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Cover: EDWARD VALIGURSKY

Editor  
PAUL W. FAIRMAN

Managing Editor  
CELE GOLDSMITH

Art Editor  
HERBERT ROGOFF

# Monday Immortal

By RALPH BURKE

SENATOR Edmund Cardiff was on his way up to the lab that housed Project Peep-hole when the reporter stepped out of the alcove and blocked his way.

"I'm in a hurry," Cardiff said in annoyance. "Can't you fellows wait for a press conference on this Venus Mines thing?"

"It's not the Mines situation, Senator—it's about you. Is there any truth to the story that you narrowly escaped assassination outside the Capitol early this morning?"

"None whatsoever," Cardiff snapped. "And now, if you'll excuse me—"

"But—"

Cardiff didn't wait for butts. He stepped around the man and entered the elevator.

---

*Cardiff had seven days to live. Terrifying knowledge, but there was comfort in one aspect of it: For seven days they couldn't kill him with an axe.*

---

"Sixteen," he said, and lit a cigarette. His fingers quivered a little as he did so. The robot operator hummed its acknowledgment and the elevator swooped upward.

So the press had picked up the story after all, he thought. It had all happened so quickly that Cardiff had hoped no one had seen—the wild blaster shot, the rapid interchange of fire, the gunman lying crumpled in the street. Evidently someone had seen the duel, though.

Too bad. He didn't want the word getting around that he was in the process of becoming a martyr, or else he'd be subjected to constant armed guard as long as the Senate was in session—and that might hamper his activities. He made a mental note



With no risk involved it didn't matter how he traveled.

to issue an official denial of the rumors, squared his broad shoulders, and stepped through the widening sphincter of the elevator into a quiet, dimly-lit corridor.

He turned left, walked about fifty yards into the half-darkness, reached a door, and pressed his thumb against the electronic door-plate. The plate recognized his thumbprint and the door slid open to admit him.

"Holley? Are you there, Holley?"

"I'm coming, Senator Cardiff," said a thin, dry voice. A small man with hunched shoulders and tapering, delicate hands appeared. He was Lloyd Hollister, Ph.D.—the world's ranking expert on temporal theory, and the mainspring of Project Peep-hole. At the moment, he was staring up at the powerful figure of Edmund Cardiff with a strange expression of curiosity and pity in his weak, watery eyes.

"How's it going?" Cardiff asked. "Do you have that report on Jansen yet?"

"Ah—no," the little man said. "There's been a—a complication. Would you care to step inside, Mr. Cardiff?"

Cardiff frowned in annoyance as the small man led him

to the room adjoining, which was completely filled with a wild, sprawling tangle of machinery centering around a large, gleaming screen. This was Project Peep-hole—the time-viewer project, Very Top Secret, to which only Cardiff and a few others had access at the moment. The senator was anxious.

Cardiff glanced around. "Well? What's up? I asked you to take a Peep and let me know whether my man's going to get back from Venus in the next week. I need that evidence if I'm going to smash that cartel, Holley."

Hollister knotted his wiry fingers together and chewed his lip before speaking. "I've run a tentative check on your agent Jansen, sir. He didn't return in any of the next six days."

Cardiff frowned. "That means I'll have to delay the opening of my drive a little. But why didn't you check further ahead, Holley?"

Hollister smiled apologetically. "I did, Senator Cardiff I got as far as seven days from today."

"And?"

"And I shut the machine off, sir. I—"

"What's going on, Hollister?" Cardiff demanded an-

grily. "What are you hiding from me?"

"Nothing, sir," Hollister sighed. He snapped on a switch and the myriad tubes of the time-viewer began to hum.

After a few moments, the screen started to glow.

"I've left it exactly as it was when I stopped looking, sir. That's the way it was."

Cardiff looked at the screen and went pale with disbelief. It showed, simply, an unfolded copy of the *Globe*. The date was clearly indicated—Monday, May 7, 2386. One week from today, exactly.

He stared at the bold black eight-column streamer head. It said:

### **FIND MANGLED BODY OF SENATOR CARDIFF**

Underneath, in smaller type it said:

#### **Capitol Police Investigating Case**

And underneath that, just above the illegible type of the story:

### **BELIEVE CRUSADING SOLON WAS MURDERED**

*Seven days to live.* The four words ran through Car-

diff's stunned brain over and over again, as he left the Project Peephole lab and returned to his own office in downtown Washington.

The future was unalterable—Hollister had proved that. No matter what steps you took to change it, it always snapped back to the form the time-viewer revealed, one way or another. So there was no point in running away, or in spending the next week in cold storage. Somehow, inexorably, Edmund Cardiff would have to die seven days from now.

He scowled as he tossed the words over and over in his mind. *Why now? Why so soon?*

He knew why he would die; that didn't require a time-viewer to figure out. The powerful Venus Mines cartel had already made one attempt to erase him—and, obviously, they would keep at it till they were successful.

But that left a week. Cardiff smiled grimly. In a week, a lot can be done.

He punched a button on his desk. A few moments later, a tall, thin young man appeared. He was Ralph Morley, Cardiff's chief assistant.

"Morning, Mr. Cardiff."

"Hello, Ralph. Sit down, will you?"

Morley took a chair near Cardiff's desk. "What did Hollister have to say, sir?"

With an effort, Cardiff concealed his emotions. "Nothing much. Jansen won't be back for at least eight days."

Morley's face darkened. "Oh—too bad, sir. That means we'll have to delay bringing the cartel business up in the Senate, won't it?"

"No," Cardiff said sharply. "On the contrary. We're accelerating the entire schedule. I want to have the evidence in my hands by—oh, next Tuesday, say." He tried to make his voice sound casual. "Then I'll prepare the documents and raise the matter on the Senate floor."

"But what about Jansen, sir? He's bringing the evidence with him from Venus!"

Cardiff chuckled. "There's plenty evidence of illegality right here on Earth, Ralph—in the cartel's home office. Their files probably contain records of every filthy bit of exploitation they've carried out on Venus. If we can get hold of them, I'll be able to smash the cartel by getting the Senate to revoke its charter—and then we can open Venus to legitimate colonization."

*Which I'll never live to see,* Cardiff added bitterly. The image on the screen in Hollister's lab was as good as a sentence of death—but Cardiff was determined to drag the cartel down to death with him.

"Why the sudden rush?" Morley asked. "I thought we had almost a month to get the documents ready."

"We don't any more—and don't ask me why. We'll have to have everything ready by next Monday."

"Yes, sir."

"The important thing now is to get a man inside the cartel headquarters and case the building," Cardiff said. "We've got to get to their files. And we've only got a week."

Morley nodded. "I'll get right with it, Mr. Cardiff."

"Good. Keep me posted on what happens."

Cardiff watched the young man leave, then whirled and began dialing the combination of the safe behind his desk. The safe swung open.

Inside was the fuel with which Cardiff fed the bonfire of his hatred—his painstakingly-assembled collection of documents that told the story of Venus Mines' abuse of their charter. The sinister,

octopus-like cartel had managed to get a tentacle into every part of Venusian life and controlled the planet utterly.

Cardiff had been working on the exposé for over a year, readying it for its presentation before the Senate. Overcoming the powerful Mines lobby would be hard, but Cardiff thought he could do it. All that remained was for Jansen, the spy he had sent to Venus, to return with the clinching proofs.

Well, there was no time to wait for Jansen now. Time was running out for Cardiff. He bent over his desk, arranging his materials. It was a bitter thing to be cut short at the moment of success.

A new thought struck him suddenly. The time-viewer had predicted his death next Monday—and so it also guaranteed him practical immortality *until* that day! It could be a week of taking risks, of venturing into places where no sane man would go—since, come what may, Cardiff would die no sooner than next Monday. It was a small consolation, but an important one.

"The building's guarded thoroughly," Ralph Morley told him. "Our man couldn't even get close."

Cardiff looked up from his work, scowling. "There's no way in at all?"

"There is, but I don't recommend it. He said it might be possible to get into an air-shaft from an adjoining building, but there's only a chance in five that the man who tried it would make the jump successfully. It means a suicide mission, sir."

Cardiff closed his eyes for a moment and ground his thumbs into them. He had been working nearly thirty straight hours and he was starting to feel it. *Hell of a way to spend your last few days alive*, he thought. *But what I'm doing has to be done.*

"Just how difficult is this jump, Ralph?"

"As I said—one chance in five."

"But it's our *only* chance," Cardiff said reflectively.

"Unless we wait for Jansen," Morley pointed out.

"Jansen can't be waited for. We'll have to chance this jump and get a man inside that building."

"Yes, sir. Do you want me to ask for volunteers, or should I set up a lottery among the staff?"

Cardiff stood up. "Neither. I'll be the man making the

jump." Seeing the look of astonishment widen on Morley's face, he glared fiercely at him. "And I don't want an argument."

The bewildered *attache* gaped for a moment, then subsided. He knew from long experience that there was no point in trying to argue with Edmund Cardiff. "Yes, sir," he said weakly.

"Good. Now, I want you to show me the layout, and I want to talk with the man who did the reconnoitering."

Morley nodded. "Sir—"

"I expect to come through this thing alive, or I wouldn't be trying it," Cardiff said. "But just in case I don't, I'll leave you full details of what's to be done. In the event I don't return, you're to take all our documents to Senator Grendon—he'll be willing to propose the thing on the floor. If not, go to the President. You'll have to wait for Jansen, of course. He ought to be back any week now."

"Yes, sir."

"That'll be all, then. Send in the man who did the reconnaissance work, will you?" Cardiff was almost ready.

On the rooftop, Cardiff rocked lightly on the balls of his feet and surveyed the dis-

tant airshaft-opening. It was quite a jump.

Cardiff was in his late thirties, but still agile and vigorous; he hadn't let his body go flabby, and he had the reflexes of a skilled athlete of twenty. He was counting on that to pull him through — that, and the knowledge that he couldn't die before Monday.

The elimination of hazard has a lot to do with the way the muscles function. A man confident that he'll make a leap successfully—a man who *knows* he will—will make it, while one whose muscles are clogged with fear - generated adrenalin might falter and hang back at the crucial moment of the leap. Cardiff was not troubled by doubts.

He stared down at the gleaming chrome sides of the building below, the building that housed Venus Mines. It was virtually a fortress—but every fortress had to have a chink in its armor somewhere.

Carefully, Cardiff fastened the stout hemp hawser around a projecting spar on the roof of the building he would leap from. He tugged until he was certain the rope would hold. It was a hundred feet down to the roof of the



Venus Mines building, and forty feet out. With proper timing, he could make it.

He hurled the rope out over the abyss and watched as it swung out, hovered within a few feet of the airshaft, and dropped back. Yes, it had the range. But if he miscalculated, if he should somehow let go too soon or too late, he would drop eight hundred feet to the ground. Or if he froze up and didn't let go at all, the momentum of the rope would swing him back and bash him against the side of the building he leaped from.

But there wasn't much point in speculating. He was going to make it. It was only Saturday night, after all—he still had three days to live, guaranteed. It was just as inexorable as the fact that he would have to die on Monday.

He reeled in the dangling rope and gripped it firmly, swathing his hands in the silk wrappings that would prevent rope-burn.

He stepped to the edge of the roof and looked down. The sidewalk seemed miles away; the pedestrians, mere bugs. Sucking in his breath, he grasped the rope and swung himself out over the seemingly bottomless gulf.

The rope appeared to take forever to uncoil as he plunged downward and out. He braced himself for the moment of impact as the rope paid itself out completely, and hoped his two hundred pounds would not snap it loose from its mooring.

A stinging shock ran up his arms as the rope drew taut. He glanced down, saw himself hovering just above the gaping airshaft, and in that instant let go.

The rope continued on outward. He dropped straight down, entered the open airshaft perfectly, and plummeted down.

His descent was checked, as he expected, by the metal grid ten feet below. He rebounded off it, struck again, and lay still for just a moment, recovering his equilibrium. Then, quickly, he found the exit from the airshaft and shinnied through, emerging in a corridor of the Venus Mines building.

*One chance in five, Cardiff thought. Well, I made it.* He wiped away a trickle of perspiration.

With cat-like tread, he tiptoed through the darkened corridors of the building, searching for the room he wanted—the office of B. C.

Kanbeck, the half-legendary head of the cartel.

It took three hours of diligent search through the empty building before he found the executive suite. He glanced at his watch. It was three A.M., Sunday morning. He'd have to get out by that night at the latest; by morning the place would be swarming with Cartel people, and he'd never get out.

Cautiously, he began to work the hinges off the massive door of Kanbeck's office. It took better than an hour for him to finish the job, and, without having disturbed either the lock on the door or the alarm keyed to it, he pried back the left side of the unhinged door and stepped through.

It was nearly dawn by the time he had succeeded in springing the safe. Outside the suite, he could hear the methodical, unvarying pacing of the robots who guarded the building from evening till dawn. Probably there were some human guards scattered through the building too, but they hadn't seen him yet, and he was safe in here. From outside in the hall it would be impossible to tell that the door had been tampered with.

He looked in the safe, staring at the horde of papers inside—the private files of Venus Mines. This was the end of his search; this was the evidence he needed to smash the rotten cartel in one mighty blow.

Exultantly, he reached forward to collect the damning papers.

"Suppose you keep your hands out of there," a cold voice said behind him.

He whirled, realizing sickeningly that he must have tripped some sort of alarm after all. Three flashlights blinked on, transfixing him with their blinding beams. He held his hands before his eyes as shields and tried to see who was there.

As he struggled to see, arms grasped his arms roughly. He lashed out, felt his fist connect with someone's face, then a length of rope was twisted around him, pinioning him and leaving him helpless.

Vision returned in a few moments, and by then he was securely trussed. He saw a tall man, of about his own height and general build, with a cold, malevolent glint in his eyes and a Number Six Webley Blaster grasped firmly in his right hand. He was obviously in charge; the two

other men, who held him from each side, were dressed in the uniforms of guards.

"Allow me to introduce myself," the tall man said. "My name is Kanbeck—B. C. Kanbeck. May I ask who you may be, and what business you have in my private suite at this hour—or at any hour?"

Cardiff stiffened. This was Kanbeck—the legendary Kanbeck, head of the cartel!

"My name is Smith," he said acidly. "John Smith. I was passing by, and thought I'd drop in for a late-evening snack. Do you mind?"

Kanbeck chuckled hollowly. "Very funny, Mr.—*Smith*." He took a step closer and smashed an open palm against Cardiff's cheek. "But I have little sense of humor about these things. Must I force you to tell me who you are?"

"I'm afraid you must," said Cardiff.

"Very well, then. First search him, George."

The guard on his right jammed a hand into his pocket and pulled out Cardiff's wallet. Kanbeck snatched it eagerly and thumbed through it, eyes wide with surprise.

"We've made quite a catch," he said. "Senator Ed-

mund Cardiff—a common burglar! What is the Senate coming to these days, I wonder?"

He slipped Cardiff's wallet into his own pocket and nodded to the guard at the right. "This is better than I could have dreamed of, having him walk right into our hands."

"Should I burn him, Chief?"

"No—certainly no. Just knock him out, and we'll see what information we can get from him."

Cardiff felt a stinging blow at the side of his neck. He fought for consciousness, but the edge of the guard's hand descended a second time. Cardiff's knees buckled and he blacked out.

When he awoke, he was still in the suite, strapped securely to a chair. He could tell from the growling emptiness in his stomach that he'd been there some time. Through the window, he could see the sun going down.

Kanbeck smiled mirthlessly. "I see the drug is wearing off, Senator."

Cardiff opened both eyes and rolled his head groggily. "What drug?"

"Sodium amytal, Senator. An extremely efficient meth-

od of extracting information. You've planned a most thoughtful campaign against us, Mr. Cardiff. I fail to understand, though, how you could so completely have misunderstood the benevolent policies of Venus Mines."

"Don't feed me that, Kanbeck. I know exactly what you skunks have been up to, and—"

"Yes. You plan to smash our nefarious enterprise to smithereens." Kanbeck smiled amiably. "I'm afraid you won't succeed, though. You've been caught breaking and entering, which happens to be a crime. Should you happen to be killed by one of our watchmen, I believe there won't be much difficulty explaining the matter to the police. And that, I think, would be the end of your crusade."

Cardiff stared bleakly at the tall man with the blaster. He was right; Kanbeck had him cornered and could quite legally get away with his murder now.

"Untie him," Kanbeck ordered.

As the guard reached down to undo Cardiff's bonds, the cartel head turned to the wall safe and began turning the dial.

In a moment Cardiff saw the whole plan. They would force him to the wall and kill him in the act of rifling the safe. There would be no trouble with the police at all, that way.

Only there was one factor Kanbeck wasn't figuring on—Cardiff's private knowledge that he wasn't going to die till Monday. That gave Cardiff a fighting chance to get out of the building with the documents, to blast the cartel before it was too late.

The guard finished unbinding Cardiff just as Kanbeck succeeded in opening the safe.

"Now, Senator, if you'll—"

The sentence was never finished. Cardiff came to life all at once, crashing his fist into the guard's face and leaping from the chair—straight at Kanbeck.

The last thing a man with a blaster expects is that he'll be attacked head-on. Cardiff had the insane assurance that he could not be in any danger, and so he made the suicidal dash in perfect calmness. Kanbeck was taken completely by surprise.

He managed to get off one unaimed bolt of the blaster, and then Cardiff was upon him. Moving with lightning swiftness, the Senator grab-

bed the blaster before Kanbeck could fire a second time, and sent the cartel head reeling backward with a smash in the face.

The stunned guard behind him started to come to, but Cardiff immobilized him with a quick kick backward and went after Kanbeck again. The cartel leader was rocking dizzily back and forth as Cardiff connected a second time.

Kanbeck spun backward and his arms pinwheeled wildly as he began to topple. Seeing what was about to happen, Cardiff made a quick grab for the man, but he was too late. Kanbeck fell backward heavily against the window to the right and smashed through it.

His scream trailed off somewhere about halfway down. Cardiff glanced out and saw the spinning figure dwindling to a mere dot as it approached the distant ground, more than seven hundred feet below. He looked away. It was a lousy death for anyone—even Kanbeck, Cardiff thought.

He recrossed the room and pulled the groggy guard to his feet. "Get out of that uniform, fast," he snapped, gesturing with the blaster. He

emphasized the command with two quick, sobering slaps.

When the guard had stripped, Cardiff tied him securely, picked up a briefcase from a nearby desk, and shoveled the contents of the open safe into it. Then, quickly, Cardiff slipped into the guard's uniform, and, clad as a member of Venus Mines' private police, he strode openly out the door of the suite toward the elevator.

He was half-surprised to discover it was nightfall. Time had streamed past unnoticeably while he had been in the building. Cardiff stood for a moment in the dark street, gripping the precious briefcase tightly, and realized dizzily that he didn't even know what day it was. He had entered the Mines' building on—was it Saturday?

Yes. Saturday night, and he'd been caught some time early Sunday morning. Was today Sunday night, then? Monday? He didn't know. All he knew was that Kanbeck was dead and the evidence to blast the cartel was in his possession.

"Taxi!"

The cab pulled up. "Where to, officer?"

He gave the address of his office, and sat back. For the first time, he paused to run a hand across his cheek.

There was a thick, wiry growth of beard there. A chill passed through him. How long *had* Kanbeck been interrogating him? How much time had passed while he was doped up with truth-drugs? What day . . .

Innocently, he glanced up at the driver. "Hey, cabbie?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm a little confused on the date—what day is this?"

The cabbie chuckled. "You better lay off that stuff. Today's Monday."

Monday!

Cardiff rocked backward in amazement. Monday!

He forced himself to laugh in pleasant surprise. "Hey, so it is! Guess I just wasn't thinking, there. Of course it's Monday!"

His heart began to pound. So Kanbeck had kept him under drugs for many hours, pumping every bit of information possible from him?

He'd have to work quickly; he had just a few hours to live. Or would Kanbeck's death change things? *No*, he thought. *The future can't be changed. If the viewer says something will happen, it'll*

*happen.* Hollister had proven that over and over.

He paid the cabbie with some loose change he found in the pockets of the guard's uniform and ran up the stairs to his office. He locked himself in and immediately set to work making photocopies of the documents he'd brought back with him. He had everything, a full, explosive record of the Venus Mines Cartel's operations.

He sorted out the photocopies, gathered one bundle and locked it in his safe, packed another and hid it in Ralph Morley's desk, and sealed the third set in a permoplast wrapper and addressed it to the President. He sent it down the mail chute. Now no matter what happened to him the word would get out.

*There*, he thought. The job was done. He was prepared to face death, now that the cartel was finished.

But when would death come? How?

He walked inside and snapped on his video to see the news. An excited newscaster was saying, ". . . body of Senator Edmund Cardiff was found this noon. Police believe the Senator was the victim of an assassin. Further bulletins will follow.

Meanwhile, the latest baseball scores . . .”

Cardiff stared at the video as if it had turned to a live rhinoceros there in his office, then reached out and turned the switch. He looked at his hands, touched his fingers to his throat, his chin, his shoulder, feeling himself.

He was solid. He wasn't any ghost.

But what the hell did that newscast mean?

The body of Senator Edmund Cardiff had been found and police were investigating. That was exactly as Holley's machine had predicted it would be. But if that was so—

*Who in blazes am I?*

He stood frozen in the middle of the office, staring at the neat, uncluttered surface of his desk for a moment, trying to figure things out.

His hand unconsciously slipped into his trouser pocket, and he frowned curiously at the realization that his wallet wasn't where it usually was. Then he re-

membered that he was wearing borrowed trousers.

And then he realized what had happened to his wallet. Suddenly, everything came clear. Cardiff began to laugh uproariously with relief and incredulity.

His wallet—was in Kanbeck's pocket! The pulped corpse found in the street must have been beyond identification—except for the wallet in its pocket, bearing Cardiff's name. And Kanbeck was approximately his size.

Holley's machine had been right. Today was Monday, and the headlines *did* say, "Senator Cardiff's body found." There was no paradox, merely an inaccuracy. There'll be some revisions in the later editions, he thought.

Smiling, he picked up the phone and dialed.

"Police headquarters? This is Edmund Cardiff. *Senator Cardiff*. No, I'm not a crank. I'm just calling to inform you that any reports of my death have been—greatly exaggerated!"

**THE END**