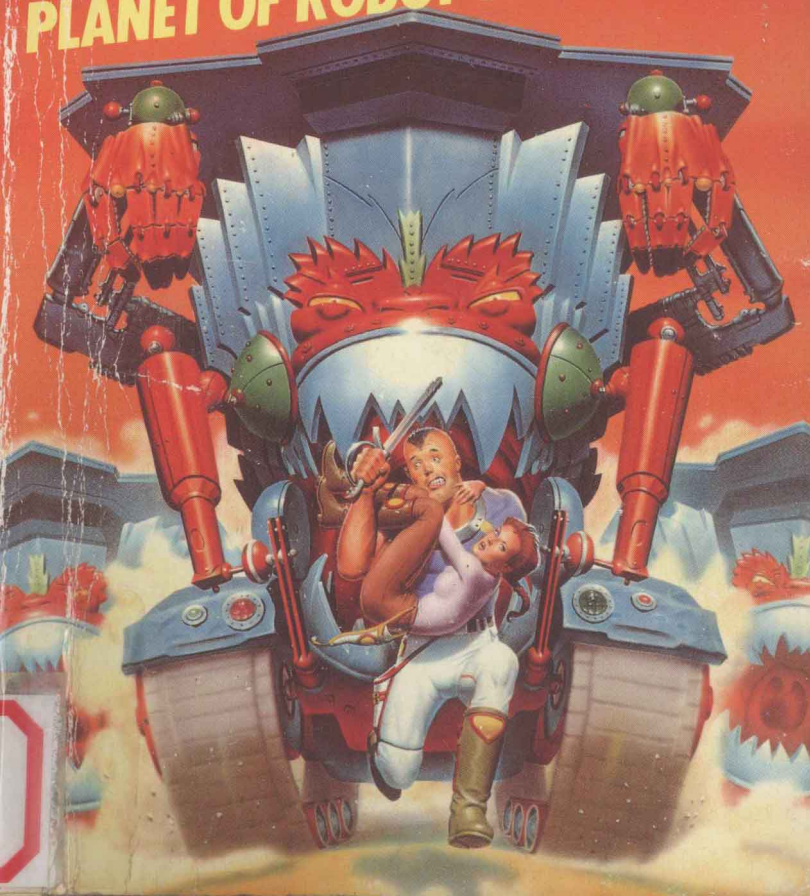


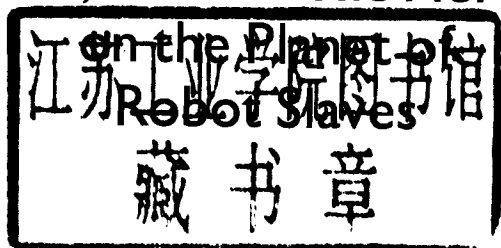
HARRY HARRISON BILL,

THE GALACTIC HERO ... ON THE
PLANET OF ROBOT SLAVES



HARRY HARRISON

Bill, the Galactic Hero



A Byron Preiss Book

VGSF

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He tore the oversized shoe from his right foot and stretched out his long toes. Then raked three long grooves into the plastic floor. "What about this, Doc? What about this?"

"Very nice indeed, if I say so myself. I think your claws need trimming."

"The foot needs changing! Am I to go through the rest of my life with a giant chicken foot stuck onto my ankle?"

"Why not? It sure beats a wooden leg."

"I want a real foot!"

His howl went unheard because at that moment there was a loud explosion that blew away most of the roof of the hospital.

Also by Harry Harrison in VGSF

BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO

**BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO ON THE
PLANET OF BOTTLED BRAINS**

with Robert Sheckley

**BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO ON THE
PLANET OF TASTELESS PLEASURE**

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**BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO ON THE
PLANET OF ZOMBIE VAMPIRES**

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**BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO ON THE
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with David Bischoff

**BILL, THE GALACTIC HERO:
THE FINAL INCOHERENT ADVENTURE**

with David Harris

T H E T R U E
S T O R Y O F

BILL

BILL, THAT'S WHAT THEY CALLED HIM. THEY called him that because that was his name. A simple farm boy destined for the stars, ripped from his green acres, his silver robomule, his blue Mom—she had circulatory troubles—and forced by trickery into the armed forces of the Emperor.

The story of how Bill became a Galactic Hero has been told in a book titled *Bill, the Galactic Hero*. It is a true story and there is a tear on every page. (An artificial tear dripped onto the pages by the printer.) Read it. It will make you laugh, make you cry, make you want to rush away and throw up. You will see how hard the military labored to destroy Bill, how he shrunk and withered, then grew and matured under this treatment. Learning, like any good soldier, to curse—say bowb at least 354 times a day—to drink in excess, to lust after girls while his eyeballs bulged with sperm. Any woman would be proud to be his mother. Though I can't think why.

After being drugged and tricked into enlisting in the Space Troopers, Bill was sent for his basic training at Camp Leon Trotsky. It was there under the sadistic guidance of Deathwish Drang, a drill instructor with three-inch-long tusks, that his morale was crushed, his will destroyed, his IQ diminished,

his spirit broken as he was turned into the perfect trooper. Only his superb physical condition, the product of years of boring physical activity down on the farm, prevented him from being crushed like a beetle as well. No sooner had his basic training been finished, in fact even before it was finished, and even more important before he could get through the front door of the Lower Ranks Cathouse, he and his bunkmates were bundled off to war aboard the space battleship, the grand old lady of the fleet, the *Fanny Hill*.

The war was on. Mankind was advancing to the stars. For out there among the stardust, suns and planets, comets and space crap, there existed a race of intelligent aliens. The Chingers. They were peaceful little green lizards with four arms, scales, a tail like most lizards. So of course they had to be destroyed. They might become a menace sometime, maybe. In any case—what is an army and a navy for if not to fight war?

The boredom of space service was relieved slightly when Bill discovered that his good friend, Eager Beager, was a Chinger spy. At first this was hard for Bill to understand, even with his militarily lowered intelligence, since everyone knew that Chingers looked like moth-eaten alligators, with four arms, that stood seven feet tall. Bill understood the facts a lot better when he discovered that Beager was a special kind of spy. Well, not really a spy, but a robot operated by a seven-inch-high Chinger from a control center in Beager's skull. Seven inches, seven feet, the military does exaggerate slightly in the need of good propaganda. In any case the spy escaped and the normality of starvation and boredom returned until Bill finally went into battle as a fusetender,

tending giant fuses. The battle was fierce, all of his buddies were killed, and Bill was slightly wounded when his left arm was blown off. Despite this, and completely by accident, he fired the shot heard round the fleet—that destroyed the enemy spaceship. A hero now, with a good, strong, black right arm sewed in place of his carbonized left arm (having two right arms he can now shake hands with himself which is lots of fun), he received a medal and a hero's award.

He also managed to go AWOL, which stands for Away Without Leave, also Over the Hill, which is basically slipping out of the clutches of the troopers for a little bit. In the course of his adventures on the planet Helior he also became a spy, got involved in garbage disposal, and other interesting things. So interesting that he ended up in combat and doomed to die on the planet of no return where the troopers went in only one direction. But alcohol-related research revealed that while normal casualties were being sewn up and sent back to combat, new arms sewed on to replace old arms, new everything, well, almost everything, sewn on as replacements, there was a shortage of feet. A footless soldier would be sent offplanet for repair, to fight another day on another world. Unhappily for Bill he had two good feet and therefore was doomed to die in combat. But, ever resourceful, he blew his right foot off, which was better than getting everything else blown off.

So there it is. With an artificial foot, a growing alcoholic habit, incipient satyriasis, Deathwish Drang's surgically transplanted fangs willed to him, and a hobnailed liver, he is ready for whatever comes. Bill, a trooper loyal to the Emperor, as if he

had a choice, destined for life to be an interstellar warrior, since his enlistment is automatically extended whether he likes it or not. About the only thing that he has going for him is the fact that with an artificial foot he has only half as much athletes' foot as the other troopers.

Here he is, a reluctant galactic hero, going into action yet once again.

Harry Harrison

C H A P T E R 1

BILL WAS NOT HAPPY IN HIS WORK. HE REALLY should have been since, like most things military, it required little or no intelligence. Just well-conditioned reflexes. Which reflexes now tickled his brain with a reminder that the shuffle of recruit footsteps was growing very dim. He glanced up to see that they were almost out of sight. In fact they really were out of sight behind the cloud of dust kicked up by their weary boots. And their feet were, obviously, weary as well. Bill took a deep breath and blasted most of it out with a single roar of sound.

"To the rear—h'arch!"

A small bird fell to the ground, stunned by the intensity of the command. This cheered Bill ever so slightly since it proved that his skills as a drill-private were improving. It cheered the recruits as well since they were about to march into a deep, rock-filled ravine. The first rank was already atremble with fear, facing the terrible choice of death by falling or death by drill-instructor. They wheeled about, not too smartly since they were stumbling with fatigue, and marched, coughing strenuously, back into the cloud of dust.

As they came closer a snarl of anger twisted Bill's lips, a snarl made even more impressive by the

single, long tusk that rested on his lower lip, its yellow tip practically touching his chin. Bill twanged it with his fingernail and the snarl grew snarlier. Two tusks were menacing. One tusk made him look like a bulldog who had lost a fight. Something had to be done about this.

The loud thud of tramping feet drew his attention and his eyes unfocussed to see that the marching recruits were just a step away, the nearest one gasping with fear at the thought of running down the DI.

"Company—HALT!" he bellowed.

Aching feet thudded into silence and the recruit almost thudded into Bill. He stood in shivering eyeball contact with the feared DI, his dusty eyeball touching Bill's bloodshot one.

"What are you staring at?" Bill sussurated with all the menace of a snake in heat.

"Nothing, majesty, sir, your highness . . ."

"Don't lie—you're staring at my face."

"No, I mean yes, can't help myself since my eyeball is touching your face."

"And it's not just my face you are staring at—it's my tusk. And you are thinking—why has he only one tusk?" Bill stepped back and growled loathingly at all of the swaying, frightened, fatigued, near-death recruits. "You are all thinking that, aren't you? Say *yes!*"

"Yes!" They gasped and croaked in unison, most of them too hammered by fatigue to have the slightest idea of what the hell they were doing anyway.

"I knew it," Bill sighed, then twanged the solitary tusk gloomily. "Not that I blame you. A DI with two tusks would be a fearful and terrible sight. But a single tusk is, I must say it, a pathetic sight."

He sniffled with self-pity and rubbed a pendant drop from his nose with the back of his hand.

"Not that I expect sympathy from you feeble-minded misfits—or loyalty or anything like that, since it is always bowb-your-buddy week. No, I expect raw self-interest and bribery. We will drill until it grows dark or you drop dead, whichever comes first." He waited while the moan of pain sighed through the troops. "Or you might emulate yesterday's intake who, so sympathetic to my problem, freely donated one buck each towards my fang fund. I must admit that I was so grateful that I cut the drill short at that point."

The troopers, all recently and reluctantly drafted into service for the glory of the Empire, had already absorbed a few survival messages. They read this one loud and clear. There was a clink of coins as Bill passed before them and accepted their unsolicited donations.

"Dismissed," he muttered as he counted the loot. Enough, yes, just enough. He smiled and looked down at his feet. The smile instantly vanished. The tusk was only half of his problem. He was now looking at the other half.

His left foot appeared normal enough, encased in its mirror-finished recruit-stamping boot. His right boot was slightly different. More than slightly. For one thing it was twice the size of his left boot. Of even greater interest was the long toe that stuck out through a hole above the heel. An impressive yellow toe that was tipped by a shining claw. Bill growled in frustrated anger and kicked out with his right foot and gouged a deep groove in the hard ground. Something was just going to have to be done about this as well.

Thunder rumbled from behind the mountains as Bill started across the drill field towards the barracks. He cast a suspicious eye at the sky as black clouds boiled quickly into sight. The wind rushed up just as fast as the clouds. He coughed as the dust swirled around him—but not for long. The dust was beaten down by a torrential rain that instantly turned the field to a sea of mud. The rain stopped—as soon as he had been well soaked—and giant hailstones plobbered holes into the mud and rattled off his helmet. Before he reached the barracks the clouds were blown from sight and the tropical sun burned billows of steam from his uniform. This planet, Grundgy, had an interesting climate.

This was the only thing interesting about it. Otherwise it was barren and worthless and had only two seasons: frigid winter, tropical summer. There were no minerals worth digging, no land worth planting, no resources worth exploiting. In other words the perfect planet to turn into a military base. This had been done, at great and overpriced expense, until the giant island-continent in the boiling, ice-berg filled sea, was a single great military establishment. Fort Grundgy, named after the galaxy-famous Commander Merda Grundgy. He was famous for absolutely nothing other than the fact that he had expired of terminal hemorrhoids from overeating. But since he was the Emperor's granduncle his name would be ever honored.

These and kindred gloomy thoughts sifted through Bill's mind as he sifted through the money-bag in his riveted steel footlocker. Enough, just enough. Six hundred and twelve Imperial Bucks. Now was the time.

He unzipped his boots and kicked them off. The

three yellow toes on his right foot were curled and cramped and he stretched them happily. Then he ripped off his uniform and dropped it into the shredder where the reinforced paper fabric was instantly reduced to its component fibers. He tore a fresh uniform from the roll on the latrine wall and drew it on. He had trouble getting his large yellow toes into his right boot and muttered foul curses as he struggled with it.

It was raining stair rods when he opened the barracks door. Muttering nastily he slammed the door shut, counted to ten, then opened it again and stepped out into the broiling sun and hurried down the company street to the base hospital.

"The doctor is otherwise engaged and cannot see you at this time," the zaftig corporal at reception said as she daintily filed the edge of one blood-red fingernail. "Put your name here for sick call which is three weeks from now at four in the morning—eeek!"

She had eeked because he had growled viciously as he had kicked out with a twisting kick and had torn a groove down the metal of her desk with his clawed heel.

"Don't give me no bowb, Corp, I been too long in the army to take no bowb."

"Apparently you have not been in it long enough to learn any grammar. Out—before I call the MP's and have you shot for destruction of government property—eeek!"

Her pained cry echoed the screech of torn metal as he raked the desk again.

"Call the Doc. Tell him it's about money, not medicine."

"Why didn't you say so to begin with," she

sniffed as he banged the intercom. "Cash customer to see you, Admiral." She did this with alacrity and efficiency since the admiral-doctor was giving her a percentage, as well as a good stupfing, with equal alacrity and efficiency whenever he got his mind off of his illegal experiments.

The door opened behind her and Admiral-Doctor Mel Praktis poked his bald head out and leered one-eyedly at Bill, his other eye hidden by a black monocle. The monocle concealed the fact that the eye had been removed in a manner too disgusting to mention. But had since been replaced by an electronic telescope-microscope, which is a very handy thing to have. His illegal medical experiments had been so loathsome that when they had been discovered he had been condemned to death by impaling—or alternately becoming a medic in the navy. It had not been an easy decision. Though it had worked out well in the end since the alcoholic commander of the base here turned a blind drunk eye on his experiments. Praktis had blinded the eye himself with a limitless supply of medical alcohol to make sure he got away with his dirty work.

"Are you the one for the prefrontal lobotomy?" Praktis asked.

"Not bowby likely. The tusk, Doc, the tusk, remember? I only had enough bucks before for a single implant—but I have the rest now."

"No bucks no tusks. Let's see what you got."

Bill shook the bag so it jingled.

"Inside, we don't have all day."

Praktis shook the coins into the sink, threw the empty bag into the disposal chute, then soaked the money in antiseptic before counting it.

"Never know what grotty infections the troops have. You're ten bucks short."

"You should know—you infected most of them. No bowb, Doc, that's the agreed price. Six hundred and twelve."

"That was last week. I'm taking inflation into account."

"That's all that I have," Bill whimpered.

"Then sign a chit against next month's pay."

"You have no soul," Bill muttered as he signed.

"I checked it at the church when I got in the service. What's the name? I have to access the computer to find where I filed your fang."

"Bill. With two L's."

"Two L's only for officers." He punched the keyboard. "Here it is, under Bil where it belongs. Freezer twelve, in the liquid nitrogen."

He grabbed up metal tongs and rushed off, was back in an instant with a plastic cylinder that smoked moistly in the warm air. He threw it into the microwave and pushed buttons.

"Sixty seconds should do it. Any more and it would be cooked."

"No jokes, Doc. This is a serious matter."

"Only to you, trooper. To me it's just a few more bucks for my broker towards buying my discharge." The microwave pinged and he jerked his thumb towards the operating table. "Take your trousers off and lie down."

"Trousers? It goes in my jaw, Doc—where were you thinking of putting it?"

Praktis's only answer was an evil chuckle as he wheeled the electronic surgeon into place.

Bill gagged as the rubber clamps whipped his mouth open. Praktis muttered and punched com-

mands into the keyboard. Bill screamed hoarsely around the clamps as the laser scalpel sizzled his gums and forceps twisted an incisor.

"Oops, sorry, I forgot." Praktis lied sadistically as he shot in a local anesthetic before continuing. In a matter of seconds the tooth was out, Bill's gum was peeled back, the hole in his jaw drilled larger, the roots of the fang firmly implanted, GrowFlesh pumped into the interstices before sutureglue sealed it all into place.

"Rinse and spit and get out of here," Praktis ordered as Bill climbed groggily on his feet.

"That's better," Bill said, admiring himself in the mirror. He twanged each tusk in turn, then smiled a twisted smile. This was really a very revolting expression. "Deathwish Drang would be proud to see me, if he was still alive."

"Out."

"Not yet, Doc." He tore the oversized shoe from his right foot and stretched out his long toes. Then raked three long grooves into the plastic floor. "What about this, huh? What about this?"

"Very nice indeed, if I say so myself. I think your claws need trimming."

"The foot needs changing! Am I to go through the rest of my life with a giant chicken foot stuck onto my ankle?"

"Why not? It sure beats a wooden leg."

"I want a real foot!"

"You got a real foot—a real giant mutated chicken foot. And let me tell you, not that I want to brag, but there isn't another surgeon in the known universe that could have done that. And they complain about my so-called illegal experiments! They'll