

# NOR MOON BY NIGHT

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*Pride was his sin on Earth . . . would  
it deprive him of his one last chance  
at Paradise?*

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THE guard nodded to the tall prisoner beside him. "You're next to die, Stevens."

Stevens glared at him, scorn on his thin lips. "I know, and I'm not frightened. . . . Remember that."

"I wasn't trying to scare you, Stevens." The guard glanced sideways at the warden, and then was quiet. He hated Stevens, and yet it made him sick to see men go to their deaths. Stevens would be the sixth in less than ten minutes.

The warden nodded and the guard took Stevens by the arm. The prisoner shook him off, angrily, stepped forward alone. The guard looked questioningly at the warden, then shrugged.

The next guard opened the green door. Stevens hesitated for an instant, in the doorway, looking down at the six-foot drop to the floor of the small room.

Slick and shiny, it was, a perfect mirror, and Stevens knew well it was not an actual floor. This was the Matchen Screen. Five men, just before him, murderers like himself, had stepped off, fallen to that mirrorlike surface and vanished.

Perhaps it was better than hanging or electrocution, gas chamber or rifle fire. All states were using the Matchen Screen for carrying out the execution of the sentences of death. When something touched the surface of the screen it vanished—flashed into a nothingness that left no trace. Now it would take the life of Troy Stevens, as though he were but a common criminal.

He heard the low voice of the guard. "The others didn't have to be pushed, Stevens."

He cast a contemptuous glance over his shoulder, and stepped into space.

He felt himself falling toward the Matchen Screen, knew he would snap out of the sight of the witnesses—

Stevens landed hard, his bare feet sinking down into the soft ground. He realized his prison clothes were gone, that he was in the country, and that there were men around him. Lastly, he realized he was thinking. *Thinking.*

He looked at the five men and it was an instant before recognition came. Like himself without clothes, the five were grouped together, talking, wonderment in face and voice.

Bristen, the skinny little prisoner, saw him first. "Hi, Stevens!" His hand waved in hard-assumed nonchalance. "Welcome to Heaven."

The others turned, looked without speaking. Stevens regarded them for a moment, then turned to see his surroundings.

They were in a valley between tree covered hills. Those trees— They seemed to have been cut and trimmed to shape. The grass beneath his feet was short and soft and green, as though it might have been a lawn. Twenty yards away there was a small brook, winding through the valley, making approved gurgling noises.

Stevens looked at his former fellow-prisoners, then began to laugh. It was laughter that brought chilled glances from the others, for it was laughter utterly without humor, and was only the sound of his taunting contempt.

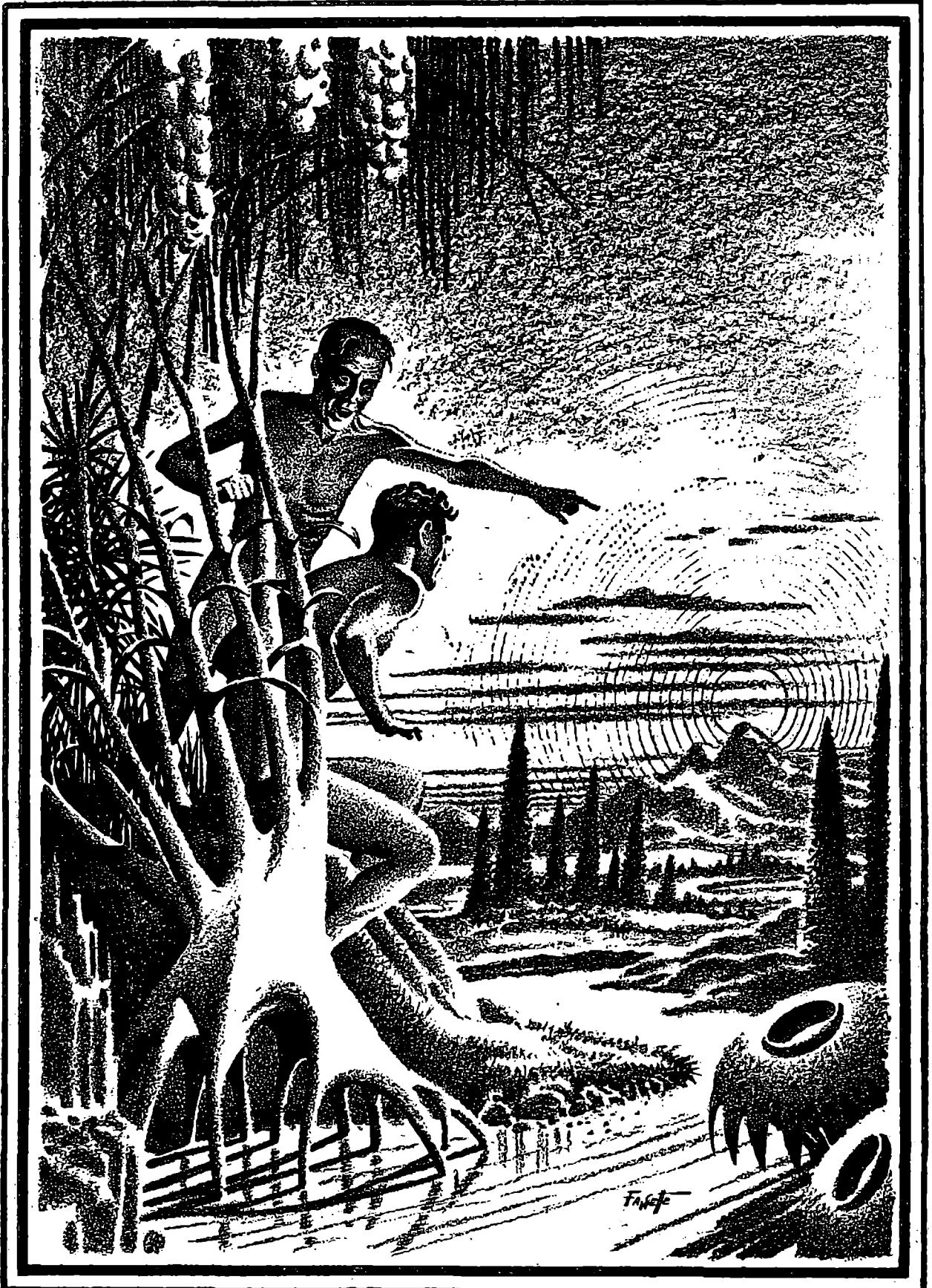
He stopped abruptly, looked again at Bristen, who watched with frightened little eyes.

"Heaven, is it? You're an ignorant fool, Bristen . . . and the rest of you. . . . Heaven? Do you actually think so?"

Two of the men muttered, but none spoke up to answer the question.

"Heaven after that stinking prison, yes!

"You must keep moving!"  
Hooper cried.



But I'm afraid our scientific friends were off-base on the Matchen Screen. . . . It doesn't kill."

Jerome, heavy and slow-voiced, who had kidnaped once too often, spoke. "I guess we don't understand, Mr. Stevens."

Stevens nodded in appreciation. "Matchen invented his screen by accident. Then found anything that touched it vanished. He and the other fools assumed that the screen caused the disintegration of matter. That it destroyed whoever touched it. It doesn't."

"Then what does it do, Mr. Stevens?"

"Look around you. Is this Earth?"

"We were thinking it wasn't. More like heaven, if you're not wanting fleecy clouds and golden streets."

"Not Earth and not Heaven. . . . Apparently the Matchen Screen is a dimension door."

"I know what that is!" Bristen's voice was high, excited. "It's a way to get to another dimension. Like— Like—"

Johnson, heavy-set and awkward, turned to Bristen, his face showing relief. "What is it, kid?"

Bristen tried to go on, then stopped and pointed to Stevens. "He can tell you. I don't know the right words. . . . But I know what it is."

Stevens let the smile that stayed away from his eyes touch his thin lips. "Another dimension is really a term to popularize a mathematical thought. It would be simplest to explain by saying we're in another kind of space than that which Earth is in."

Johnson rubbed his forehead. "You mean like we're way off, maybe on Venus or Mars?"

"No. We're probably closer than they are to Earth— If we could figure some absolute measurements to use. . . . We're probably *touching* the Earth. Standing now, perhaps, in the basement of the prison. The walls are around us. . . . We might be standing in a wall—"

He saw the men shifting uneasily, and broke off. "It doesn't matter what we call it."

"Sure don't," Bristen agreed. "As long as it comes out like this, I'm happy."

Ignorant, Stevens thought. Ignorant fools who'd murdered and got out of paying the penalty because Matchen had discovered a screen.

For himself— He couldn't find a point of comparison. It wasn't ignorance, nor lack of planning that caused his conviction. A silly accident, a one-in-a-million

chance had put him among these men—

He broke away from the thought and considered the situation. This was much like Earth, but greener and better. It was almost as though this were part of some great park. He looked at the sun, so familiar— Perhaps Sol himself as seen in another dimension. It was still early morning and the sun had not been long in the sky.

He realized the men were talking, beginning to drift up-valley.

"Wait! Come back!" he called.

They hesitated, started to return. Stevens had been careful not to move from the spot where he had landed. He reached down and started pulling grass out by the roots. The other men reached him, stood silent, watching.

"What's that for, Mr. Stevens?"

"So we can find the place where we dropped in. . . . See if you can find some stones, Jerome."

Jerome shuffled off in the direction of the brook, returned with two handfuls of smooth white pebbles. He dropped them where the grass had been pulled.

"Why are we doing this, Mr. Stevens?"

"So we can get back. We might not want to stay here the rest of our lives."

Jerome considered this carefully. "If we could get back to Earth from here, wouldn't it take us back in the prison?"

"Of course."

"Then, how—"

"We all owe something to that prison, Jerome. Don't we? . . . If we get strong, gather weapons, we can go back through for a surprise trip. Free some of the other prisoners, perhaps. Stage a raid on the countryside for things we need. Then we'll drop back through the screen. We'd have what we'd need to live here as we'll want to."

Jerome nodded. "I guess we might be wanting to do that some day. Just now, me and the boys want to drift up the valley a ways."

"No," Stevens said. "We've got to stay together. For strength."

"We're sticking together," Johnson remarked. "Except you. We want to go up-valley. . . . Some of the trees look like they got ripe fruit, so we'll make out."

Stevens tried to keep the anger from his face. "Think it over, man. We're going to need strength. Four more men are to be executed in the next week. We'll have them. . . . Then we can hunt for others."

Johnson remained stubborn. "I want to get along."

"Are you fellows going to take this? . . . Let us be shoved off in this world with nothing? Nothing? Not even clothes?"

"Say, how about our clothes?"

"Never mind. . . . I imagine they were lost in the screen. Perhaps it only transmits living matter."

Jerome was thinking. "You might have something, Mr. Stevens. Wilson will be coming through. I like Will. Maybe we can have that raid. We'll need some stuff—"

There were assenting murmurs. Stevens sensed his victory.

"It won't work." Bristen's voice was shrill. "He knows it won't work. We get the stuff, then *try* to bring it back! Remember what happened to our clothes."

"That's right, Mr. Stevens. Guess it wouldn't do much good hanging around. Will probably'll be along after us."

Stevens fought to keep his voice calm. Surely he could handle these— This scum! "Doesn't what they did to you mean anything? They tried to kill us! . . . We could capture guards, bring them here, and—"

Johnson broke in. "No. No, I reckon we had it coming. They were just doing their job. . . . Coming, fellows?"

The five men turned, as one, and walked from Stevens. Fifty yards away, they stopped, looked back. Seeing he hadn't moved, they went on.

STEVENS watched until they were out of sight, hidden by the trees. He wanted to follow. But, if they weren't willing to accept his leadership— Certainly he wouldn't let them consider him an equal. Besides, if he waited here, more men would be coming through. He'd have time to think things over. He'd be ready with a good story for them.

He looked to the sky and saw the sun was heading high, yet there was no increase in the heat. It was pleasant, almost cool. He picked the fruit of a tree and found it good to eat, unlike any fruit he'd ever known. This, certainly, was not Earth.

Perhaps this world was inhabited by a race of its own development. *There* would be an opportunity!

At the very least there would be hundreds—perhaps thousands—of murderers who had been executed since the invention of the Match Screen. All those would be possible subjects of a man strong enough to forge an empire here. A man who could surely find a way back to Earth, and

have this handy as sanctuary. Most here would be men—An empire would be needing women. As would an emperor.

The sun showed late afternoon. Stevens waited.

The sun was low in the sky when he rose from his place beside the brook to watch the man coming up-valley. He was naked, as they all had been. He walked fast, perhaps hunting for companionship.

Stevens wondered what prison he was from, idly watched him hurry along. The man saw him, changed his course slightly to take him to where Stevens waited.

As he drew closer, Stevens saw the man was thin, not strong-looking, and— Well, it would take all kinds, and a little more strength was better than none.

The man waved his hand to Stevens, smiled. He walked swiftly, for all of his apparent lack of strength, and his long legs covered ground rapidly.

He stopped by Stevens.

"Hi, Mister. . . . My name's Hooper. . . . Going my way?"

"I'm waiting for some—others. Stay awhile, and you can go with us."

Hooper shook his head. "Couldn't do that. Have to keep moving."

"A little while?" Stevens suggested.

"Can't do it, Mister. . . . Part of the morning's gone already.

"Morning!" Stevens looked at the low sun. "It's almost night."

Hooper looked up. "Nope, not for me. It's not high noon, yet. . . . Where did you come in?"

"Here."

Hooper's face showed alarm. "Here? You haven't traveled? It's a full day's journey, you know."

"From where to where?"

"From wherever you come in to the top of the valley. . . . Just one day."

"We can make it tomorrow." He could put it off again, tomorrow.

Hooper shook his head. "There's no delaying. Whenever you get here, it's morning. It's late morning for me, and almost evening for you. . . . "You can't make it, Mister." Pity showed in his face.

"Make it?"

"To the Gate. . . . Not before *your* night comes. . . . You've lost your chance."

"What chance?"

"To live again."

"Wait!" Stevens noticed his own shadow was long, Hooper's was very short. "What prison were you in?"

Hooper turned for the last time. "Prison? . . . I was killed by a truck."