

Science Fiction QUARTERLY

ALL
STORIES
NEW

Volume 3

May, 1955

Number 5

FEATURED NOVEL

- THE EYE IN THE WINDOW** Sam Merwin, Jr. 6
Senator Pearmain was sure that an alien plot was hatching in Nesi Wyndham's apartment building. He never dreamed how right he was, and how alien the aliens were!

SHORT STORIES

- THE SEDULOUS APES** Dennis Wiegand 37
All of a sudden, a famous saying came true . . .
- YOU RISK YOUR LIFE** Joseph Slotkin 49
This was the audience participation show that couldn't be topped!
- GLADSOME PLANET** Russ Winterbotham 60
The administration of justice depends upon what is considered a crime.
- THE GUZZLER** Robert Abernathy 68
What can be done about a licensed space pirate who hasn't broken any laws?
- THE RED AND THE GREEN** Joe L. Hensley 76
The human race was in constant retreat, and I for one was tired of it.

READERS' DEPARTMENTS

- LIMITATIONS OF SCIENCE FICTION (Editorial)** R. W. Lowndes 47
- READIN' AND WRITHIN' (Book Reviews)** Damon Knight 57
- INSIDE SCIENCE FICTION** Robert A. Madle 65
- IT SAYS HERE (Letters and Comment)** 83

ROBERT W. LOWNDES, *Editor*

DOROTHY B. SEADOR *Asso. Ed.*

MILTON LUROS, *Art Director*

MARIE A. PARK, *Asso. Ed.*

Cover by Ed Emsh

SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY, May, 1955, published February, May, August, and November, by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 211 Church Street, New York 12, New York. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Single copy 25¢; yearly subscription \$1.00. Entire contents copyright 1955 by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed envelopes to insure return if not accepted, and while reasonable care will be extended in handling them, it is understood that they are submitted at author's risk. Printed in U. S. A.



Bonesteel ruled this world, and he claimed that the vast majority of his subjects were happy. Which was true, and for the strangest reason!

GLADSOME PLANET

by Russ Winterbotham

GORDON STONE fixed his deepset eyes on the man from his home planet. "Gad, Bonesteel," he said, "you're twenty years older than when I saw you last."

"Nothing unusual in that," said Humphrey Bonesteel, "considering that it's been twenty years since we've seen each other." Bonesteel looked at his former friend. His hair was still light brown, without gray; his eyes were

clear and he wore no glasses; his body slim, without fat. "I will say, though, that time has been kind to you."

Stone looked at the gray-haired man from earth. He noted the tell-tale signs of approaching middle-age, as well as the tiny pock-like scars in his skin—space burns that resulted from years of interstellar travel.

"You've heard of hell," said Stone. "This is heaven."

He waved his arm, gesturing with its wide sweep the whole horizon. There was something about Gordon Stone that made everything he said seem like a self-evident, axiomatic truth. Bonesteel felt that this place undoubtedly was heaven.

"It's hard to believe that you could have carved such an empire in so short a time," said Humphrey Bonesteel.

Stone shrugged. "If earthmen excel at anything, I suppose it is political science." He laughed. "Well, call it intrigue, if you will. I'll have to admit I pulled a few wires and a few fast ones to get where I am, but it didn't take much. I had the right idea to begin with; once you have the right idea, things sort of take care of themselves."

"Well, you are to be congratulated," said Bonesteel. "I've heard a lot about X-43—"

"We've changed its name," said Stone. "But we've been too busy to notify the star-map makers. We call our sun Akhenaten, and our planet Menes."

"Ah! The Egyptian influence—names of a god and a king! I suppose there's a reason?"

"No. I just liked the names."

"You named them."

"Certainly. I'm the high mogul; why shouldn't I name everything?"

Humphrey Bonesteel looked at his friend. Stone had always been an opportunist, but it was hard to imagine him as a chief. He was too much of an idealist, and just a bit of a crazy one at that. But everyone Bonesteel had seen since his arrival on the planet only a few hours ago had seemed happy and contented. In fact, the idea that this was heaven, had occurred to him almost at once.

"I rule wisely," said Stone, seeming to sense what Bonesteel was thinking.

"I know you must, and I've heard that you have. Most men would have been tempted to substitute tyranny for benign leadership—especially when

they ruled a planet on which they were foreigners."

"We're all people, whether we live in the solar system or the farthest galaxy," said Stone. "I just give everyone what they want. This is heaven, because the natives want this kind of a world."

"Surely it isn't unanimous! It's human nature never to be satisfied; you must have some discontented subjects!"

"Yes," said Stone. "There are a few, but they don't live here. We have another place, not so heavenly, on a continent near the equator. People who don't agree with things live there; we call it Styx."

They were riding down the principal street of New Ontario, the capital city of Menes. The people, small, lithe and fragile-looking thronged the thoroughfare. They waved at Stone, smiling and happy. They seem to thrive on the dream of this Michiavellian earthman, who had carved this empire out of a little, unknown star system some forty years from the sun.

SUDDENLY, Bonesteel was not so sure about Stone. He noted the windows of the car had radiation-resistant glass in the windows. This seemed odd. If people were satisfied with the Terran's leadership, why should he take such precautions? And Bonesteel noted men in armored machines, heavily-armed men, who traveled ahead and behind the chief's vehicle. Bonesteel remembered—Stone had admitted that he did not have unanimous support.

"How'd you happen to come here in the first place?" the visitor asked.

Stone's eyes seemed to glisten with memories. "I came here to trade, but I stayed to conquer." He looked off at the buildings, and his countenance seemed to soften. "Goodness knows, the people here needed something. No initiative, no aim, no industry; just a bunch of lazy bums. And I made something out of them all." He paused, "All but a few cranks."

It wasn't a boast. Humphrey Bonesteel realized that Stone was speaking a belief; and he could also see that Menes was as neat and smooth as any world its size, which was about the size of the earth. Stone had transformed it into something utterly dreamlike in twenty years. It must be because the people here were different. Man doesn't take to changes quickly. Granted though, that the people of Menes might be somewhat different from Terrans, it was hardly believable. Life-forms are adaptive, but adaptations takes time, usually several generations. Bonesteel thought of the length of time England had taken to adapt itself to the Norman conquest.

There must have been resistance; there must have been die-hards. How had Gordon Stone overcome these?

The car swung into a tunnel and pulled up beneath an underground archway, the entrance to some building of state. A group of uniformed men—the gendarmerie of the planet, sprang to attention at the entrance as Stone and Bonesteel left the car. As they passed through the doorway, two of the gendarmes fell in behind them and marched with drawn radiation pistols into the building.

"Bodyguard?" asked Bonesteel.

Stone nodded. "One can never be too careful," he said. "This is Justice Day, and the relatives of criminals are usually upset; they might try drastic measures to prevent their loved ones from being sent to Styx."

They passed into a long corridor, lined with a white stone that looked like marble, and brilliantly lit by fluorescent globes which hung from the ceiling. Beside each doorway they passed, stood a uniformed gendarme. And behind these guards Humphrey saw faces. For the first time, in these faces, Humphrey saw unhappiness.

Everywhere else he had been since he stepped out of his spaceship, Bonesteel had noticed smiles and happiness; but here was anxiety, a few tear-

strained faces—a different expression, which made him homesick for the earth.

"Those are relatives of criminals." Stone explained without slackening his pace. "They are closeted with the defendants and allowed to give advice. Justice, you see, is often unjust for the innocent, and we must do our best to see that everyone has a chance to present his case."

They stepped into an elevator which automatically whisked them upward. Bonesteel did not notice how far, but he judged they traveled several stories. They stepped forth into another corridor and walked to a door. A gendarme at the door, saluted briskly and opened the door.

Bonesteel followed Stone into a balcony that overlooked a circular chamber. At one side was a dais on which was a desk. An official dressed in judicial robes—even to a powdered wig—sat behind the desk, looking down on a group of men and women, fettered by chains. Behind this group were others, the most unhappy of all people in that room.

"Those in chains are defendants," said Stone. "The others are relatives of the defendants—or close friends and the like—who might suffer if the defendant is found guilty."

HUMPHREY'S eyes fell on a single figure in the group. A slender, fragile girl. She seemed to sense his gaze and turned, looking up at the earthman. She had a pretty face.

"What did that girl do?" Humphrey Bonesteel asked Stone.

Stone followed Humphrey's stare. "Pretty thing, isn't she?" he said.

"Could she be a criminal?"

Stone shrugged. "She hasn't been tried yet," he said. "You know a man is never guilty till he's been found guilty by the court. But she's here; at least she's suspected of crime."

"But what crime?"

"There is only one crime on Menes," said Stone.



Humphrey's eyes scanned the others. There were three old men, two middle-aged men, a boy, two older women besides the girl. Nine altogether. Not many, but they were sad.

"What is the crime?" he asked.

"Crime is hard to define," said Stone. "Sometimes the wrong word in the wrong place; sometimes an act that cannot be recalled. I think the best definition for crime on this planet is that it is an attempt to rectify an admitted mistake."

The truth dawned on Bonesteel. "That sounds political," he said. "These are political prisoners?"

"Only in a sense," said Stone. "There is only one crime on Menes—that is the crime of admitting there is anything wrong with conditions as they are. Politics is a way of life. A bad life is not harmful, unless it is *recognized* as a bad life. As long as it is thought to be good, why should any life be bad or criminal? Even on earth, you can do a thing and get away with it if it is done at the right time."

The judge cleared his throat and

rapped his gavel. "State versus Tlata Deusen," he said.

One of the old men stepped forward. "I am a farmer, judge," said the man. "This year I did not fertilize my soil; as a result my crop failed. As an individual I suffered."

"Did you publicly admit your error?" asked the judge.

"I most certainly did. It was wrong not to fertilize the soil; had I done so I would have enough money to bet on the horse races at the county fair!"

"For this mistake, you are sentenced to five years in the Styx," said the judge.

Sobs and cries came from the poor man's relatives, but they were quickly seized by the gendarmes and led away with the convicted man. Their screams: "A miscarriage of justice!" echoed through the hall.

"Next case," said the judge. "State versus Unbla Corgis."

The judge took the complaint, read it silently and then glanced toward the prisoner, who had stepped forward rattling his chains. He was the second old man.

"I am a farmer, judge," said the man. "This year I fertilized my soil. As a result, I had a bumper crop."

"Did you publicly state that you made a mistake?"

"I did, your honor, and the reason is as obvious as the wig on your head. I brought down grain prices by marketing my bumper crop. Other farmers were ruined."

"You will go to Styx for five years," said the Judge.

Again sobs and cries came from the convict's relatives, but they were led away by the gendarmes.

"State versus Lana Duxle," said the judge.

The girl stepped forward.

"Don't let her be sent to Styx," whispered Bonesteel. "Surely you can issue a pardon for her."

"I will not interfere," said Stone.

The girl already was speaking. "I killed my grandmother," said the girl.

Bonesteel was horrified. She did not look like a murderess.

"Did you publicly state that it was wrong?"

"I did not, sir," said the girl. "My grandmother was old. She suffered from cancer, from paralysis, from hardening of the arteries. She would have died soon, anyhow; I could not stand her suffering."

"I find you not guilty," said the judge.

"Good heavens," said Bonesteel. "What kind of a court is this? You sentence people to exile for fertilizing their crops, and for not fertilizing their crops, and find an admitted murderess not guilty!"

Stone smiled. "Justice is a peculiar thing," he said. "On earth you try to make rules about justice.

"To break a law is a mistake; every-

one admits it is wrong. So there are two ways of life on Earth—the right way and the wrong way. Here on Menes we do not admit there is wrong—there may be many right ways. If sin were not recognized, there would be no sin."

"Is that why everyone is happy?"

"Oh no," said Stone; "they are happy because they don't believe they can make a mistake."

They left the court room. The two bodyguards were waiting and they followed Stone and his guest to the elevator.

"Your method of justice is a little odd," said Bonesteel, "but I notice you don't trust your subjects too far; you always have bodyguards."

"Someone might get the idea that it would not be wrong to assassinate me," said Stone. For a moment the ruler of the joyful planet looked worried.

