

# STARTLING STORIES

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An Amazing Complete Novel



## The Laws of Chance

By MURRAY LEINSTER

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Cover Painting by Rudolph Belarski—Illustrating "The Laws of Chance"

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**M**URRAY LEINSTER is what might be called an "old science fiction hand." His ingenious inversions of accepted scientific theory and his imaginative contemplation of the possible results of such inversions (to say nothing of their causes) have enthralled readers of STF for more years than their author cares to consider in front of his mirror while shaving.

But the author is more than a mere juggler of formulae. He is the possessor of a first-rate creative sense of dramatic story values as well as of sharper and more whimsical insight into human behavior. And he knows how to write prose with the easy fluidity that comes only of long experience.

But so often has his biography been briefed in the departments of STF magazines that he is, in truth, beginning to feel a certain lurking ennui toward his own life story. In short, to him, Murray Leinster on Murray Leinster is very old hat.

Therefore he has, in the following paragraphs, given us a brief biography of his *LAWS OF CHANCE* and the motives that caused him to write it. And since the story deals with the universal urge to find a sure thing, it seems to us a highly interesting departure from the orthodox magazine thumbnail sketch.

Says the Leinster:

A long time ago I got cured of any inclination to gamble because I tried to use my head. I got technical and dug into the laws of chance, so—I thought—I could gamble intelligently. And ultimately I wrote *LAWS OF CHANCE* because they're the most irritating natural laws in all the cosmos. They ought to be set to work, but we can't do a thing with them.

You can take advantage of all the other laws of nature and accomplish things, but the laws of chance simply mess things up. Learn them, and playing poker turns to bookkeeping, shooting craps is an exercise in mental arithmetic, dropping coins in a slot-machine is dumb, while horse-playing is crazy! But play poker or shoot craps or play slot-machines or the ponies without regard to the laws of chance and you're just

[Turn page]

another sucker. Did I hear you say "So what?"

So why don't we do something about it? All the other things we've learned have done us some good. We learned the laws of mechanics and chemistry and thermodynamics and electricity and we made a civilization. Then we learned some of the laws of nuclear physics and made atom bombs which seem likely to blow it all up again. But why are the laws of chance so useless?

They're exact, they're infallible and they're infuriating. If I mix some of this and some of that, I know I'll blow myself up. If I arrange wires and condensers and dinkuses this way and that, I know I can tune in radio programs and learn all about body odor and bleeding gums. If I climb up a steep snow-covered hill and put on skis I can slide all the way down to the bottom again.

I can use the laws of chemistry and electricity and gravity and all the rest. But the laws of chance tell me that if I toss a coin a thousand times, it will come heads just five hundred times, plus or minus half a dozen. They tell me nothing else. I can't use 'em. All I can do is prove 'em. So . . .

If we can apply chemical laws to stop undesirable chemical actions—see galvanized iron and chromium plating—and electrical laws to stop electricity—see lightning-rods—and apply the laws of hydraulics to prevent floods and even use fire to fight fire—why can't we apply the laws of chance to hold off bad luck or bring about good? Dammit, we should! Why not?

So there you are. LAWS OF CHANCE is a picture of what we ought to be able to do, even if we can't do it at the moment. It's propaganda for a Science of Chance, by which we would use the forces which produce such predictable results, just as we use other forces whose results we can foresee. There should be a Science of Chance, just as there is a science of electricity or aerodynamics or nuclear physics. It's time we got started developing it. Has anybody any ideas?

Now if somebody could only apply such science to horses—and jockeys, *and* trainers AND the weather and track conditions which so frequently upset the best-laid advance dope—some of us might get somewhere. How about it, Murray?