

# Science Fiction QUARTERLY

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### *Science Fiction*

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*Cover by John B. Mussachia from a scene in "Starstone World"  
By Hannes Bok.*

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# BOOMERANG

by BOWEN  
CONWAY

"COME ON, get going!" The man in the gray suit who had just shot the nominee for the post of senior Senator from New York waved his strange weapon at me and gestured toward the door behind us with his free hand.

I stopped being panic-stricken for an instant and looked around. There was nominee Schenken still staggering across the stage of the hired theater, blood streaming from a smoking wound in the vicinity of his heart. There was the confusion below the stage as many men leaped to their feet and began shouting themselves hoarse. There was the chairman banging his gavel for order. Finally there was the thin semi-circle of menacing faces closing in on us as we backed to the door.

I closed my eyes and then opened them again. No, it was all real. I had hoped that it wasn't, but there was nothing of the dream about all this.

"Come on, you!"

Again the gestures with the shining weapon and I moved backward until my shoulders were touching the closed portal.

The man with the gun, assured now of my complete physical compliance with his orders, turned his attention abruptly from me to my fellow delegates to the state convention. His aquiline face hardened and his lips straightened into a thin line.

"If any of you so much as move a muscle until we get behind that door, I'll blast a hole in each of you big enough to drive a rocket-car through. Understand?"

They nodded slowly, but their eyes were dangerous and we all knew they wouldn't wait a second longer than they had to. Behind them, more and more men were joining the semi-circle enclosure and the lights were going on.

The door opened suddenly under the impetus of a kick from my captor. I went through it instantly. He followed, shut it behind him immediately and none too soon. The full weight of fifty men collided against it noisily. But it held.

"All right, down this metal ladder, quick!"

I looked down the length of fire escape leading to the alley behind the theater and started with no further delay. Behind me he came, jumping the same three and four steps I did at a time. We reached the ground in half a minute.

I stood waiting as he dropped to the ground beside me. He looked upward for an instant, then satisfied that pursuit was getting nowhere, pocketed his weapon and urged me out into the street.

Some distance down the block, parked about fifty feet from the theater marquee was a small roadster. He pushed me unceremoniously against the door, curiously avoiding touching me with his hands.

"Open it!"

I bent over, stumbled accidentally and reached involuntarily for his hand. He backed away rapidly.

"No, no, don't touch me!" he cried, suddenly oblivious to the presence of others on the sidewalk and seemed to shrink away. Then there was a flash of the weapon again and I wasted no time. I got in and closed the door. He ran around the car, opened the driver's door and slipped behind the wheel. Keeping me covered with the weapon, he switched on the ignition, shifted the gears clumsily with his free hand and finally started the motor. Slowly the car began moving out into the street.

As we passed the brightly lit theater entrance I got my first good look at his face. Up to that time I had been too busy being surprised to be much interested in precisely what he looked like. Immediately I got my second terrific shock of the evening.

**H**E was bleeding a bluish blood from a small scratch on his nose.

I gave him no trouble from then on until the end of our journey. I am a quiet sort of man with a medium sized family to provide for and my kids love their Dad. Anyway, I had a strange premonition that I was going to get out of this alive.

Sometimes a scheme can succeed too well!

As the car moved through the streets I cast occasional side glimpses at his face. His eyes were intently on the road ahead and he seemed to be taking absolutely no interest in what was going on around him. I noticed in his driving a peculiar redundancy as though the way were unfamiliar. Several times he went around a block three times and retraced his tracks down the main boulevard twice. I stood about as much of the silence as I could.

"Why the hell did you have to grab me?" I asked finally, in a slightly irritated voice.

He did not answer for awhile and I had decided that silence was enjoined when suddenly he spoke up.

"My escape must be safe from pursuit," he said in a very soft voice, "I figured that nobody would harm me if I threatened to harm you."

I laughed harshly.

"What makes you think those babies would spare my life," I asked, "if they could get yours? You've bumped a guy off, son! That semi-circle of doom were mostly his personal friends. I'm just a neighborhood ward-heeler."

He took his attention away from the road long enough to look at me with a pained expression in his eyes.

"You mean they would kill you without compunction just to get me? Why? In my own case, this murder was necessary, justified. You are innocent. Certainly. . . ."

Things were settling down chummily. I stopped being timid about casting my glances.

"This ain't heaven, buddy. We live in a hard world. Your life isn't worth the ghost of a worn-out dime today. You know how it is."

He chuckled, thinly.

"No, I'm afraid I don't know how it is. You see, I come from a different time. . . ."

Then abruptly he shut up and from that moment until we got to where we were going a clam would have been more explicit.

After a long time, mostly spent circling the city, we headed for the north suburbs and finally wound up in front of an old-fashioned frame house on a heavily tree-lined street in a very old section of the city.

"Get out," his voice was still gentle and it was still firm.

On the way up the path to the door I again bumped against him.

"Please!" his words were rapid, anxious, "do not touch me."

At the door, still edging away from my side as much as possible, he fumbled for the key, found it, inserted it into the lock and after some moments of futile working it back and forth, pushed the door open.

He didn't bother to light any lights when we got in, just ordered me on toward a flight of stairs looming in the background. I sniffed slightly, detecting a faint odor of closeness as though the house had been long untenanted and moved on.

In an upstairs bedroom, he switched on the lights, went rapidly to the window, pulled down the shade and faced me.

"Sit down . . . there," he commanded, indicating the bed. As I did so, he glanced toward the mirror of a dilapidated dressing table and surveyed his face for an instant. His eyes went wide as he noticed the blood—or whatever it was.

"No telling now what ancient diseases I'll carry back with me."

He stood silently regarding me for a moment, a strange baffled look in his eyes.

I leaned back on my elbows, sinking them deeply into the soft bed.

"This your hideout?" I asked, chattily, convinced at last by the nature of things that the guy was a nut and probably harmless for the present.

**H**E ignored my question, divested himself quickly of his jacket, threw his hat on the floor and then walked to a large object squatting in one corner, completely covered with an old blanket. I took it to be a trunk, but when he threw aside the covering, I had to whistle.

It was a machine, very much in appearance like the cradle and superstructure of the seats on the parachute jump at Coney Island. A lot of the parts were highly polished metal and glass. Others gleamed with the dull finish of opaque plastic. Everything pointed to some highly developed technology. On the base of the machine was a factory mark inscribed on a regulation brass plate. My machinist's soul exulted for the moment in the slick shininess of the whole contraption.

Another shock was due.

Still holding his gun trained on me, he stripped himself of his other clothes. Approaching bed-rock, he was suddenly disclosed to be wearing a tightly fitting suit of some metallic cloth the cut of which re-

sembled in appearance a suit of old fashioned red-flannel, even to the color of the metal.

Still paying no attention to my obvious amazement, he dabbled daintily at his injured face with an ordinary handkerchief and wiped away the ghastly colored stuff that was oozing from the cut.

I never moved a muscle, just lay quietly, partially propped up against the brass bedstead and watched him. After awhile he stopped his medical treatment, turned his eyes full on me and put the gun away in a broad metal belt which encircled his middle.

"I am going to need your help," he announced and watched my face closely.

I blinked my eyes.

"That's OK with me, mister. Only you'll have to explain. I'm not in the habit of assisting murderers. You know, accessory to the crime and all that sort of stuff."

He regarded me with a kind of helpless look in his eye.

"I don't know what you're talking about. But I suppose I'll have to explain."

**H**E leaned against a wall wearily and started to talk.

"First, I am a visitor from another time, the year 2034, to be exact, according to the present system of reckoning. I came to your time with an end in view—murder. I have committed that deed. But I assure you it all has a purpose."

"Oh, sure," I interrupted blandly.

He looked away confusedly and I thought for a minute he was going to shut up again like a clam. But he continued.

"Have you ever been in love?" he asked.

"I am the father of four kids," I answered, "which is not precisely good evidence, but . . ."

"Never mind. Here's the story. The present year is 1943. Senator Schenken instigated a law in the year 1945 which is the basis of the most vicious tyranny ever perpetrated on the human race. He introduced in that year and had passed an act of Congress which made universal sterilization of the unfit compulsory. The enactment into law of this damnable provision marks the beginning of enslavement of the American people to a robot-like bureaucracy. Encouraged, the rabid eugenists added more and more stipulations to the act until in my own time—2034, it is impossible to marry anyone unless both of your hereditaries are compatible and in agreement

with the formula of which the witch doctors we are forced to regard as scientific experts approve.

"I fell in love," he confessed, a guilty look in his eyes," with a Type 25T Blonde, who, eugenically speaking, according to the standards of my day, is as fit a partner for me as a jellyfish is for a duck-billed platypus. She loves me too and wants to marry me. But the experts said no, said that we were courting inevitable disaster for our children, which is a lot of what you would call bunk. There is a strong party opposed to the people in power and they are backed by what I firmly believe to be excellent scientific proof that eugenic selection is sheer hogwash, considering the fact that everybody in my world is healthy and completely free from disease." He paused and breathed deeply.

"I am an expert on tempnautical navigation—that's time-travelling to you," he continued, "and being practical and revolutionary, I had the idea that if I could effectively remove the root of this cancer which is destroying the emotional life of my time and turning us into soulless machines—the root being Senator Schenken—I would have so altered original circumstances that the despicable legislation would never have come to hold power."

"And now I have succeeded!" he cried. "The foul beast is dead and when I return to 2034 I can marry my loved one. My friend, can you understand my feelings?"

I could, vaguely. I said so, keeping a tight grip on myself because I wasn't sure whether I was in a bug-house or enjoying the effects of a badly cooked chunk of beefsteak.

"Just what do you want me to do?" I asked, uncertainly, feeling sure that I would be expected to pronounce benediction on his soul.

He looked at me gratefully, a new hope springing from his eyes.

"Then you do understand! And you will help!" he gestured toward the machine. "I cannot return to the future unless some outside agency operates a control — that one," he stated, pointing to a long lever jutting out from underneath the base of the thing, "while I handle the main controls. My friend, will you do this for me?"

Well, why not, I asked myself and nodded. If he was really what he said he was, I could forget the whole business because the perpetrator of my troubles would no longer exist. If he was really a nut, I

depended on my own courage and coolness to get me out of a trying situation.

I nodded.

"Sure, but, first, please explain why you bleed blue. I'm as curious as hell. As a matter of fact I don't know why I didn't ask you before."

"Oh, that's just the Thorenson units," he replied and moved over to the machine.

Seating himself in a gorgeously upholstered cradle, he adjusted some dials and levers, then beckoned to me. I got closer.

"When I turn on the power, push that long lever toward your left. Your left, remember, not mine. And—goodbye."

**H**E must have thrown in the master switch then, because the machine suddenly became enveloped in a greenish mist. I gingerly kicked over the long rod as he had directed, being careful not to let the radiation touch me and stepped back.

It took him about thirty seconds to vanish and he did a good job of it, machine and all.

It took me several days to establish a decent alibi. I finally convinced the police that the culprit had abandoned me after using me for a shield and driven away toward the north. As the latter part of the statement was true, I gradually became morally enough sure that the whole story I gave was right that I began to believe it myself.

Now, observing the facts from the viewpoint of a year later, I can only say that the joke's on someone.

Schenken didn't die. While in the hospital, a blond nurse got him interested in eugenics, brought him books to read. He left the hospital, a man with an axe to grind.

FINIS