

feel too bad. You aren't missing a thing, really. This thing is in the cans already, and your fun is up ahead somewhere. And by the way, Kim, congratulations. You had it coming. We're all behind you, from here to the next universe and back."

"Thanks. And the same to you, Bus, and many of 'em. Well, if you won't let me stow away, I'll tag along behind, I guess. Clear ether—or rather, I hope it's full of pirates by to-morrow morning. Won't be, though, probably; don't imagine they'll move until we're almost there."

AND TAG ALONG Kinnison did, through thousands and thousands of parsecs of uneventful voyage.

Part of the time he spent in the speedster, dashing hither and yon. Most of it, however, he spent in the vastly more comfortable mauler; to the armored side of which his tiny vessel clung with its magnetic clamps while he slept and ate, gossiped and read, exercised and played with the mauler's officers and crew, in deep-space comradery. It so happened, however, that when the long-awaited attack developed he was out in his speedster, and thus saw and heard everything from the beginning.

Space was filled with the old, familiar interference. The raider flashed up, locked on with magnets, and began to beam. Not heavily—scarcely enough to warm up the defensive screens—and Kinnison probed into the pirate with his spy ray.

"Terrestrials—and Americans!" he exclaimed, half aloud, startled for an instant. "But naturally they would be, since this is a put-up job and over half the crew were New York gangsters."

"The blighter's got his spy-ray screens up," the pilot was grumbling to his captain. The fact that he spoke in English was immaterial to the Lensman; he would have understood equally well any other possible form of communication or

of thought exchange. "That wasn't part of the plan, was it?"

If Helmuth, or one of the able minds at his base, had been directing that attack it would have stopped right there. The pilot had shown a flash of feeling that, with a little encouragement, might have grown into a suspicion.

But the captain was not an imaginative man. Therefore: "Nothing was said about it, either way," he replied. "Probably the mate's on duty. He is not one of us, you know. All the better if he is. The captain will open up. If he doesn't do it pretty quick, I'll open her up myself. There, the port's opening. Slide a little forward. . . . Hold it! Go get 'em, men!"

Then men, hundreds of them, armed and armored, swarmed through the freighter's locks. But as the last man of the boarding party passed the portal something happened that was most decidedly not on the program: the outer port slammed shut and its toggles drove home!

"Blast those screens! Knock them down! Get in there with a spy ray!" barked the pirate captain. He was not one of those hardy and valiant souls who, like Gildersleeve, led, in person, the attacks of his cutthroats. He emulated, instead, the higher Boskonian officials and directed his raids from the safety of his control room; but, as has been intimated, he was unlike those officials in that he lacked directorial ability. Thus it was only after it was too late that he became suspicious. "I wonder if somebody could have double-crossed us? Hijackers?"

"We'll soon know," the pilot growled, and even as he spoke the spy ray got through, revealing a very shambles.

For VanBuskirk and his Valerians had not been caught napping, nor were they a crew—unarmored, partially armed, and rendered even more impotent by internal mutiny, strife, and