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# SCIENCE FICTION

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LUNAR CONCESSION

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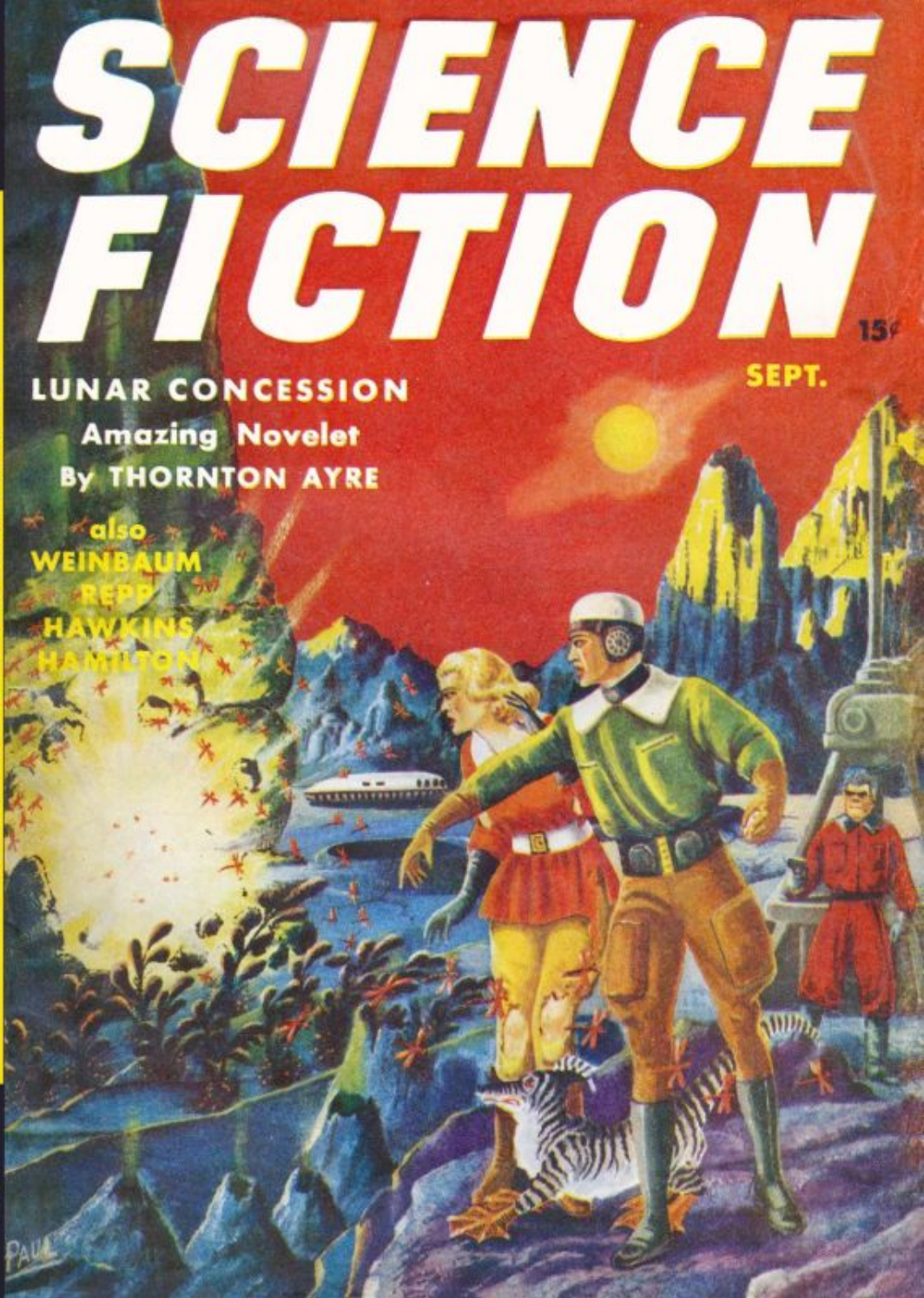
Amazing Novelet

By THORNTON AYRE

also  
WEINBAUM  
REPP  
HAWKINS  
HAMILTON

SCIENCE FICTION

1941



PAUL

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*Title:* Lunar Concession

*Date of first publication:* 1941

*Author:* John Russell Fearn (as Thornton Ayre) (1908-1960)

*Illustrator:* Frank Rudolph Paul (1884-1963)

*Date first posted:* Aug. 21, 2022

*Date last updated:* Aug. 21, 2022

Faded Page eBook #20220843

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*Against the lesser gravity, I was on him in a second!*

# LUNAR CONCESSION

By

John Russell Fearn

Writing under the pseudonym Thornton Ayre.

First published *Science Fiction*, September 1941.

*Ann was just a foolish little heiress, and her desire to spend four million to own a mining claim brought tragedy and disaster into the lives of herself and Clem, manager of her Lunar Concession—for Randi, the war-monger, meant business when he learned of the power hidden beneath the claim. . . .*

## CHAPTER I

### POWER AT AUCTION

Something of the eternal round of international squabbling, bickering over colonial rights and economic differences, was thrown in the shade in early 1987 by Dagenham Pye's amazing record flight to and from the Moon. It was not the space trip itself that was so remarkable—space travel has been in vogue now for over ten years—but it will be recalled that his meteoric speed certainly aroused interest.

He revealed that he had a new type of fuel, a little of which went a long way; that was the sum total of his information to persistent radio, television and press representatives. The fuller details of his record were only for the privileged few—and because at that time I'd done quite a little knocking around in space myself, I was present at the banquet given in his honor in the home of Ann Drew, recently become the heiress of the Drew multi-millions and owner of the powerful Drew Space Corporation by the sudden death of her father.

I hardly need to describe the lionizing and feting; you will remember the televised details—but I can take you behind the scenes to matters of a very different interest, as for instance when Ann, Count Vaston Randi, Pye, and myself all got into a huddle on the terrace. I remember that we were very eager—except Count Randi. I couldn't quite weigh the fellow up.

He was foreign, even though he spoke perfect English. I had been given to understand he was of Russian and French extraction—a pale, dark haired immaculacy, faultlessly mannered; the kind of dress-suit-Romeo it pleased a girl like Ann to have around. Beyond that he seemed harmless.

Then there was Dagenham Pye—dark and quick, with a hint of mystery in his manner and speech, a legacy of long service in the Interplanetary Secret Service before he had taken to space racing with his new fuel . . . Ann herself, incredibly blonde, incredibly fluffy, and sometimes incredibly senseless, listened most of the time to Pye's statements with her very kissable red lips parted in amazement . . .

And me? Well, I'm a pretty ordinary guy—not quite six feet, black-headed and blue-eyed, with a pile driver fist and feet big enough to tread any planet in God's universe. My name wouldn't make you turn handsprings, either—Clem Dixon, bestowed on me some thirty-three years ago—

Well, there we were on the terrace with Pye talking with his usual machine-gun rapidity, flicking cigarette ash all over his suit.

"The stuff's dynamite plus!" he declared, thumping his knee. "You see, I happened to be lucky. I spent a bit of money in buying a plot of territory on the Moon's other side, but directly under that territory I found this fuel. I'm as lucky as a man with an old time oil gusher in his back garden. Five feet below the surface of the Moon are tons of fuel. In fact, most of the Moon is hollowed out, only it happens that I have an edge over the others because I have a special way in. Besides, it looks as though my particular concession is the main fuel source."

"Whereabouts is your plot, Dag?" I asked.

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He tugged out a small, perfect scale map of the Moon's other side, traced a stumpy finger along it.

“Here are the Dawn Edge Mountains, that’s where Earthward view of the Moon ends. Now, down in all this space there is, of course, air—pulled into the deeply sunk valley caused by Earth’s perpetual gravitational drag. Nothing active or dangerous lives in the green stuff except of course the *Diggers* and *Flame Bugs*— Here’s Devil’s Nose Rock. Two miles to the east of it”—more finger jabbing—“is my plot. Just here. I bought it from the Government and I figured I might make a tidy profit out of it as a trading center, until I found this stuff below at five feet depth. That altered matters. I got samples of the stuff, had it analyzed, and—Well, a record!” he wound up blandly.

“But what possessed you to look underground?” I demanded.

“Quite an ordinary thing, really. You see, the lunar night is hellishly cold, and I noticed that the *Flame Bugs* and *Diggers* all trekked to some part of my plot at sundown. I followed them in a space-suit on one occasion—I’d have been frozen to death without its protection—and discovered a fairly wide fissure leading below. I got down and had a look around—found the *Diggers* and *Bugs* all cozy as you please . . .” He shrugged a little. “Well, I found the fuel, anyway. Being a chemist I put two and two together when I saw an eruptive crater in the underground cavern . . . But that’s another story!” he finished, with a guarded smile.

“So wonderful, don’t you think?” Ann asked brightly. “It must be marvelous to have such a scientific mind. . . You know, Daggy, you’re much too clever to just pilot a space-machine and break records. You ought to be settling affairs of state—and all that,” she wound up vaguely.

Nobody spoke for a moment. For once she’d come near truth. War was right on our horizon, blowing in from Europe in close alliance with Asia. . . Then Randi spoke in his slow, calm voice, fingertips together.

“Since this stuff is so valuable, Pye, why don’t you find a company to take it up? Expand it into a business? We need fuel like that, not only for space-travel but for armaments and war materials. The possibilities are—Well, limitless!”

Pye shrugged. “I’ve been thinking of something like that, Count. Up to now I’m the only one who has the ownership of the lunar plot, who knows exactly what the stuff looks like. Naturally, now I’ve proved the stuff’s worth, I intend to cash in on it. I’m going to start looking for a bidder as soon as possible, somebody who’ll take over the whole concession and mine the stuff. It’ll turn in a vast fortune. I call it *Potentium*, by the way. A piece the size of a garden pea will drive a space-machine to the Moon and back. I’ve proved it. That’s all I used.”

“What!” I cried incredulously. “Why, that sounds almost like atomic force!”

He shook his head slowly. “No, Clem—*potential* force; hence the name. . .”

“One moment,” Randi broke in thoughtfully. “Would you consider a private bidder for your concession? Need it of necessity be a space company?”

“Why, no. I’ve no objection to a private bidder. The check is my main interest, I guess. I don’t want the job of mining the stuff anyway—I’m not the type. The Interplanetary Secret Service made me something of a rover, you know. . . . I only said a space company because I figured they’re the only people liable to pay my price.”

“And it is?” Randi murmured, surveying the ornate ceiling.

“Two million dollars. Outright sale. Profits will multiply a thousand fold in no time.”

“Two million. So!” Randi looked momentarily rueful. “You are a business man, my friend. But suppose—”

“I’ll give you three million!” Ann exclaimed suddenly, and giggled a little. “I’ve always wanted to do something big—like this. I’d love to own a—a dynamite factory! Daddy was

always sure I'd make a business woman if I had the proper chance."

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Randi sat up as she broke off into another snicker. I fancied that for a moment I saw a queer light come into his dark, somber eyes. He flashed a glance at Pye, then back at Ann.

"But Ann, my dear, what would you *do* with this concession?" he asked gently. "Think of the details! Expert spacemen, miners, Governmental details—thousands of dollars in labor alone—"

"I'd handle that," said I, turning to her. "If you'd let me?"

"But of course!" she cried. "Oh, Clem, that's awfully decent of you, really it is. And you'll have a nice fat salary too."

Funny thing about Ann. For all her feathery, cockeyed ways she had a ring of something regular about her. A bit of a chump, yes, but she had a quality that made a guy like her.

"You really mean this?" Pye asked at last, keenly.

"Why not?" Ann demanded. "I'm wealthy enough. . ."

"I'll give you three and half million," Randi said suddenly. "That's my limit."

Ann hesitated for a moment, then she shrugged her bare, creamy shoulders and sighed, "Oh, well, make it four million. I believe in paying for things that interest me. After all, Vassy, you don't mind so very much, do you?" she pouted. "I do so want to be a businesswoman. . ."

Randi looked back at her steadily, and I thought I never saw a man kill a girl so effectively without physical force. His eyes lost that pet dog quietness and went strangely brittle and cold—but when it made no effect on Ann, his shoulders went up resignedly and his hand gently patted her arm.

"Of course not, my dear," he smiled. "I only thought I'd like to invest. Your gain is my loss. But just the same—" He stopped and demurred, smoking absently.

"Well?" Ann asked.

"Would it interfere with your business sense if I helped you? Just as your very devoted friend?"

"Why—why, no." Ann looked at me. "Would it, Clem?"

"I suppose not," I answered briefly, but I was thinking of that look in Randi's eyes. "Do what you like, Count, but just the same I'm still going to handle the man's end. I know all the answers in mining for explosive. I've had a year collecting *ampite* compound from Pluto. . ."

"You're quite indispensable, I'm sure," Randi conceded, airing his unblemished rows of ivory. "Ann is very fortunate."

I didn't reply because I was thinking I was pretty fortunate, too. I needed a job for one thing. A spell of space sickness had knocked me off the payroll of my old company and space jobs soon fill again. Illness in my racket means long unemployment. Though Ann was a close friend of mine, of any man's, for that matter, I couldn't ask her outright for money, though she'd probably have given it to me by the truckful if I had. It was better to earn it this way. Besides, there was that nasty look in Randi's eye, something in the acid flattery of his smile . . .

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"Then it's a deal?" Pye asked suddenly.

"Of course!" Ann rose to her feet and left the terrace. She came back with her check book. She scribbled with the ease of a girl with too much cash and too little sense, handed the check over. Pye nodded slowly and pulled out his wallet, laid a recognizable Interplanetary

Concession form on the wicker table, filled out the space provided for endorsement and receipt.

“And this endorses the concession over to you,” he said, handing it over. “I’ll come with you on the first trip, of course, to show you the exact nature of the stuff you’re to mine. Now, here is the formula of quantities for safe usage, which you’d better hand over to your laboratory technicians. And here is the map. . .”

I looked over Ann’s shoulder as she studied the various papers. Precious little went into her carefree head, I imagine, though she looked dutifully solemn. Still, the papers were O. K.; I could tell that at a glance. Then Randi came silently forward, but he wasn’t soon enough. I folded the papers just as he arrived and he shrugged a little, regarded me steadily.

“Surely, if I’m helping—?” he asked.

“To help doesn’t mean to know everything,” I retorted. “The formula, and concession, are Ann’s personal property—not even the property of the Drew Company unless she wishes it. It was private account, wasn’t it, Ann?”

She nodded proudly. “All my very own!”

Randi still looked at me. “You are most cautious, Mr. Dixon,” he observed.

“I guess life’s made me that way. . . .” I went over and pushed the bell, told the butler to find Sykes Henson, the Drew Company’s own lawyer. He came in, bald and perspiring, from the ballroom—but before he left he’d legally finished off the details, got Pye’s signature to numberless ready printed forms, and fastened the formula in a heavily sealed envelope signed by Ann’s own hand. Without her instructions—or mine, as her manager—nothing could be done.

And Randi was anything but pleased, even though he tried to be as courtly as ever . . .

At last I managed to get Ann away from him, left him talking to Pye. We wandered away to the edge of the rooftop terrace and gazed over the sprawling, lighted haze of New York.

“Don’t you think it’s wonderful, Clem?” she said wistfully, resting her elbows on the parapet and clasping slender fingers under her chin.

“You need a keeper,” I growled uncivilly.

“Keeper?” Her big blue eyes were astonished. “Oh, Clem, how could you—”

“You nearly chucked four million dollars down the sink,” I said, trying to be patient. “Count Randi did his utmost to muscle in and see what was written on that formula. You ought to be more careful! And see that Randi confines his interests to Earth, too! Frankly, I don’t trust him.”

“Oh, you men!” she chided, and smiled in that irresistible feminine way of hers. When she smiled like that, I wanted to stop being tough and scoop her up, frills and perfume and all, into my arms. Since I couldn’t stop being tough I went on talking.

“This thing’s got to be properly organized, and I’m the man to do it. I’ll run the expedition myself. Have I your authority to do that?”

Blonde waves nodded. “Of course. I just wouldn’t know *what* to do without you. But I’m coming on the expedition too, you know.”

“But Ann!” I protested. “There may be danger—”

“Daggy said there wasn’t. Only fleas and things—or was it bugs?” Her nose wrinkled distastefully, then she straightened up. “Anyway, I’m coming!” she announced decisively. “I’m a businesswoman now. . . .”

I couldn’t help but laugh. I couldn’t picture anything further from either a businesswoman or an explorer—but she had a determined kink in her that I think was a relic of her old man.



“All right, I’ll fix it,” I promised. “I’ll have everything under way in a week or two. . . Now let’s forget it. You owe me a dance.”

Instantly she was close against me, and I felt as we floated into the ballroom, with her blonde head so close to me, that I had a sudden task in life—to protect this generous little fool against the subtle courtesies of a gentleman who had a smile about as friendly as pack ice.

## CHAPTER II SUICIDE?

In three weeks I had things pretty well sorted out, had made all the necessary plans for a preliminary investigation of Pye's lunar concession. If it was all it was claimed to be, it would be a simple matter afterwards to transport the necessary mining engineers.

I fixed it so that I was to be pilot of the investigation ship. Pye was also to come along, of course, as adviser. Then there was Ann: she made it clear she wouldn't take any refusal. Last but not least there was my pet swamp hound from Venus—"Snoops."

Queer little chap, Snoops—not unlike a chow in shape, but there any similarity ended. He had webbed feet, one very serious blue eye in the middle of his forehead, a coat as soft as eiderdown, and a fanlike tail. Normally, he had a temper like a dove, but he could be unbelievably savage when roused, and never forgot a harsh word or injury.

Since he had been instrumental in saving my life on an ill-starred Venusian swamp expedition, I felt it almost a duty to look after him, and to my gratification Earth- and space-life seemed to suit him perfectly . . .

That was the sum total of our party. We fixed the date for July 7, 1987, and since I had ordered the strictest secrecy, there were only a few mechanics to watch us when we took off from the Drew space-grounds. . . Once we were free of the atmosphere, I put the automatic pilot in action and turned back into the main living room.

You can imagine my indignant surprise when I saw a long, dark haired figure murmuring flatteries to Ann. Pye was taking no part in the proceedings, was seated smoking in a corner, regarding Count Randi with a rather disgusted stare.

"How did you get aboard?" I demanded, coming forward. "Without wishing to give offense, Count, you were not invited!"

He smiled at me; an ill-disguised smile of triumph. "But I was," he corrected. "Ann herself saw to that. Didn't you, my dear?"

She flushed just a little as she turned to me. Shyly she said, "Well you see, Clem, Vassy was so persistent in his wish to help me that I just had to be a regular fellow. I—I mean—Well, I put him in the wardrobe in my room until the trip began and—Oh, why do you stare at me like that?" she broke off tearfully, as I stood grimly listening. "One might think I—I had no say in this thing at all!" Out came her square inch of silk and dabbed her watering eyes.

I looked squarely at Randi. "In other words, you just muscled in," I stated bitterly. "I might have known it! You twisted Ann around your little finger to get in on this expedition and find out all there is to know. . . . Well, I'm in charge here, and if there's one hint of anything suspicious from you, I'll fix you so the authorities will take care of it when we get back to Earth. So long as you behave yourself, you can string along. But watch yourself!"

"One would think you don't like me," he sighed, lighting a cigarette.

"I don't!" I snapped. "And neither would Ann if she'd had many men to deal with!"

---

That started her off properly and the waterworks went onto overtime. Randi gave me a slimy sort of grin and started to console her. I gave it up and went back to the control room. I was beginning to feel fed up already with the whole darned business, mainly because I

couldn't figure out what Randi was driving at, and because Ann had such a crazily generous streak in her.

I took a good look at our objective floating serenely in space, almost at the full—then Pye came in and regarded me dubiously.

“Look here, Clem, I hope you don't think I had anything to do with Randi coming along,” he said anxiously. “I only—”

“You're all right, Dag,” I interrupted him. “But it sure looks as though your concession is starting trouble already. What exactly, I don't know, but we'll soon find out. . .”

He nodded slowly, moodily switched on the radio. The same old Earth jargon came floating through on the ultra-short waves.

“War is imminent! All Europe and Asia stands ready for a supreme conquest! Every man must stand to arms—every woman must prepare for sacrifice. . .! Today the American authorities rounded up a ring of European espionage agents. The ringleader, the notorious Valon Kintroff, is still missing and—”

Pye savagely switched off, stormed up and down the little chamber.

“War! Espionage!” he shouted bitterly. “What the hell's the use of anything any more? The whole damned world upside down. . . It makes me sick!”

He turned and went glumly out. Randi, who had heard his outburst, made an observation about killing being an art. That seemed to set Pye thinking, for the next time I saw him through the glass partition he was seated in the living room with his head buried in his hands, musing.

Ann's display of tears had stopped and she was playing a game with Randi—the current craze of “Give and Take,” not unlike a great grandchild of mid-century “Monopoly.” From what I heard, Randi was winning. The game finished with Ann owing him an imaginary continent, and following the rule of the game she gloomily signed the paper stating her likewise imaginary debt.

Idly I watched Randi push the paper laughingly in his pocket, then I turned back to my observation window and stared out on the velvet dark of space, the glowing silver of our goal.

A sudden antithesis swept over me. Squabbling on Earth, for what? And out here the sublime, indescribable glory of infinitude—that had been, that would be, long after man had become a wisp of dust in eternal time. Out in space it is impossible to believe in tawdry humans. They just haven't any part. . .

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We measured our days and nights by clocks, of course, and they went quietly enough at first.

Pye, for his own amusement, typed out a daily log of events, one of which included our stoppage at the half way line by the ever active Space Patrol. We were searched, asked to produce every legitimate reason for our moonward journey, then allowed to proceed. . .

But for the most part Pye seemed intensely preoccupied about something, and all my efforts to get at the trouble were unavailing. Then, on the fourth morning, we met up with tragedy. While the rest of us had been asleep poor Pye had committed suicide!

There seemed no doubt about it—there was a typewritten letter in his quite orderly cabin, a letter which intimated he was too afraid of world crisis and war to live any longer. He would rather be out of it all.

He must have opened the emergency airlock and jumped outside into the void. Anyway, there was a charred gray speck keeping close to the ship all the time, which could only be

Pye's corpse caught by our attraction field. . .

It hit me badly; I'd liked Pye. I recalled his outburst in the control room, his recent thoughtful mood—but even then I couldn't somehow reconcile the facts with his natural space roving toughness. The business got me worried—but there it was. What could I do?

Randi seemed sorry, but that was all. Poor Ann had a great chance to go prostrate and stay in her room with an attack of grief. I do think, though, that she really *was* deeply sorry. She loved most people with genuine, sex-free affection, and Pye's untimely end struck her deep. It put a new face on the expedition, too. We would simply have to trust to luck that we'd find the right stuff. We had all the directions, except the most vital one of all. . .

Ann and I tried our best to avoid looking at the gray corpse behind us, but I saw Randi studying it once and blowing smoke rings at the same time. . .

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With ordinary fuel, such as we were using, it is about six and half days' journey to the Moon, and after Pye's decease things passed fairly quietly. Ann was much quieter; Randi spent a good deal of time with her. I spent mine either playing with Snoops or watching the great globe of Moon rising through space, the notched fingers of shadows cast across its waning disk. . .

And finally it came time for the landing. . .

We dropped within a mile of Devil's Nose Rock. The sun was half way to the zenith, just clear of Dawn Edge Mountains, a range entirely encircling the huge valley which forms the moon's other side.

From our position, part of the valley was spread out before us, sweeping down into a deep, verdure-filled cup. Here and there amidst the sprawling green—day vegetation only, withering in the bitter cold of the fortnight long lunar night—smoked and fumed carbon dioxide geysers, connected by natural shafts to the dying fires of the Moon's core. Carbon dioxide, broken down by the plentiful supplies of ephemeral green stuff, formed into breathable oxygen of almost earthly density. Such a thing could only exist in this gravity-drawn valley—for, as science has proved, the earthward surface of the Moon is dead—airless and finished.

Here in the valley the shadows had lost their savage black and white aspect; they were softly tempered as an earth shadow, and through the midst of them swarmed the strange lunar *Flame Bugs*—myriads of them, a little larger than dragonflies, sweeping in endless hordes in and out of the glancing, pouring sunshine, revelling in the protracted day. . .

And then there were the *Diggers*. We couldn't see them from the ship, but from record—and Pye's own observations—the place teemed with them—savagely active, molelike creatures, forever burrowing with a seeming blind purposelessness, but probably because being heat lovers they were always trying to get nearer to the Moon's still smoldering, internal fires.

"Interesting," observed Randi at last, his eyes fixed on the distant, unmistakable formation of Devil's Nose Rock. "Just the same, with all these thousands of clefts and ruts in the valley side, it's going to be no picnic trying to find Pye's fissure. He could have taken us straight to it. . ."

"It's wonderful!" Ann broke in excitedly, the business of our mission right over her head for the moment. "I've never seen anything away from Earth before. Just look at those darling little Flame Fleas. . . It makes me want to go out with a net and catch them. I brought one, you know, on the off chance."

“We didn’t come here to hunt those things, Ann,” I said, a bit tartly. “And you’d better get into suitable clothes, too. We’re going outside. Don’t forget a topee, too.”

She nodded promptly. “I’ll wear a dark blue silk blouse to match the sky,” she said thoughtfully, and with that she tripped off merrily. I turned from watching her to find Randi eyeing me.

“Suppose, Dixon, we come to grips?” he suggested levelly.

“Meaning what?”

“That you drop your high-handed attitude and include me in on this investigation? Be reasonable, man, and stop trying to freeze me out. After all, I’m not trying to do anything except help Ann.”

“I don’t believe you,” I answered bluntly. “However, I have to admit that I can’t very well stop you helping us. Just the same I’ll watch that you make no use of anything you may learn.”

“Always looking ahead,” he said regretfully. “What a pity we haven’t Pye to help us.”

His gaze rose for a moment to the spired heights of Dawn Edge Mountains. I knew in that moment that he was thinking of the gray speck that had dropped there as we’d landed—Then he turned aside without a word and went off to dress.

## CHAPTER III TRICKERY!

Half an hour later we were outside in the blazing sunshine. Ann fell over twice in her excitement, forgetting the lesser gravity after the ship's attractive plates—but it didn't dampen her spirits and rather pointless vaporings.

Randi and I walked silently together, and Snoops came up behind us, sniffing suspiciously. In fact, I never saw him quite so perturbed. His absurd tail was standing upright, an action I'd learned to interpret as a prelude to his rare fits of passion. Glancing around, however, I could see no reason then for his mood. Everything was quiet. The hot sun, the distant verdure, the scorching rocks. . .

I pulled out Pye's map and studied it carefully, made measurements, pointed out directions, but although we wandered for nearly two hours, we could not find that one elusive fissure that gave ingress to the underworld. As Randi had remarked, the surface around Devil's Nose Rock was cracked into millions of fissures, nearly every one of them blind, and to find one in particular that went clean through to below, without a specific guide, was a next to impossible feat.

"We might never find it without assistance," Randi remarked, as we halted to review the position. "Unless we wait until night when the *Diggers* and *Bugs* head for below."

"And that means working in space-suits because of the cold," I grunted. "Wasting valuable hours of time. . ."

"There is one other way," he said thoughtfully. "Pye said the underworld begins at five feet down. If we get out the drilling apparatus there's nothing to stop us drilling a shaft of our own and be damned to the fissure."

"Now why didn't I think of that!" Ann exclaimed.

"Guess you're right, Randi," I had to admit; and we returned to the ship for equipment, set it up in the approximate center of the area Pye had owned. . .

Starting up the automatic driller, we watched it commence its steady biting into the rocks. A slow haze of dust began to rise in the quivering hot atmosphere. The three of us sat down thankfully on the rocks and relaxed.

"Just look at those flame things!" Ann exclaimed presently, shading her eyes. "Millions of them. Don't you think it would be wonderful if we collected some?"

"What the deuce for?" I asked blankly. "They're already catalogued in the Planetary Museum, anyhow."

"I know—but think how lovely a score of them would look, professionally dried and hardened, on an evening frock. I'd be the rage of New York!"

I just couldn't answer that. Here was a girl with four million dollars banked in us finding *Potentium*, and she had to talk about evening frocks! It was clear, though, that the things fascinated her. Chasing about in the lesser gravity with a butterfly net would be just about her idea of a thrill. . . She went on vaporing idly, but I didn't listen.

---

I was eagerly watching the drill's slow progress as it bit a two-foot wide circle in the rock and hardened pumice. I turned to comment on it to Randi, then paused at a sudden bass growling from Snoops. The three of us looked up sharply. Ann was the first to cry out.

“Look! Moles like lobsters!” she shouted. “Oh, Clem, aren’t they cute—”

“*Diggers!*” I interrupted her, watching them. “I might have known it. They seem to scent it when anybody or anything starts to dig downwards. Take it easy. They’re harmless enough.”

We studied perhaps a score of the strange looking gray shapes as they came towards us on their crablike feet. Their mouths, fitted by Nature with a naturally sharp drill in swordfish fashion, were opening and shutting spasmodically, following the usual custom of biting invisible mites in the air—

Then all of a sudden there was confusion. Snoop’s growling abruptly veered off into a hoot of fury. He shot outwards like a gigantic muff and charged at the advancing creatures. Immediately they scattered, then came back to the attack. Inside seconds Snoops and *Diggers* were mixed up in a snapping, snarling mass of dust and flying pebbles.

Randi grinned sardonically. “Evidently that swamp hound of yours doesn’t like *Diggers*,” he commented, obviously enough. “Sort of cat and dog act—”

“Snoops! Come here!” I bawled, racing down into the melee. “Come here, damn you—!”

I plowed through the midst of the drilling little devils, kicked them to one side, tore off those that had fastened their pincer claws into Snoops’ fluffy body. He was bleeding a little. A drop or two fell on my trousers and the *Diggers* flew for it right away until I clubbed them off with my revolver.

Breathless, Snoops hugged tightly to me, I stumbled back to Randi and Ann. Instantly she took Snoops from me, cuddled him under her arm and softly stroked his head.

“There now, poor little Snoopsy. Did he get cross, then. . .”

“Better keep him locked up after this,” Randi suggested dryly. “He may get hurt if you don’t, and I’d hate to have that happen.”

If Ann hadn’t been present, I’d have called him something. As it was, I looked back at the slowly returning *Diggers*—then Ann went into action with a very feminine but very determined “shooing” act. Her war-like leaps and noises were enough to keep the *Diggers* away. In the intervals, she took Snoops to the ship and gradually bound him up with lint tied in chocolate box bows. . .

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In two hours our drill had gone down three feet, moving more slowly now on account of the tougher material packed below. There was little to be gained by just watching, so we returned to the ship for a rest and a meal and left the apparatus to its own devices.

With some astonishment we found we’d been at work for eight hours. Time is like that on the Moon. The protracted day—the slow movement of the sun across the heavens—the lesser gravity. They all play havoc with one’s sense of timing . . . It was the meal that showed us how the burning heat had tired us.

There were no objections at my suggestion that we should get some sleep before restarting work. My last vision before I securely closed the airlock was of the *Diggers* nosing around our still operating drill, and the eternal *Flame Bugs* swirling in the sunshine. Then I went off to my room to grab some rest, leaving Snoops in the control room on guard. . .

In fact it was Snoops who awakened me—his snuffling, prodding muzzle dug insistently into my ribs until I was forced to take notice of him. I sat up yawning, saw through the window that the sun was considerably higher in the sky. According to my watch, another eight hours had passed. The drill ought to be through by this time.

I washed and tidied myself up, then I became aware that Snoops was remarkably anxious about something. He ran in and out of my room, finally clamped his teeth on my trouser-leg,

and began to pull me insistently.

The moment I entered the control room I got a shock. The airlock was wide open—open to the drowsy stillness of the lunar mid-day. That started me on a wild search, and in three minutes I found that it was Ann who was missing! Randi wanted to know what was wrong, but I'd no time to waste on him. Instead I followed Snoops' anxious prowling, went with him across the burning rocks towards our now-deserted drilling equipment.

As I'd expected, the work had finished itself and a bottomless, narrow hole lay beneath the automatically stopped drill. I stared at the shaft, then started at a sudden cry from its dark depths.

"Help! Is that somebody there? Clemmy, it's you!"

"Ann!" I yelled, both in relief and amazement, flinging myself flat on the shaft edge. "Where the devil are you?" I shaded my eyes.

"Down here, of course! I'm too short to get up and the shaft edge is too smooth. See—here's my hand!"

I watched intently and saw something vague and white twisting in the gloom. I reached to the limit and grasped it tightly.

"How the devil did you get here?" I demanded, staring at the smudge I took to be her face.

"I—I fell in, and I'm scared. Help me up!"

I reached down both hands, gripped her upflung wrists, and heaved. The weak gravity and her own natural lightness made it pretty easy. In a few moments I'd lifted her up bodily and set her down on the rocks.

She was filthy dirty, her bare arms caked in dust, her hair and face smothered. For a long time she sat with her knuckles crammed in her eyes at the blinding glare of sunshine. Then by degrees she looked at me—and I just couldn't stop myself bellowing with laughter at her comic, filthy appearance.

"It isn't funny!" she complained, shuddering as she surveyed herself. Then she said, "You see, Clem, I couldn't sleep properly. I was too hot. I could see the *Flame Bugs* through my window and I got to thinking about that evening frock. . . Well, I got out my net and decided to hunt them. I went quietly and took Snoops with me as protection from the *Diggers*. I found when I got here that the *Diggers* had gone and that this shaft was finished. . . I leaned over to look down, but I guess Snoops thought I was playing a game. He charged playfully at me, I lost my balance, and down the shaft we both went. I wasn't hurt much because the gravity's so silly—but I couldn't get up again without help. I'm too small."

---

She stopped and stared at me ruefully, wiping her face. I tried not to grin and asked politely, "And what then?"

"Well, I wandered about a little, trying to decide what to do. There were a lot of *Flame Bugs* flying about, and since they give a phosphorescent sort of light, I could see pretty well—so I went along the narrow tunnel into which I'd dropped. This tunnel ended in a huge cave, and I think it's the one Daggy Pye was talking about."

"It was!" I cried eagerly. "Then you—"

"There were other tunnels and more caves beyond it," she went on seriously. "Sort of all the insides of the Moon. But there was something else, Clem—something that scared the wits out of me—a great rumbling and roaring noise from somewhere deep inside the Moon; and there were hot winds and things, too. I saw the reflection of white light cast on the walls, and in the shadows there were thousands of *Diggers* crouched around in a kind of luminous crater.



I think our newly-made shaft provided an easier way into the ground than the fissure they usually use. . . But around the floor there were little chunks of brittle gray stuff. Like this. . .”

She fished in her blouse pocket and tugged out a shiny piece of stuff like extremely battered aluminum.

“Then I lifted Snoops up our shaft in the hope he’d find you and bring you,” she finished, handing the lump of stuff to me. “Think it might be what we’re looking for?”

I studied it intently, and as I was doing so, footsteps came crunching up and Randi appeared.

“Interesting, isn’t it?” he asked slowly, squatting down. He glanced at Ann. “I heard most of what you had to say as I came up,” he remarked. “Sound carries very well in this still air.”

“Think this might be what we’re searching for?” I asked, handing the lump over.

He shrugged, studied it, then stood up. With a sudden effort, he heaved it an enormous distance. We all watched its flight—then the three of us were abruptly lifted from the ground and pressed back hard against the rocks by the force of a terrific explosion.

It looked as though the whole verdure-filled valley rocked and swam under that stunning impact. *Flame Bugs* went hurtling like driven mist; the distant trees swayed and bent. . . Then all was still once more.

Very slowly I rose from shielding Ann. She was nearly crying with alarm. I noticed in that moment that Randi was not over startled; he was looking towards the scene of the explosion with a dreamy expression in his eyes. I saw his thin hands clench momentarily.

“It *is* *Potentium*!” I exclaimed at last.

“Exactly,” he agreed thoughtfully. “*Potentium*. Crystallized energy, stored up through millions of years. Release of natural forces.”

“What the blazes are you talking about?” I demanded, scrambling up. “Did you know it would explode like that?”

“If it *was* *Potentium*—yes.”

“And I wandered about with that awful stuff in my pocket!” Ann cried, suddenly shaking. “If I’d trodden on the stuff, or slipped, or anything—Oh, Clem! Do you realize. . .”

She didn’t finish; the thought was too awesome for her, though I decided the light pull of gravity wouldn’t make her doll-like weight very heavy on a piece of *Potentium* anyway.

“You see,” Randi said, looking at us both, “I’m rather more of a scientist than you two think—and I also believe in turning Nature’s efforts to good use, if possible.” He pointed to the ten-foot crater the stuff had blown. “Look at that—from a thing the size of a Brazil nut. Imagine, then, a shell of a ton or so in weight, made of *Potentium*, dropped in the middle of a civilized city! Nothing—absolutely nothing—could stand against it. Whoever owned such a power could dominate all nations, all Governments—perhaps all planets. . .”

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Ann gave a little gasp of alarm. “Vassy, whatever do you mean? You talk like a warmonger  
—”

“I am,” he said steadily, regarding her with a cold smile. Then with lightning suddenness, he whipped his revolver from its holster, covered us both steadily. Stupidly Ann and I raised our hands.

“We came for fuel,” he went on calmly. “And we’ve found it rather more quickly than I expected—thanks to Ann’s fool blunderings with a butterfly net. As an explosive material for rockets *Potentium* has certainly no equal—but I’m not interested in rockets. I regard the stuff as a supreme war weapon.”

“You mean you’re working for some foreign power?” I grated out.

“Yes. You may have heard of a missing espionage agent—one Valon Kintroff. That’s me. . . You see, my government has ways and means of learning things. They found out that when Pye made his space-record trip, he was using hardly any fuel at all. Before he set out from earth, paid agents—in the guise of mechanics and so on—removed a small quantity of his fuel and sent it to our laboratories for analysis. It was found to possess an enormous amount of stored energy, released by the action of friction or heavy, successive blows. A lump the size of a pea, as Pye told us, was quite sufficient to drive him the 480,000 miles to the Moon and back. . .”

“Then?” I asked bitterly.

“I was assigned to learn all about the fuel—obtain it by any possible means without exciting suspicion. As you know, the Space Patrol prevents us from doing anything but legitimate business on any planet. No amount of bribery or corruption can get a paid agent in the Space Patrol. I could not, therefore, by any stretch of ingenuity, jump a concession on Luna—nor could I import the necessary machinery. The only thing to do was to line up with somebody who *had* a legitimate purpose and then work things my own way. I went to work, found out by devious means that Pye was prepared to sell his fuel secret, that its source was on the Moon.

“I realized he’d sell to the biggest company—the Drew. So I struck up an apparently amorous acquaintance with you, Ann. Pye did as I’d hoped, and I tried to get the concession to save further trouble. You outbid me, Ann, so I let you have it and kept by you all the same. . . All very simple, isn’t it?”

I looked at him helplessly, said savagely, “Are you fool enough to think you can get away with this, Randi? You—”

“I know I can,” he answered me, complacently. “Accidents on the Moon—death of famous heiress and young space-explorer. . . Very easy. Oh, yes! Pye was the fly in the ointment. He did not suspect anything until I gather he heard something over the radio about a missing espionage agent—Kintroff. As you know, Pye was once in the Secret Service. He’d unfortunately seen my record photograph and started to recognize me. . . . He came into my room to know the truth while you two were asleep. We fought it out. He ended up through the emergency lock. . . You see, of the two evils of him giving me away, or losing him and the exact location of *Potentium*, I decided the latter was the lesser. Naturally I typed his suicide note. I remembered his outburst about war and kindred things. Perfect link up for me.”

“So it *was* murder!” I roared. “You damned, rotten snake! I suspected it, but I couldn’t prove it. . .”

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Randi grinned a little as I glared at him. Ann looked at me helplessly. Behind us Snoops snuffled impatiently.

“You know, Dixon, you’re something of a fool,” Randi commented. “If you were anything of a scientist—such as I think I am—you would have seen the possibilities of this fuel for yourself. Don’t you see what’s happened here on the Moon? The titanic craters and mountain ranges could possibly have been caused by volcanic and internal upheaval—but not *probably*. . . Nature is ever expending her force. Some of it passes away into space; some of it changes into invisible radiation—but quite a quantity of it is stored up in materials.

“Coal, for instance, discharges long accumulated solar energy. In the ultimate state of a world like this one, vast amounts of energy are liable to be stored up in the rocks in a locked,

potential form. The forces that blew these vast craters are no longer active—they're inert, awaiting powerful impact to release them—just as coal seams will not burn until the coal is removed and placed on a fire. That is the nature of this fuel—locked energy—a planet with great areas of its underworld holding enormous supplies of leashed force—*Potentium*, as Pye so aptly called it. Control of that stuff—”

That was about the limit of what I could stand. Randi's sneering voice, his supercilious explanation, his absolute belief in his mastery of the situation, did something to me. With an almost mechanical impulse, I suddenly dropped my hands and charged forward. Against the lesser gravity, I was on him in a second; his revolver went off violently and fell a few feet away. In the confusion I saw Ann snatch at it gingerly.

Then Snoops joined in, lip drawn back over his teeth, his single eye flaming hate. He'd never liked Randi anyhow, and my sudden attack was sufficient to release his terrific temper.

I punched and pounded Randi with all the force I could muster, and that was plenty with muscular power rating so high—but in Randi I was dealing with a man of unsuspected strength. He was no boxer, but his wrestling holds were wicked. Before I knew what had happened, I was underneath him with his crushing fingers at my throat.

Snoops charged in with snarling muzzle, only to fly backwards as Randi lashed out with his heavy boot. The blow hit Snoops clean on the head, stunned him completely with its violence. . . . That incident lent me added fury and I struggled again with the force of a maniac.

Out of the tail of my eye I saw Ann dancing around frantically with the revolver butt foremost in her hand. Down it came, aimed unerringly at Randi—but at that identical moment my strugglings succeeded and I came uppermost, got the full force of the revolver blow on my left temple.

I saw a soundless flash of fire—

## CHAPTER IV POWER AND PEACE

A deep, rumbling, beating roar thundered in my ears. The ground was shaking underneath me. Stiffly, I twisted around and tried to bring up my hands to my head—only I couldn't. They were bound securely at my sides. In fact my whole body was bound so tightly I could not even bend my knees.

For a moment I lay passive on rough stone, gazing at a remote, lofty ceiling of rock, lighted by the eternal dancing of the *Flame Bugs*—and something else. A vast, distorted wavering shadow was cast on the wall in front of me, the ragged outlines of a man, his head bent as he looked downwards.

I twisted around at that, and the first thing I saw was Ann beside me, similarly bound. She flicked her eyes towards the figure of Randi standing some little distance away. . . . The scene rather awed me for a moment—the vision of him staring down into some kind of crater, its creamy glow fanning upwards with the radiance of white hot fire. Hot winds were swirling through the cavern; the deep, remote muffled boomings gave a little insight to the titanic battle of forces still being waged deep in the moon's core, probably at the bottom of that colossal shaft.

“What happened?” I whispered, wishing my head didn't ache so abominably.

“I'm sorry I hit you,” she muttered. “It was a complete accident. He overpowered me in a moment, brought me down here, and then brought you as well. He tied us up together with his belt while he went to the ship and got some rope. . . . Funny thing, he saved a length of the rope for something, and also brought a bottle of acid from our supplies.”

“Acid!” I cried.

My voice carried to Randi. He turned and came slowly forward, smiling complacently.

“So you've recovered, Dixon,” he murmured. “And are wondering about my acid bottle, eh? Well, you'll soon see its purpose. At least I shall be able to spare myself the thought that I ill treated either of you. It will be so swift—so sudden—there can be no question of lingering pain. . . . However, first there is work to be done.”

He turned away and went swiftly out of the cavern. The moment he'd gone I set to work on my ropes. Ann and I sat back to back and worked with desperate fury, she pulling at my knots and I at hers—but we might as well have tried to open a bank vault with a toothpick for all the good we accomplished. Those knots were so damned tight it would take hours to unfasten them working under such conditions.

The idea of rubbing the rope against stone was ruled out too in case we happened to choose a piece of *Potentium* and the friction would blow us to infinity. . . .

So by the time Randi came back, we were pretty exhausted. He had only that same smile on his sallow face. With him he had brought four ordinary metal chests from the ship, carefully lined with cotton wool and waste rags. Ann and I watched in silence as he moved about the cavern, picking up gray, metallic hunks of the explosive rock and laying it with gentle care in the crates, taking supreme pains to wrap each piece separately. As each crate became full he departed with it, walking on tip toe to avoid all chance of jar—and, thanks to his precautions and the lightness of the gravitation, he got all his crates full and removed them, presumably to the ship.

Then he came back with three strong poles which he proceeded to erect with significant silence in the cavern's center. By the time he'd finished, he had a stand like a camp fire tripod with a massive hunk of rock suspended from the center by the surplus length of rope. He regarded it like an artist finishing a masterpiece, just glanced at us amusedly, then searched around until he found a large, odd piece of *Potentium*. Carefully he placed it on the floor directly under the suspended rock.

"I wonder," he said, turning, "if I need to explain this?"

"You know damn well you don't!" I raged. "If this is your idea of fighting for your country, you've some plenty foul ideas! Why can't you and I fight it out? Leave Ann out of it! She—"

"Knows everything, like you," he murmured. "And that, unhappily, is a chance I cannot afford to take. You see, this piece of rock is large enough to weigh pretty heavy even in this gravity. Now, if I sprinkle nitric acid on the supporting rope, it will rapidly eat through it. Down comes rock, explodes *Potentium* underneath, and— Well, I can imagine my reporting a tragic lunar accident in which two well known people lost their lives. . . . And I have three crates full of *Potentium*, enough to make bombs to blow all enemy civilizations from the face of the Earth.

"Then, in the future, I may return here with others. This cave will assuredly be blasted to dust, but not all traces of *Potentium* will vanish from the moon. I shall dig for it again, be the heir to it, because it was your dying wish, Ann, that it should be so."

"You—you can't do this, Vassy!" she screamed frantically, lashing her bound body. "You just can't—"

"Who's going to believe you, anyway?" I broke in furiously. "You'll be caught by the Drew Company and made to explain!"

"Which I shall—very satisfactorily," he smiled. "You see, Ann, you have made the entire concession over to me. It was your dying wish."

"I—I didn't! It—it isn't!" she stammered despairingly; then she took refuge in tears. I lay glaring up at Randi.

"What in hell are you talking about?" I grated. "You've got no authority, and never will have."

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For answer he tugged out a sheet of paper from his pocket and held it for us to see. Both Ann and I stared in speechless amazement at a statement in Randi's handwriting that the entire concession and formula were under his control. That was plain enough, but the extraordinary part about it was Ann's unmistakable, flowing signature at the end.

"You see, it is not a forgery," Randi commented dryly.

"But—but how—?" Ann gasped, "That's my signature, yes. Even my bank manager would swear to it, but—"

"A little game of 'Give and Take'," Randi said softly, refolding the paper. "You remember how we played it on the journey? I believe I won an entire imaginary continent from you. In accordance with the rules, you gave me your signature for it, just as on an I. O. U. I wrote the statement of the game debt at the top of the sheet, and you signed at the bottom. To you it was just a game of fun—to me a game of reality. I had merely to tear the top off the sheet and substitute these other vital words underneath. . . . Need I remind you that the Expeditionary Clause in the new Space Law makes it legal—as in the constantly existent case of a soldier—"

for a dying person on an expedition to make a last will without the presence of witnesses, provided the signature is approved by experts. . .?”

“Why, you infernal swine!” I yelled. “You dared to do that? Is there nothing safe from your rotten fingers? And if you wanted to kill us, why resort to this? You killed Pye without compunction; what stopped you on our account?”

“Well, I wanted to be sure that *Potentium* could be found first, otherwise my accident story and false concession would have been useless and I’d have found myself in difficulties. But as it is—”

He shrugged and turned aside, pulled a bottle from his pocket. Ann and I could only watch helplessly as an oily, corrosive fluid poured from the bottle onto the rope suspending the improvised pile driver. At the finish of his performance, Randi threw the bottle away with a flourish, regarded the wisping smoke already rising from the rope into the disturbed air.

“I should say . . . about fifteen minutes,” he commented, glancing at his watch. “That will give me ample time to get away from the Moon into space—and I have an idea that the Moon’s surface will change a deal in the upheaval, enough anyhow to substantiate my story of an accident.” He stopped and regarded us. “It’s been nice knowing you,” he chuckled, then he went softly from the cavern and vanished in the outlet tunnel beyond.

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It seemed that Ann and I lay gazing for an eternity at that gently smoking rope before the full horror of our predicament hammered in upon us—then we both started to thresh and struggle with desperate energy, straining and tugging until the skin round our wrist ropes was bleeding and broken.

Disturbed by our activities one or two *Diggers* came from out of the warm shadows. I called to them as a last desperate measure. If only I could get them to work they’d drill through the ropes in a moment—but all the little devils did was to sit like rats and watch us, basking in the warmth from the central crater shaft.

“No dice,” I panted at last. “They haven’t the brains to know what I mean. We’ll have to try rolling towards the tripod—”

“No—no, wait!” Ann screamed. “You can’t pick your way like you can when walking. There are bits of *Potentium* all over the floor. If your weight crushes one of them we’ll go sky high.”

“And what do you think we’ll do when that blasted rock falls?” I demanded desperately. “This is the lesser of the two evils. Come on!” And I started rolling with frantic speed, digging my bound heels into the floor to help me along. I couldn’t have stood upright, anyhow; I was too tightly bound.

Little by little I edged my way along, moving towards the *Potentium* under the tripod in the hope that I might be able somehow to push it away—but the distance! It seemed to me like hundreds of miles. And suddenly the rock swayed ever so slightly as one strand of the rope parted smokingly.

“Clem, it’s going!” Ann screeched. “It’s going!”

“Keep rolling!” I ordered, and made myself sound savage to stop her going hysterical—though I knew it didn’t matter much anyhow. The rate I was going at I’d never reach the darn thing in time, anyhow. . .

Then, half way in a roll, I stopped at a sudden sound down the outlet tunnel. Not a second later Snoops came into view—limping badly, blood dripping from a battered jaw, a deep gash

across his skull where the fur had been torn away. I stared at him in momentary horror. In the intensity of the moment, I had forgotten all about him.

“He’s hurt!” Ann cried. “Look, he’s bleeding. . . .”

“Come here, Snoops!” I ordered wildly, making motions with my body. “Bite! In God’s name, animal—bite!”

Bite! That was the last thing the affectionate old fool did. He lay down, plainly exhausted, and licked my hand languidly. I felt the warm drip of blood drops as he made the action.

“*Bite!*” I screamed. “Dammit, Snoops—*bite!*”

He licked my bound right hand again, more affectionately than ever—and also more wearily. I couldn’t figure how he’d gotten into such a state, why he’d been so long coming. Unless that devil Randi—

Then my thoughts were interrupted by a violent commotion in the shadows. Like a sudden tide a mass of *Diggers* came swarming into view, eyes glinting fiendishly, their terrible drilling muzzles projected for action. Ann and I watched in blank horror as they swept towards us—but they left her alone entirely and instead plunged for me.

Exhausted though he was, Snoops was on his feet again instantly, snarling defensively, and this time there was nothing I could do to save matters. Fighting began instantly—a swearing, snapping mass swarming about the cave, piling thick and fast on poor old Snoops until he went down with a crash. . . . But I noticed something else too. Savagely sharp drills were boring into my right hand, through the rope that pinioned it. Almost before I realized what was happening, my hand was free!

“It’s the blood—Snoops’ blood!” Ann shouted hysterically, staring at me. “It happened in that other fight—when it got on your clothes. . . . It’s on your ropes. . . . The *Diggers*—attracted them—enemies. . . .” She got no further, collapsed in her bonds, utterly overcome.

I didn’t wait to ask whys or wherefores. I hurled off the remaining *Diggers*, ripped my hand free, tugged out my left arm from the loosened rope, then dragged myself as fast as I could go along the cavern floor, fell flat by the tripod.

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With infinite care, I dragged out the *Potentium* from beneath. Hardly had I pushed it to a safe distance than the supported rock came down with a bang that made a dent in the soft floor and sent dust swirling wildly. . . .

I was shaking with reaction, had to lie prone to still my slamming heart. Then at last I was calmer, tore the remaining rope from my body and released Ann, raised her in my arms.

I was glad she didn’t see the carnage I was forced to gaze upon—the swarming masses of *Diggers* over the lacerated corpse of poor old Snoops. I knew in those moments that all aid I could give was unwanted. . . . Slowly I went out of the cavern.

As I neared the surface opening, Ann recovered again, but I still carried her. Without saying anything, I lifted her up to the rim of the surface hole and she scrambled outside. With my greater height, I got up without assistance, just as Randi must have done.

“Even though we’ve got out of that mess, we’re not much better off,” Ann remarked moodily, gazing at the blue-black sky. “I don’t see the ship anywhere up there, so I guess he’s gone. . . . Taken all the drilling apparatus, too,” she went on, surveying the deserted space. Then she looked at me quickly. “Where’s Snoops? We must have left him below—”

“For good,” I said seriously. “Anyhow, he died being loyal.”

We began to walk aimlessly; then she said, “Well, I was right about the blood on your rope attracting the *Diggers*, anyway. They and Snoops were sworn enemies—” She broke off.

“Look!” she cried in amazement, as we turned the corner of the rock that gave access to the main valley side.

I saw immediately what she meant. Our ship was where it had been all the time—but that wasn’t the main point. I raced forward in long leaps to land beside the sprawling body of a man—Randi! Ann turned away with a little shudder as I turned him over. Just for a moment I felt pretty squeamish, too. His neck was lacerated mercilessly from ear to ear. Across his face were the unmistakable marks of canine teeth.

Gently I let him fall back on the crimson stained dust.

“Snoops!” I breathed, suddenly understanding. “Ann, don’t you realize—? That was why Snoops took so long in joining us. He hated Randi; he hated him more after he stunned him so violently. He must have waited his chance and then sprung—probably from this very rock. And he made no mistake. Got the jugular. . .”

“But Randi made a lot of trips,” Ann reminded me. “Why did Snoops choose the last one?”

I shrugged. “Probably because he was still unconscious during the interval, and only recovered as Randi made his last trip to the ship. . . That accounts for Snoops’ condition. There must have been a hell of a fight. . .”

She nodded very slowly, gripped my arm in eloquent silence as we turned towards the machine. . .

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At least Randi had guessed right in one thing—his belief in the potency of *Potentium*. Once we got back to Earth and had the stuff analysed and formulated according to Pye’s methods, we adopted Randi’s own scheme and had a considerable amount of the raw stuff made into bombs.

Then, purely as a matter of defense, we demonstrated the bombs’ efficiency to a world council of war. The result was immediate. Approaching hostilities were tempered; bickering slackened off. No nation could afford to tackle such a supremely destructive agent. The threat of war vanished—but in the laboratories of the Drew Space Corporation there still remains enough substance in raw state to blow to atoms any nation that dares to break the World Peace Pact of 1994.

Today, of course, the Moon is entirely under the control of the Drew Concessionaries. The stuff is mined by trusted experts and used for the peace-time measure of super-fuel. . . None without absolute authority may venture to that lunar storehouse.

Ann has gained more sense since her experiences—but there are times when we both wonder, during the all-too slack intervals of our busy married life, how much of this power and peace would have come about but for the supreme loyalty of an ugly, one-eyed mass of fur from the swamps of Venus. . .

[The end of *Lunar Concession* by John Russell Fearn (as Thornton Ayre)]