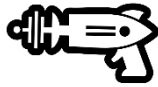


We hope you enjoy this excerpt from
Alien Space Nazis Must Die!

By Chuck McKenzie

He blinked, and found himself once again sitting in the shuttle cockpit. He jumped to his feet, then swayed as a wave of faintness and nausea swept over him. His guts heaved, but— *I don't even have a stomach...*

And suddenly the full weight of reality crashed in upon him. He fell to the deck and lay there, convulsing. Dimly, he heard Kroll say: “So sorry. But better this way...”



Hidden inside the ventilation duct, Lars Janssen peered cautiously through the grille at the shuttle-bay beyond; or, more accurately, at the back of the trooper's head currently blocking his view of the shuttle-bay. The trooper, he noticed, had dandruff; greasy white flakes spilling out from beneath the Nazi's helmet, speckling the collar of his uniform. Lars shook his head

reprovingly, then glanced at his watch. Only ten minutes before the explosives went off. If he wasn't off this KillMoon by then...

Lars pushed gently against the bottom of the grille, which swung silently outwards from the wall. He slid forward slightly to brace the back of his neck against the underside of the raised grille to prevent it from swinging shut again, then slowly reached out with both hands towards the back of the unsuspecting trooper's neck... ..paused...

Then lunged forward, grabbed, and *twisted*.

Snap!

Lars slid swiftly from his hiding-spot, catching the body as it fell and gently lowering it to the deck. He spared the dead trooper a brief glance—the reptilian yellow eyes already glazing—and smirked.

Galactic Master-Race? Not from where I'm standing...

Lars liberated the pulse-rifle from the trooper's death-grip, hefting it with practiced ease, and scanned the bay cautiously. Darkness and silence. Aside from a couple of shuttles parked nearby, dimly visible in the gloom, the area seemed utterly deserted. Lars moved towards the nearest craft.

He'd taken barely three steps before he heard a sound that stopped him in his tracks: a sudden low hum that escalated quickly into the higher octaves before accelerating to a pitch inaudible to the human ear.

Hummmmmmm...

It was the sound of a pulse-rifle being primed to fire.

Lars stopped in his tracks, finger tightening against the trigger of his weapon. This was bad, but he was nonetheless confident in his own speedy reflexes, so if he could just work out where the other guy was standing—

Hummmmmmm...

Hummmmmmm...

*Humm-Humm-Humm-Hummmity-Humm-Humm-de-
Humm...*

Dammit!

Apparently the other guy was standing all around him.

Abruptly, the lights flicked on to reveal a squad of Nazi troopers surrounding Lars, each aiming his rifle unwaveringly at the agent's head. Lars sighed theatrically and raised his hands in surrender. An officer stepped forward and curtly removed the rifle from Lars' grasp. Lars beamed disarmingly. "So...somebody order a candygram?"

"Flippant as ever, Janssen." The mob parted, and a depressingly familiar figure walked forward through the resulting gap.

"Well, well." Lars nodded. "Reichsführer Hottschtepper. I didn't think I'd be seeing *you* again. Last time we met, you wound up on the receiving end of a napalm enema. You must be using a very effective brand of haemorrhoid cream."

Hottschepper smiled horribly, grey lips peeling back to display a dentist's nightmare of sharklike teeth. "Did you really think you could infiltrate zis KillMoon undetected?"

"Frankly, yes. Mind if I put my hands down?"

Hottschepper regarded him coolly. "*Ja*. But keep them vere I can see them."

Lars nodded amiably as he lowered his arms. "Sooo...what happens now?"

Hottschepper smirked. "Now? *You die!* Squad! Prepare to carry out execution!" He sighed as his troopers snapped into position. "Oh—and those of you standing behind ze prisoner? Will you *please* move around to stand with ze others, in case Janssen ducks? That's how he got away last time." He stepped quickly out of the line of fire as the troopers repositioned themselves. "Squad ready? Aim—!"

"Um!" Lars raised his hand. "Mind if I blow my nose first?"

Hottschepper regarded him incredulously. "Ve are about to *shoot* you! Does it truly matter that you die with a nose full of bogies?"

"Sorry," Lars apologised, "it's just that...oh, I'm going to sneeze! Ah! Ah! *Ahhhh—!*" he cupped a hand over his nose, "*—CHOO!*" Unseen by Lars' captors, the tiny grenade hidden up his right nostril flew out into his palm. Lars made a show of wiping his nose with the back of his hand, using the motion to

surreptitiously affix the grenade to the nail of his right index finger.

“Are you quite done?” Hottschtepper enquired, with mocksweetness.

“Yep, all done, thanks!”

“Are you *quite* sure? Would you perhaps like me to fetch you a Kleenex?”

Lars waved away the offer. “No, all good, thanks. You’re good to go.”

Hottschtepper rolled his eyes. “*Wunderbar!* So! Squad ready? Aim—!”

“Say cheese!” Lars shut his eyes tightly and flicked his index finger in the direction of the assembled troopers, the grenade shooting through the air to hit the deck in front of the firing squad, where it exploded in a searing flash of light. The entire squad staggered back, flashblinded. Lars leapt forward and tore a pulse-rifle from the grip of the nearest trooper, immediately thumbing the weapon to auto and strafing the squad with plasma-fire. Within seconds Lars was the last man standing—apart from Hottschtepper, who was stumbling blindly towards the exit. “Oh no you don’t!” Lars sprinted after the fleeing Nazi, catching up to him within moments, grabbing his shoulder and spinning him around before delivering a cracking blow to his jaw. “*That’s* for all the innocents and agents who’ve died at your hands!” Lars

snarled. “And *this*—” a second blow laid the Nazi out cold, “— is for *me!*”

Pausing only to catch his breath, Lars glanced at his watch. Barely a minute left! He sprinted towards the nearest shuttle, charged up the ramp, scrambled into the cockpit and threw himself into the pilot’s chair, hands flickering across the flight console. *Closing the ramp! Priming the drive! Ignition!* With a piercing whine the craft shot forwards, punctured the containment field, and flew out into open space. Lars waited until he judged the shuttle was out of range of the KillMoon’s anti-spacecraft batteries, then leaned forward and activated the comm. “Hello, KillMoon switchboard? Priority call for Reichsführer Hottschtepper...”

There was a slight pause. Then: “*Ja?*”

“Hottschtepper?”

“Janssen?? Zere is no escape! In moments ze DeathWaffen will be on your trail! And then...*you will meet your doom!*”

“I’m afraid not, Hottschtepper. You see, I’ve left a little gift for you under your KillMoon’s primary reactor.” Lars regarded his watch. “And you’ve got...ten seconds left in which to thank me!”

“*VHAT???*”

Lars’ expression hardened. “Goodbye, Reichsführer!”

“I will see you in *HECK*, Janssen! *IN HECK!!*”

The comm went dead as a silent flash briefly lit up the endless night of space.

Lars sighed. Mission accomplished. Time to head back to Central Headquarters, debrief, and prepare for the next assignment. No rest for the heroic. An agent's job was never done. So long as the Alien Space Nazis remained a threat to Intergalactic freedom, there would always be another operation, another counterstrike, another assassination to undertake.

Sometimes, Lars thought, it seemed like he'd been doing this job forever...

“Greeting?”

Lars blinked, then regarded the comm with a frown. “Hello? Who's that?”

“Greeting?”

“Identify yourself, please.”

A clattering gargle emanated from the comm, Lars identifying two distinct voices—if indeed it was speech he was hearing, as opposed to a couple of somebodies or *some things* clearing their throats—that he had the distinct impression were addressing one another rather than himself. After a moment, a voice different to the one that had suggested greeting spoke.

“Am Kroll, Commander of Nine Hundred and Twelfth Spawning of Eighteenth Fleet of Elevated Tertiary Hive of Hoosh of Seventeenth Broodworld of Forty Second Quadrant of Fifteenth Outreach of Generation Ark Fleet of Twelfth Great

Diaspora of Year of Golden Fettling of Second Glorious Arthro Empire!”

“Gosh. *That*...is certainly an impressive address. It must make mailing out Christmas cards very time-consuming.”

There was a slight pause, then: “What?”

Lars waved a hand dismissively, despite knowing the gesture would go unseen. “Sorry. Agency humour. We have it drummed into us in basic training.”

Another pause. “Er...to whom I speak?” Kroll asked eventually.

“This is Lars Janssen of the Intergalactic Anti Alien Space Nazi Agency. State your business, Commander.” More gargling and clattering.

“I *can* still hear you, you know,” Lars interrupted wearily.

There was a distinctly embarrassed pause.

Kroll cleared his (?) throat and addressed Lars again.

“Believe yourself to be Lars Janssen of Intergalactic Anti Alien Space Nazi Agency? Fight Alien Space Nazis? Fight to free galaxy?”

Lars glanced around the cockpit, then raised an eyebrow and regarded the comm again. “I mean...that’s what it says on my onboarding paperwork, yes.”

Kroll made an odd rattling sound. “Apologies. No easy way to tell, but...you *not* Lars Janssen.”

“I’m not?”

“Not.”

Lars smiled thinly. “*Okaaaaaaay*—so, who am I?”

“Not know. But not Lars Janssen. Not agent of IAASNA. Not fight Alien Space Nazis. Not even sit in shuttle right now, talking to us.”

“Riiiiiiiiight. So where do *you* think I am right now, then?”

“Body connect to ‘Ultra-Immersive Entertainment System.’ Program running on system is titled ‘Alien Space Nazis Must Die!’.”

Lars smiled dismissively. “So you’re saying I’m...what? Playing some sort of immersive game?”

“Yes. You play *character* named Lars Janssen. We currently observe your gameplay on monitor.”

Lars sighed. “Right. Yeah. Sure. Okay. Listen, Commander Kroll, I don’t know what you’ve been smoking, but—”

“We observe you for two cycles now,” Kroll interrupted. “Get feel for game. Very...exaggerated. Unrealistic.”

“You think my life is unrealistic? I’m...not quite sure how to take that, frankly.”

“Not think your life too convenient?” Kroll pressed. “Prison always have hidden exit? Guard never shoot straight? Escape explosion with only seconds to spare? Is believable? Is even vaguely credible?”

“I mean—”

“No! Is not! Is fantasy world! Not real!”

“Go away, Kroll,” Lars snapped. “Stop wasting my time!”

More gargling. Then the first voice, clearly a subordinate of Kroll's, said: "We find memory-suppressant installed in system, which clearly reason you not notice being inside a constructed reality. With Commander's permission, I deactivate this now. Just giving you warning."

"Oh, for Chrissake!" Lars leaned forward to switch off the comm, and—

"Deactivating..."

Light explodes around him. Above, a grossly swollen sun fills the sky. Below, the soil is ash. Deep underground, the sterile remnants of humanity slumber in a drug-induced stasis, bodies laid out on a seemingly endless number of metal gurneys, while artificial intelligences postulate a means to repopulate the Earth.

He dives deeper. Remembering...

The A.I.s are set to reawaken their wards when a viable solution to their fertility becomes apparent; meanwhile, in order to prevent psychosis due to sensory deprivation, the sleepers remain wired into state-of-the-art gaming modules, all knowledge of their reality suppressed to further cushion them against the weight of their situation. Thus, gamers may fight at the O.K. Corral or Gallipoli, and actually believe they are there.

They can take Neil Armstrong's infamous step, or pilot the Enola Gay over Hiroshima, or step into the personas of a vast range of fictional characters.

Deeper...

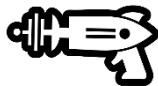
He seems to float above himself, looking down at the senseless, emaciated figure huddled on the gurney, cocooned in a web of cannulas and tubes and wiring, a compact gamelink puncturing the top of his skull. A small metallic tag hanging from just above the puncture point reads:

RealPlay Games
Alien Space Nazis Must Die!
A Lars Janssen Adventure

He reaches out to touch the wire, and—

He blinked, and found himself once again sitting in the shuttle cockpit. He jumped to his feet, then swayed as a wave of faintness and nausea swept over him. His guts heaved, but— *I don't even have a stomach...*

And suddenly the full weight of reality crashed in upon him. He fell to the deck and lay there, convulsing. Dimly, he heard Kroll say: “So sorry. But better this way...”



**To read on, purchase a copy of the full
novella from Amazon...**