganic objects.

NARRATOR: The Commander smiled grimly.

MORRISON: Then we'll go back without any inorganic material.

HALL: But even our clothes! They can imitate belts, gloves, boots—

MORRISON: We're not taking our clothes. We're going back without anything. And I mean without anything *at all*.

HALL: I see. Hmm. It might work. Can you persuade the personnel to—to leave all their things behind? Everything they own?

MORRISON: If it means their lives, I can *order* them to do it.

NARRATOR: Commander Morrison contacted her supervisors using the vidscreen. The nearest cruiser large enough to remove the remaining members of the unit was two hours' distance away. It was moving Terraside again.

DAVIS: Commander, what is going on down there?

NARRATOR: The heavy features of a Terran cruiser captain regarded them.

HALL: Uh. We'd rather not explain until we're aboard, if you don't mind.

DAVIS: And why the devil not?

HALL: Captain, you're going to think we're crazy enough as it is. We'll discuss

everything fully once we're aboard. *(pause)*
We're going to board your ship naked.

NARRATOR: The captain raised an eyebrow.

DAVIS: Naked?

MORRISON: That's right, sir.

DAVIS: I see.

NARRATOR: Though obviously he didn't.

DAVIS: Fine. We'll be there in two hours.
15:00 hours.

HALL: We'll be waiting for you. Don't let any of your men out. Open one lock for us. We'll board without any equipment. Just ourselves—nothing else. As soon as we're aboard, remove the ship at once.

MORRISON: Captain, would it be possible—um—for your men to—not look when we board?

DAVIS: We'll land by robot control. None of my men will be on deck. No one will see you.

MORRISON: Thank you.

DAVIS: Not at all. We'll see you in about two hours then, commander.

MORRISON: Okay. Let's get everyone out onto the field. They should remove their clothes here, I think, so there won't be any objects on the field to come in contact with the ship. *(pause)* They'll think we've gone mad.

HALL: Isn't it worth it to save our lives?

NARRATOR: Nearly two hours later, the time was drawing near. Major Hall found Lieutenant Friendly in his barracks.

HALL: C'mon. The ship will be here soon.

FRIENDLY: I won't do it. I'll stay here. It's too degrading.

HALL: It's 14:50. The ship will be here any minute. Get your clothes off and get out on the landing field.

FRIENDLY: Can't I take anything at *all*?

HALL: Nothing. Not even your blaster. Don't be such a baby! They'll give us clothes inside the ship. Come on! Your life depends on this. Everyone else is doing it.

NARRATOR: Friendly tugged at his shirt reluctantly.

FRIENDLY: Well, I guess I'm acting silly.

NARRATOR: Just then the vidscreen clicked. A robot voice blared shrilly.

ROBOT: Everyone out of the buildings at once! Everyone out of the buildings and on the field without delay!

HALL: So soon? I didn't hear the ship land.

NARRATOR: Hall ran to the window and lifted the metal blind. Parked in the center of the landing field was a long gray cruiser, its hull pitted and dented from meteoric strikes. It lay motionless. There was no sign of life about it.

A crowd of naked people was already

moving hesitantly across the field toward it, blinking in the bright sunlight. Hall started tearing off his own shirt.

HALL: It's here! Let's go!

NARRATOR: Hall finished undressing. Both men hurried out into the corridor. Unclothed guards raced past them. They padded down the corridors through the long unit building to the door. They ran downstairs, out onto the field. Warm sunlight beat down on them from the sky overhead. From all the unit buildings, naked men and women were pouring silently toward the ship.

TENNER: What a sight! We'll never be able to live it down.

TAYLOR: But you'll live at least!

MORRISON: Lawrence!

NARRATOR: Hall half turned.

MORRISON: Please don't look around. Keep on going. I'll walk behind you. This feels so strange.

HALL: But is it worth it?

MORRISON: I suppose so.

HALL: Do you think anyone will believe us?

MORRISON: I doubt it. I'm beginning to wonder myself.

HALL: Anyhow, we'll get back alive.

MORRISON: I guess so.

NARRATOR: Hall looked up at the ramp being lowered from the ship in front of them. The first people were already beginning to scamper up the metal incline, into the ship, through the circular lock.

MORRISON: *(suddenly frightened)*
Lawrence, I'm—I'm scared.

HALL: Scared! Why?

MORRISON: I don't know. Just a feeling.

NARRATOR: People pushed against them from all sides. Hall put his foot on the bottom of the ramp.

HALL: Forget it, Stella. Up we go.

MORRISON: I want to go back!

HALL: It's too late now!

NARRATOR: Hall grabbed Morrison's hand. Around them, on all sides, men and women were pushing forward, carrying them up. They came to the airlock.

HALL: Here we are. C'mon, Stella. We're safe now.

NARRATOR: Hall went inside the airlock, into the dark interior of the ship, into the silent blackness before him.

MORRISON: All right.

NARRATOR: Then the commander followed into the blackness after him.

At exactly 15:00 Captain Daniel Davis landed his ship in the center of the field. The entrance airlock opened with a bang.

Davis and the other officers of the ship sat waiting in the control cabin.

DAVIS: Well, where are they?

NARRATOR: The officers became uneasy.
(murmuring of the officers)

DAVIS: Maybe something's wrong? Maybe the whole darn thing's a joke? They did say the whole lot of them would be naked.

NARRATOR: They waited and waited. But no one ever came.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was the ultimate fate of the officers on Planet Blue?
2. What are some examples of foreshadowing in the story? Explain.
3. Why does the plot of this story feed off a sense of paranoia?
4. The officers were worried about letting their paranoia get the best of them. Should they have been more paranoid? Explain.
5. Is paranoia sometimes a good thing? Explain.
6. Could the officers of Planet Blue have avoided their fate? Explain.
7. What will happen when someone comes to the base to investigate the disappearance of the officers? Explain.
8. How could Planet Blue be cleansed of these harmful life forms? Explain.
9. Is the ending of the story a twist ending? Explain.
10. Are the events of the story frightening, suspenseful, or simply comical? Explain.