



Library podcast

Virtual Thrilling Tales: *This World is Taboo* Chapter 5

[00:00:00] Welcome to Thrilling Tales: Seattle Public Library's Virtual Story Time for Grownups. I am your librarian reader, David Wright. And, you are joining us for chapter five, that is episode five, of our ongoing science fiction pulp serial *This World is Taboo* by Murray Leinster. When we left our story, the space doctor Calhoun and his stowaway, had just landed on the plague planet of Dara. And now, chapter five of *This World is Taboo*.

[00:00:39] It seemed that the smell of hunger was in the air. The armed men were emaciated. Lights came on, and stark, harsh shadows lay black upon the ground. Calhoun's captors were uniformed, but the uniforms hung loosely upon them. Where the lights struck upon their faces, their cheeks were hollow. They were cadaverous. And there were the splotches of pigment of which Calhoun had heard. The man nearest the Med Ship's port had a monstrous, irregular dull-blue marking over half of one side of his face and up upon his forehead. The man next to him had a blue throat. The next man again was less marked, but his left ear was blue and there was what seemed a splashing of the same color on the skin under his hair.

[00:01:29] The leader of the truculent group—it might have been a firing squad—made an imperious gesture with his hand. It was blue, except for two fingers which in the glaring illumination seemed whiter than white.

[00:01:43] "Out!" said that man savagely. "We're taking over your stock of food. You'll get your share of it, like everybody else, but—"

[00:01:51] Maril spoke over Calhoun's shoulder. She uttered a cryptic sentence or two. It should have amounted to identification but there was skepticism in the armed party.

[00:02:02] "Oh, you're one of us, eh?" said the guard leader sardonically. "You'll have a chance to prove that. Come out of there!"

[00:02:11] Calhoun spoke abruptly, "This is a Med Ship," he said. "There are medicines and bacterial culture inside it. They shouldn't be meddled with. Here on Dara you've had enough of plagues!"

[00:02:24] The man with the blue hand said as sardonically as before, "I said the government was taking over your ship! It won't be looted. But you're not taking a full cargo of food away! In fact, it's not likely you're leaving!"

[00:02:39] "And I want to speak to someone in authority," snapped Calhoun. "We've just come from Weald." He felt bristling hatred all about him as he named Weald. "There's tumult there. They're talking about dropping fusion-bombs here. It's important that I talk to somebody with the authority to take a few sensible precautions!"

[00:03:00] He descended to the ground. There was a panicky "Chee! Chee!" from behind him, and Murgatroyd came dashing to swarm up his body and cling apprehensively to his neck.

[00:03:10] "What's that?"

[00:03:12] "A tormal" said Calhoun. "He's not a pet. Your medical men will know something about him. This is a Med Ship and I'm a Med Ship man, and he's an important member of the crew. He's a Med Ship tormal and he stays with me!"

[00:03:29] The man with the blue hand said harshly, "There's somebody waiting to ask you questions. Here!"

[00:03:35] A groundcar came rolling out from the side of the landing-grid enclosure. The groundcar ran on wheels, and wheels were not much used on modern worlds. Dara was behind the times in more ways than one.

[00:03:49] "This car will take you to Defense and you can tell them anything you want. But don't try to sneak back in this ship! It'll be guarded!"

[00:03:59] The groundcar was enclosed, with room for a driver and the three from the Med Ship. But armed men festooned themselves about its exterior and it went bumping and rolling to the massive ground-layer girders of the grid. It rolled out under them and onto a paved highway. It picked up speed.

[00:04:19] There were buildings on either side of the road, but few showed lights. This was night, and the men at the landing-grid had set a pattern of hunger, so that the silence and the dark buildings did not seem a sign of tranquility and sleep, but of exhaustion and despair.

[00:04:37] The highway lamps were few, by comparison with other inhabited worlds, and the groundcar needed lights of its own to guide its driver over a paved surface that needed repair. By those moving lights other depressing things could be seen: untidiness, buildings not kept up to perfection, evidences of apathy, the road, which hadn't been cleaned lately, litter here and there. Even the fact that there were no stars added to the feeling of wretchedness and gloom and, ultimately, of hunger.

[00:05:11] Maril spoke nervously to the driver.

[00:05:14] "The famine isn't any better?"

[00:05:16] He moved his head in negation, but did not speak. There was a splotch of blue pigment at the back of his neck. It extended upward into his hair.

[00:05:25] "I left two years ago," said Maril. "It was just beginning then. Rationing hadn't started."

[00:05:31] The driver said evenly, "There's rationing now!"

[00:05:35] The car went on and on. A vast open space appeared ahead. Lights about its perimeter seemed few and pale.

[00:05:45] "Everything seems worse. Even the lights."

[00:05:49] "Using all the power," said the driver, "to warm up ground to grow crops where it ought to be winter. Not doing too well, either."

[00:05:57] Calhoun knew, somehow, that Maril moistened her lips.

[00:06:01] "I was sent," she explained to the driver, "to go ashore on Trent and then make my way to Weald. I mailed reports of what I found out back to Trent. Somebody got them back to here whenever it was possible."

[00:06:14] The driver said, "Everybody knows the man on Trent disappeared. Maybe he got caught, maybe somebody saw him without make-up. Or maybe he just quit being one of us. What's the difference? No use!"

[00:06:29] Calhoun found himself wincing a little. The driver was not angry. He was hopeless. But men should not despair. They shouldn't accept hostility from those about them as a device of fate for their destruction.

[00:06:43] Maril said quickly to Calhoun, "You understand? Dara's a heavy-metals planet. There aren't many light elements in our soil. Potassium is scarce. So our ground isn't very fertile. Before the Plague we traded metals and manufactured products for imports of food and potash. But since the Plague we've had no off-planet commerce. We've been quarantined."

[00:07:06] "I gathered as much," said Calhoun. "It was up to Med Service to see that that didn't happen. It's up to Med Service now to see that it stops."

[00:07:16] "Too late now for anything," said the driver. "Whatever Med Service may be! They're talking about cutting down our population so there'll be food enough for some to live. There are two questions about it. One is who's to be kept alive, and the other is why."

[00:07:33] The groundcar aimed now for a cluster of faintly brighter lights on the far side of the great open space. They enlarged as they grew nearer. Maril said hesitantly, "There was someone, Korvan—" Calhoun didn't catch the rest of the name. Maril said hesitantly, "He was working on food plants. I thought he might accomplish something...."

[00:07:55] The driver said caustically, "Sure! Everybody's heard about him! He came up with a wonderful thing! He and his outfit worked out a way to process weeds so they can be eaten. And they can. You can fill your belly and not feel hungry, but it's like eating hay. You starve just the same. He's still working. Head of a government division."

[00:08:20] The groundcar passed through a gate. It stopped before a lighted door. The armed men hanging to its outside dropped off. They watched Calhoun closely as he stepped out with Murgatroyd riding on his shoulder.

[00:08:33] Minutes later they faced a hastily summoned group of officials of the Darian government. For a ship to land on Dara was so remarkable an event that it called practically for a cabinet meeting. And Calhoun noted that they were no better fed than the guards at the spaceport.

[00:08:50] They regarded Calhoun and Maril with oddly burning, eyes. It was, of course, because the two of them showed no signs of hunger. They obviously had not been on short rations. Darrians had this, now, to increase a hatred which was inevitable anyhow, directed at all peoples off their own planet.

[00:09:10] "My name is Calhoun," said Calhoun briskly. "I've the usual Med Service credentials. Now—"

[00:09:16] He did not wait to be questioned. He told them of the appalling state of things in the Twelfth Sector of the Med Service, so that men had been borrowed from other sectors to remedy the intolerable, and he was one of them. He told of his arrival at Weald and what had happened there, from the excessively cautious insistence that he prove he was not a Darian, to the arrival of the death-ship from Orede.

[00:09:42] He was giving them the news affecting them, as they had not heard it before. He went on to tell of his stop at Orede and his purpose, and his encounter with the men he found there. When he finished there was silence. He broke it.

[00:10:00] "Now," he said, "Maril's an agent of yours. She can add to what I've told you. I'm Med Service. I have a job to do here to carry out what wasn't done before. I should make a planetary

health inspection and make recommendations for the improvement of the state of things. I'll be glad if you'll arrange for me to talk to your health officials. Things look bad, and something should be done." Someone laughed without mirth.

[00:10:27] "What will you recommend for long-continued undernourishment?" he asked derisively. "That's our health problem!"

[00:10:35] "I recommend food," said Calhoun.

[00:10:38] "Where'll you fill the prescription?"

[00:10:41] "I've the answer to that, too," said Calhoun curtly. "I'll want to talk to any space pilots you've got. Get your astrogators together and I think they'll approve my idea."

[00:10:53] The silence was totally skeptical.

[00:10:56] "Orede—"

[00:10:57] "Not Orede," said Calhoun. "Weald will be hunting that planet over for Darrians. If they find any, they'll drop bombs here."

[00:11:06] "Our only space pilots," said a tall man, presently, "are on Orede now. If you've told the truth, they'll probably head back because of your warning. They should bring meat."

[00:11:19] His mouth worked peculiarly, and Calhoun knew that it was at the thought of food.

[00:11:25] "Which," said another man sharply, "goes to the hospitals! I haven't tasted meat in two years!"

[00:11:30] "Nobody has," growled another man still. "But here's this man Calhoun. I'm not convinced he can work magic, but we can find out if he lies. Put a guard on his ship. Otherwise let our health men give him his head. They'll find out if he's from this Medical Service he tells of! and this Maril...."

[00:11:54] "I can be identified," said Maril. "I was sent to gather information and send it in secret writing to one of us on Trent. I have a family here. They'll know me! And I—there was someone who was working on foods, and I believe he made it possible to use ... all sorts of vegetation for food. He will identify me."

[00:12:15] Someone laughed harshly.

[00:12:17] Maril swallowed.

[00:12:19] "I'd like to see him," she repeated. "And my family."

[00:12:24] Some of the blue-splotched men turned away. A broad-shouldered man said bluntly, "Don't look for them to be glad to see you. And you'd better not show yourself in public. You've been well fed. You'll be hated for that."

[00:12:41] Maril began to cry. Murgatroyd said bewilderedly, "Chee! Chee!"

[00:12:49] Calhoun held him close. There was confusion. And Calhoun found the Minister of Health at hand. He looked most harried of all the officials gathered to question Calhoun. He proposed that he get a look at the hospital situation right away.

[00:13:03] It wasn't practical. With all the population on half rations or less, when night came people needed to sleep. Most people, indeed, slept as many hours out of the traditional twenty-four as they could manage. It was much more pleasant to sleep than to be awake and constantly nagged at by continued hunger.

[00:13:24] And there was the matter of simple decency. Continuous gnawing hunger had an embittering effect upon everyone. Quarrelsomeness was a common experience. And people who would normally be the leaders of opinion felt shame because they were obsessed by thoughts of food. It was best when people slept.

[00:13:46] Still, Calhoun was in the hospitals by daybreak. What he found moved him to savage anger. There were too many sick children. In every case undernourishment contributed to their sickness. And there was not enough food to make them well. Doctors and nurses denied themselves food to spare it for their patients. And most of that self-denial was doubtless voluntary, but it would not be discreet for anybody on Dara to look conspicuously better fed than his fellows.

[00:14:15] Calhoun brought out hormones and enzymes and medicaments from the Med Ship while the guard in the ship looked on. He demonstrated the processes of synthesis and auto-catalysis that enabled such small samples to be multiplied indefinitely. He was annoyed by a clamorous appetite. There were some doctors who ignored the irony of medical techniques being taught to cure nonnutritional disease, when everybody was half-fed, or less. They approved of Calhoun. They even approved of Murgatroyd when Calhoun explained his function.

[00:14:48] He was, of course, a Med Service tormal, and tormal were creatures of talent. They'd originally been found on a planet in the Deneb area, and they were engaging and friendly small animals. But the remarkable fact about them was that they couldn't contract any disease. Not any. They had a built-in, explosive reaction to bacterial and viral toxins, and there hadn't yet been any pathogenic organism discovered to which a tormal could not more or less immediately develop antibody resistance. So that in interstellar medicine tormal were priceless.

[00:15:30] Let Murgatroyd be infected with however localized, however specialized an inimical organism, and presently some highly valuable defensive substance could be isolated from his blood and he'd remain in his usual exuberant good health.

[00:15:47] When the antibody was analyzed by those techniques of microanalysis the Service had developed, that was that. The antibody could be synthesized and one could attack any epidemic with confidence.

[00:16:01] The tragedy for Dara was, of course, that no Med Ship had come to Dara three generations ago, when the Dara plague raged. Worse, after the plague Weald was able to exert pressure which only a criminally incompetent Med Service director would have permitted. But criminal incompetence and its consequences was what Calhoun had been loaned to Sector Twelve to help remedy. He was not at ease, though. No ship arrived from Orede to bear out his account of an attempt to get that lonely world evacuated before Weald discovered it had blueskins on it. Maril had vanished, to visit or return to her family, or perhaps to consult with the mysterious Korvan who'd arranged for her to leave Dara to be a spy, and had advised her simply to make a new life somewhere else, abandoning a famine-ridden, despised, and out-caste world.

[00:16:59] Calhoun had learned of two achievements the same Korvan had made for his world. Neither was remarkably constructive. He'd offered to prove the value of the second by dying of it. Which might make him a very admirable character, or he could have a passion for martyrdom, which is much more common than most people think. In two days Calhoun was irritable enough from unaccustomed hunger to suspect the worst of him.

[00:17:25] Meanwhile Calhoun worked doggedly; in the hospitals while the patients were awake and in the Med Ship, under guard, afterward. He had hunger cramps now, but he tested a plastic cube with a thriving biological culture in it.

[00:17:40] He worked at increasing his store of it. He'd snipped samples of pigmented skin from dead patients in the hospitals, and examined the pigmented areas, and very, very painstakingly verified a theory. It took an electron microscope to do it, but he found a virus in the blue patches which matched the type discovered on Tralee.

[00:18:03] The Tralee viruses had effects which were passed on from mother to child, and heredity had been charged with the observed results of quasi-living viral particles. And then Calhoun very, very carefully introduced into a virus culture the material he had been growing in a plastic cube. He watched what happened.

[00:18:27] He was satisfied, so much so that immediately afterward he yawned and yawned and barely managed to stagger off to bed. The watching guard in the Med Ship watched him in amazement.

[00:18:41] That night the ship from Orede came in, packed with frozen bloody carcasses of cattle. Calhoun knew nothing of it. But next morning Maril came back. There were shadows under her eyes and her expression was of someone who has lost everything that had meaning in her life.

[00:19:00] "I'm all right," she insisted, when Calhoun commented. "I've been visiting my family. I've seen Korvan. I'm quite all right."

[00:19:08] "You haven't eaten any better than I have," Calhoun observed.

[00:19:11] "I couldn't!" admitted Maril. "My sisters, my little sisters so thin.... There's rationing for everybody and it's all efficiently arranged. They even had rations for me. But I couldn't eat! I gave most of my food to my sisters and they—they squabbled over it!"

[00:19:30] Calhoun said nothing. There was nothing to say. Then she said, in a no less desolate tone, "Korvan said I was foolish to come back."

[00:19:40] "He could be right," said Calhoun.

[00:19:43] "But I had to!" protested Maril. "And now I—I've been eating all I wanted to, in Weald and in the ship, and I'm ashamed because they're half-starved and I'm not. And when you see what hunger does to them.... It's terrible to be half-starved and not able to think of anything but food!"

[00:20:03] "I hope," said Calhoun, "to do something about that. If I can get hold of an astrogator or two—"

[00:20:10] "The ship that was on Orede came in during the night," Maril told him shakily. "It was loaded with frozen meat, but one load's not enough to make a difference on a whole planet! And if Weald hunts for us on Orede, we daren't go back for more meat."

[00:20:26] She said abruptly, "There are some prisoners. They were miners. They were crowded out of the ship. The Darrians who'd stampeded the cattle took them prisoners. They had to!"

[00:20:36] "True," said Calhoun. "It wouldn't have been wise to leave Wealdians around on Orede with their throats cut. Or living, either, to tell about a rumor of blueskins. Even if their throats will be cut now. Is that the program?"

[00:20:51] Maril shivered.

[00:20:53] "No. They'll be put on short rations like everybody else. And people will watch them. The Wealdians expect to die of plague any minute because they've been with Darrians. So people look at them and laugh. But it's not very funny."

[00:21:10] "It's natural," said Calhoun, "but perhaps lacking in charity. Look there! How about those astrogators? I need them for a job I have in mind."

[00:21:20] Maril wrung her hands.

[00:21:22] "C—come here," she said in a low tone.

[00:21:24] There was an armed guard in the control room of the ship. He'd watched Calhoun a good part of the previous day as Calhoun performed his mysterious work. He'd been off-duty and now was on duty again. He was bored. So long as Calhoun did not touch the control board, though, he was uninterested. He didn't even turn his head when Maril led the way into the other cabin and slid the door shut.

[00:21:49] "The astrogators are coming," she said swiftly. "They'll bring some boxes with them. They'll ask you to instruct them so they can handle our ship better. They lost themselves coming back from Orede. No, they didn't lose themselves, but they lost time, enough time almost to make an extra trip for meat. They need to be experts. I'm to come along, so they can be sure that what you teach them is what you've been doing right along."

[00:22:16] Calhoun said, "Well?"

[00:22:19] "They're crazy!" said Maril vehemently. "They knew Weald would do something monstrous sooner or later. But they're going to try to stop it by being more monstrous sooner! Not everybody agrees, but there are enough. So they want to use your ship—it's faster in overdrive and so on. And they'll go to Weald in this ship and—they say they'll give Weald something to keep it busy without bothering us!"

[00:22:47] Calhoun said dryly, "This pays me off for being too sympathetic with blueskins! But if I'd been hungry for a couple of years, and was despised to boot by the people who kept me hungry, I suppose I might react the same way. No," he said curtly as she opened her lips to speak again, "don't tell me the trick. Considering everything, there's only one trick it could be. But I doubt profoundly that it would work. All right."

[00:23:16] He slid the door back and returned to the control room. Maril followed him. He said detachedly, "I've been working on a problem outside of the food one. It isn't the time to talk about it right now, but I think I've solved it."

[00:23:31] Maril turned her head, listening. There were footsteps on the tarmac outside the ship. Both doors of the airlock were open. Four men came in. They were young men who did not look quite as hungry as most Darrians, but there was a reason for that. Their leader introduced himself and the others. They were the astrogators of the ship Dara had built to try to bring food from Orede. They were not, said their self-appointed leader, good enough. They'd overshot their destination. They came out of overdrive too far off line. They needed instruction.

[00:24:08] Calhoun nodded, and observed that he'd been asking for them. They were, of course, blueskins. On one the only visible disfigurement was a patch of blue upon his wrist. On another the appearance of a blue birthmark appeared beside his eye and went back and up his temple. A third

had a white patch on his temple, with all the rest of his face a dull blue. The fourth had blue fingers on one hand.

[00:24:34] "We've got orders," said their leader, steadily, "to come on board and learn from you how to handle this ship. It's better than the one we've got."

[00:24:42] "I asked for you," repeated Calhoun. "I've an idea I'll explain as we go along.... Those boxes?"

[00:24:50] Someone was passing in iron boxes through the airlock. One of the four very carefully brought them inside.

[00:24:57] "They're rations," said a second young man. "We don't go anywhere without rations, except Orede."

[00:25:03] "Orede, yes. I think we were shooting at each other there," said Calhoun pleasantly.

[00:25:09] "Weren't we?"

[00:25:10] "Yes," said the young man.

[00:25:12] He was neither cordial nor antagonistic. He was impassive. Calhoun shrugged. "Then we can take off immediately. Here's the communicator and there's the button. You might call the grid and arrange for us to be lifted."

[00:25:27] The young man seated himself at the control board. Very professionally, he went through the routine of preparing to lift by landing-grid, which routine has not changed in two hundred years.

[00:25:38] He went briskly ahead until the order to lift. Then Calhoun stopped him.

[00:25:43] "Hold it!"

[00:25:45] He pointed to the airlock. Both doors were open. The young man at the control board flushed vividly. One of the others closed and locked the doors.

[00:25:56] The ship lifted. Calhoun watched with seeming negligence. But he found occasion for a dozen corrections of procedure. This was presumably a training voyage of his own suggestion. Therefore, when the blueskin pilot would have flung the Med Ship into undirected overdrive, Calhoun grew stern. He insisted on a destination. He suggested Weald.

[00:26:22] The young men glanced at each other and accepted the suggestion. He made the acting pilot look up the intrinsic brightness of its sun and measure its apparent brightness from just off Dara.

He made him estimate the change in brightness to be expected after so many hours in overdrive, if one broke out to measure.

[00:26:41] The first blueskin student pilot ended a Calhoun-determined tour of duty with more respect for Calhoun than he'd had at the beginning. The second was anxious to show up better than the first. Calhoun drilled him in the use of brightness-charts, by which the changes in apparent brightness of stars between overdrive hops could be correlated with angular changes to give a three-dimensional picture of the nearer heavens.

[00:27:05] It was a highly necessary art which had not been worked out on Dara, and the prospective astrogators became absorbed in this and other fine points of space-piloting. They'd done enough, in a few trips to Orede, to realize that they needed to know more. Calhoun showed them.

[00:27:23] Calhoun did not try to make things easy for them. He was hungry and easily annoyed. It was sound training tactics to be severe, and to phrase all suggestions as commands. He put the four young men in command of the ship in turn, under his direction. He continued to use Weald as a destination, but he set up problems in which the Med Ship came out of overdrive pointing in an unknown direction and with a precessory motion.

[00:27:49] He made the third of his students identify Weald in the celestial globe containing hundreds of millions of stars, and get on course in overdrive toward it. The fourth was suddenly required to compute the distance to Weald from such data as he could get from observation, without reference to any records.

[00:28:07] By this time the first man was chafing to take a second turn. Calhoun gave each of them a second gruelling lesson. He gave them, in fact, a highly condensed but very sound course in the art of travel in space. His young students took command in four-hour watches, with at least one breakout from overdrive in each watch.

[00:28:28] He built up enthusiasm in them. They ignored the discomfort of being hungry—though there had been no reason for them to stint on food on Orede—in growing pride in what they came to know.

[00:28:40] When Weald was a first-magnitude star, the four were not highly qualified astrogators, to be sure, but they were vastly better spacemen than at the beginning. Inevitably, their attitude toward Calhoun was respectful. He'd been irritable and right. To the young, the combination is impressive. Maril had served as passenger only. In theory she was to compare Calhoun's lessons with his practise when alone. But he did nothing on this journey which, teaching considered, was different from the two interstellar journeys Maril had made with him.

[00:29:16] She occupied the sleeping cabin during two of the six watches of each ship-day. She operated the food-readier, which was almost completely emptied of its original store of food, it having

been confiscated by the government of Dara. That amount of food would make no difference to the planet, but it was wise for everyone on Dara to be equally ill-fed.

[00:29:38] On the sixth day out from Dara, the sun of Weald had a magnitude of minus five-tenths. The electron telescope could detect its larger planets, especially a gas-giant fifth-orbit world of high albedo. Calhoun had his four students estimate its distance again, pointing out the difference that could be made in breakout position if the Med Ship were mis-aimed by as much as one second of arc.

[00:30:02] "And now," he said briskly, "we'll have coffee. I'm going to graduate you as pilots. Maril, four cups of coffee, please."

[00:30:12] Murgatroyd said "Chee?" The Med Ship was badly crowded with six humans and Murgatroyd in a space intended for Calhoun and Murgatroyd alone. The little tormal had spent most of his time in his cubbyhole, watching with beady eyes as so many people moved about on what had been a spacious ship before.

[00:30:31] "No coffee for you, Murgatroyd," said Calhoun. "You didn't do your lessons. This is for the graduating class only."

[00:30:38] Murgatroyd came out of his miniature den. He found his little cup and offered it insistently, saying, "Chee! Chee! Chee!"

[00:30:46] "No!" said Calhoun firmly. He regarded his class of four young men with their blueskin markings. "Drink it down!" he commanded. "That's the last order I'll give you. You're graduate pilots, now!"

[00:31:01] They drank the coffee with a flourish. There was not one who did not admire Calhoun for having made them admire themselves. They were, actually, almost as much better pilots as they believed.

[00:31:14] "And now," said Calhoun, "I suppose you'll tell me the truth about those boxes you brought on board. You said they were rations, but they haven't been opened in six days. I have an idea what they mean, but you tell me."

[00:31:31] The four looked uncomfortable. There was a long pause.

[00:31:36] "They could be," said Calhoun detachedly, "cultures to be dumped on Weald. Weald is making plans to wipe out Dara. So some fool has decided to get Weald too busy fighting a plague of its own to bother with you. Is that right?"

[00:31:52] The young men stirred unhappily. Young men can very easily be made into fanatics. But they have to be kept stirred up. They can't be provided with sound reason for self-respect. On the

Med Ship there'd not been a single reference to Weald except as an object toward which the Med Ship was being astrogated. There'd been no reference to blueskins or enemies or threats or anything but space-piloting. The four young men were now fanatical about the proper handling of a ship in emptiness.

[00:32:25] "Well, sir," said one of them, unhappily, "that's what we were ordered to do."

[00:32:31] "I object," said Calhoun. "It wouldn't work. I just left Weald a little while back, remember. They've been telling themselves that some day Dara would try that. They've made preparations to fight any imaginable contagion you could drop on them. Every so often somebody claims it's happening. It wouldn't work. I object!"

[00:32:52] "But—"

[00:32:53] "In fact," said Calhoun, "I forbid it. I shall prevent it. You shan't do anything of the kind."

[00:33:00] One of the young men, staring at Calhoun, nodded suddenly. His eyes closed. He jerked his head erect and looked bewildered. A second sank heavily into a chair. He said remotely, "Thish sfunny!" and abruptly went to sleep. The third found his knees giving way. He paid elaborate attention to them, stiffening them. But they yielded like rubber and he went slowly down to the floor. The fourth said thickly and reproachfully, "Thought y'were our frien'!"

[00:33:34] He collapsed.

[00:33:37] Calhoun very soberly tied them hand and foot and laid them out comfortably on the floor. Maril watched, white-faced, her hand to her throat. Murgatroyd looked agitated. He said anxiously, "Chee? Chee?"

[00:33:52] "No," said Calhoun. "They'll wake up presently."

[00:33:56] Maril said in a tense and desperate whisper, "You're betraying us! You're going to take us to Weald!"

[00:34:03] "No," said Calhoun. "We'll only orbit around it. First, though, I want to get rid of those damned packed-up cultures. They're dead, by the way. I killed them with super-sonics a couple of days ago, while a fine argument was going on about distance-measurements by variable Cepheids of known period."

[00:34:21] He put the four boxes carefully in the disposal unit. He operated it. The boxes and their contents streamed out to space in the form of metallic and other vapors. Calhoun sat at the control desk.

[00:34:34] "I'm a Med Service man," he said detachedly. "I couldn't cooperate in the spread of plagues, anyhow, though a useful epidemic might be another matter. But the important thing right now is not keeping Weald busy with troubles to increase their hatred of Dara. It's getting some food for Dara. And driblets won't help. What's needed is thousands of tons, or tens of thousands." Then he said, "Overdrive coming, Murgatroyd! Hold fast!"

[00:35:06] The universe vanished. The customary unpleasant sensations accompanied the change. Murgatroyd burped.

[00:35:18] Thus ends chapter five for *This World is Taboo*. Join us soon for the next exciting chapter.