

SATELLITE

science fiction

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A COMPLETE NOVEL

A GLASS OF DARKNESS

by PHILIP K. DICK

The Virginia town in which Ted Barton was born had vanished. In its place was a strange new community where golems walked and Wanderers shone by night, a strange battleground of cosmic forces that spanned time and the galaxy!

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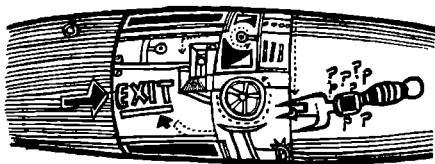
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FOUR-BILLION DOLLAR DOOR

Old Sam Button devoted his life to being first man on the Moon—in one way, he was.

by MICHAEL SHAARA

I SEE, BY THE latest history books my boy brings home from school, that they are already beginning to rewrite the incredible tale of Sam Button and the door. And I can see their point. Sam Button was a great hero, first man to reach the Moon and all that, and it was a rare moment in history when he made it.

But still, they haven't got any right to hush up about the door. Because, even if that was one of the great moments in history, it

was also undoubtedly one of the funniest. Anything that funny ought to be handed on to posterity. So, since nobody else had taken on the chore I guess I'll have to take it on myself.

Old Sam Button was a long lean man with blonde hair that looked like it had been stuck on with glue. Old Sam was a rare man, as well as a lean one. For as far back as I can remember, Old Sam lived with one great dream, to get from Earth to the

Moon. There are a lot of people like that nowadays, but there weren't so many then.

We used to kid him about it. "Old Onward and Upward Button", we used to call him, and it was a standing joke that his mother had been frightened by a flying saucer.

Kidding never stopped Old Sam—not even when he was Young Sam. He knew exactly where he was going. He kept at it all through school, up to a Ph.D. in physics, and then went right to work on guided missiles. He planned it from the very beginning, so that, when the chance came, he would be ready. When it finally came, Old Sam was readier than any man in the country. Which shows you what a deeply dedicated man he was. It also makes it kind of peculiar that such a comedy finish should finally wind up his dream.

Old Sam had faith every step of the way—I mean faith in science. He was absolutely certain men would get to the Moon, and Mars, and all the other places, and he was pretty sure that most of it would be within his lifetime. So he traveled around the country, making speeches.

In his spare time, Old Sam wrote science articles, speculating on the amazing things we would find when we got wherever we were going. I guess he had more to do with the first big rocket

being built than any man in the country. It cost four billion dollars, you see, which even now will go a good long way in the right hands, and Congress naturally had to be practically dynamited before they'd hand it over.

But Old Sam never gave up. He bribed them, he warned them. He sweetened them, he promised them everything. He claimed that the Moon was an invaluable military base, that whoever got there first would rule the world, that the scientific information we would receive would be enormous. He even hinted seriously that there might be loose diamonds, lying around on the Moon's surface—caused, he said, by meteors striking rock with great speed and pressure.

He promised them, in short, the Moon—and, in the end, he got the money.

I have never heard a more eloquent speaker. The only time I ever saw him stumped was when one Senator, an amiable, earthy man from Missouri, commented that, "If the good Lord had meant us to get to the Moon, why'd he make it so dagnab fur away?"

"But science," Old Sam declared, "science would find a way." There were a lot more atoms in the world than there were people, and, as far as Sam was concerned, what the atoms did was more important.

Now, perhaps, you begin to

know a little about Old Sam. True, he was not exactly a likeable man. Dedicated men like that seldom are. But I guess Old Sam really went a mite too far. After spending a lot of his lifetime in a laboratory, he was certainly a one-sided man. If a thing wasn't done scientifically, it wasn't done at all, for Sam.

Fortunately, he had no children. If he had had kids, he was the kind of man who would have spared the love and spoiled the child. All his emotional interest was bound up in space flight. Which, considering what happened, must have made subsequent events really rough on him.

At any rate, he got his money and built the satellite station and the space-ship. They were four years in the building, and then, one July, he took off for the Moon.

I don't suppose there was a man on Earth who didn't know about Old Sam's trip, and there were very few people who weren't excited about Man's first step into space. It was a great moment, a dramatic moment. There were television cameras mounted on Old Sam's ship beaming it all back to Earth. At least fifty million people were following Old Explorer Sam and his crew on their spectacular journey.

So, one morning, as Sam finally began to maneuver for the

Lunar landing, he was already a monumental hero. Newspaper reporters all over the world had been busy for months, writing about the hazards of the trip, about the deathly cold of outer space, about collisions with mountainous meteors and cosmic death rays.

But Old Sam had merely sniffed smugly for the cameras. "Everything has been considered," he reassured the press, "we have foreseen every detail."

So the papers painted him as a vast man, calm, unworried, going off into the illimitable dark, on the greatest of all explorations. No doubt, Old Sam was a great man—in his way.

All eyes were on him, as he went in for Man's first landing on the Moon. The TV cameras were focussed upon him, as he gave the orders for the landing, standing proud and triumphant in a spotless white cap and gilded uniform. There was a great bump, the picture leaped and blurred for a moment, while fifty million breaths were held, and then you could almost hear the cheers rising up from all over Earth. The Moonship was finally down—down and safe. What a moment!

Old Sam took off his hat and made a little speech. "Men and women of Earth," he said simply, "we have reached the Moon." It was very impressive—it was about as impressive a moment as I have

ever seen. Then Old Sam stepped toward the door.

Naturally, the next moves had all been carefully rehearsed. He was to don his uniform, a thick rubberized affair with a fish-bowl helmet, then he was to step out of the airlock of the great steel ship, bearing a flag in his hand.

Then he was to plant the flag in the soil of the Moon, and the television cameras were to be brought outside the ship, and we were all to get our first look at the Moon, while he made the speech claiming it. So we all watched breathlessly, while he got into his helmet.

At last, Old Sam went to the airlock, turned once to wave at the cameras, and pushed a button.

The door didn't open.

There was a seemingly endless pause, and then, still calm, he pushed the button again.

The door still didn't open.

He pushed several times, then motioned to one of the crew. You could hear people begin giggling nervously. The crewman examined the lock with bewilderment, then mumbled something to Sam.

"What do you mean, frozen?"

Old Sam cried, and the question must have been audible all over the world. Then he pushed feverishly at the button, but the great steel door wouldn't open.

It was all very embarrassing. Having reached the Moon safely,

they couldn't get out of the ship. The ship of course was built of solid steel, fully pressurized, and there was simply no exit. They had spanned two hundred and forty thousand miles of space, had spent four billion dollars and they couldn't get out of the ship! No flag, no speeches, no scientific information—no diamonds! They couldn't get out of the ship!

The door was frozen shut. Moments later—some of the most wildly hysterical moments in history—Old Sam announced unbelievably to fifty million people that he had discovered the reason. Some mechanic, back on Earth, had greased the outside of the door. In outer space, the grease had frozen rock-solid. There was no possible way of opening the door.

I must say, to Old Sam's credit, that he didn't break down. He waited, at least, until the cameras were off him. Then all we saw was a frigidly smiling announcer, trying to point out that Man had after all reached the Moon. But you could feel the shock rising all over the world—and then the laughter.

Mankind guffawed from pole to pole. Practically everybody enjoyed it but Congress. Some hot-head introduced a resolution banning spaceflight forever. There was nothing for Old Sam to do, but to bring the ship back to

Earth. It would be understandable if he had committed suicide on the way. He came back to what must have been the worst ribbing in history. I guess, deep down, we were all a little embarrassed, and we had to take it out on somebody.

Well that's about all there is.

What Old Sam did thereafter is obscure. When the laughter finally died down, and space travel was revived, he had no part in it. For he died, about that time, of a stroke of apoplexy, brought on one day at a picnic with his wife.

It seems she had forgotten the can opener.

