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FALL
ISSUE



DAYMARE
*A Mystery
Novel of the Future*
By FREDRIC BROWN

**MAN FROM
THE STARS**
*A Fantastic
Novelet*
By ROBERT
MOORE WILLIAMS

**PERIL
ON PHOEBUS**
*A Space
Patrol Novelet*
By NELSON S. BOND

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

SCIENTIFICTION'S LEADING MAGAZINE

THRILLING WONDER STORIES



The Magazine of Prophetic Fiction

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ON THE COVER: Painting by Earle Bergey depicts a scene from Nelson S. Bond's novelet, PERIL ON PHOEBUS.

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The man tried to wrench himself free from Rick

A Complete Novelet

PERIL ON

CHAPTER I

Race with Death

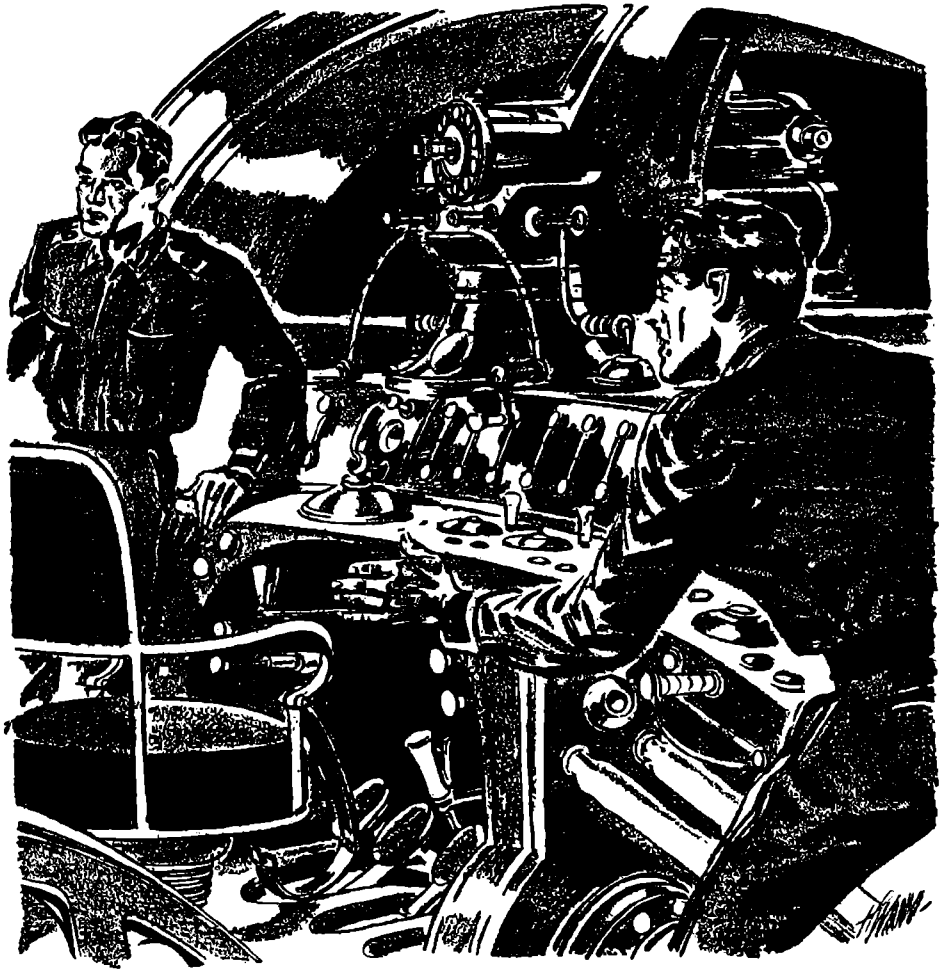
WHEN the mess gong chimed its cheerful invitation to dinner over the ship's audio, Lt. Richard Bartlett, C. T. C. of the Space Cruiser *Pollux*, rose and nodded to his assistant.

"That will be all for today, Lacey. We'll finish up tomorrow."

His aide said, "Very good, sir!", saluted, and left.

Bartlett moved slowly to the wash-basin, readying himself for the thrice-a-day ordeal that lay before him. His stomach had an appetite for the waiting meal, but his heart had none. In the three Earth months that had passed since he had qualified for the post of Chief Technical Coordinator on the *Pollux*, he had learned to dread these mess-periods. Never, at any other time

Wrecked By Space Pirates On A Moon Of Neptune,



Bartlett's grip, reaching for his holstered Lohrman

PHOEBUS

By
NELSON S. BOND

during the long, dragging hours which are an unavoidable evil of spaceflight, did he feel so alone and friendless as when he sat at table with fellow officers.

It was not that they were openly insulting, nor were they belligerent. Rick Bartlett was no physical weakling; he could have coped with either of these. But the attitude they had adopted—a mixture of deference, exaggerated politeness, covert scorn—was so subtly offensive that it left him helpless.

He would gladly give his right arm, as he moved down the ramp toward the Officers' Mess, if today, for a change, his entrance should bring one friendly grin, rather than with set and meaningless smiles. Or if just once a fellow officer should say, "The grease, Mister. Shove it down this way?"

But invariably their requests of him were elaborately correct. "Will you please pass the butter, Lieutenant Bartlett?"

Lieutenant Rick Bartlett Battles For Survival!

This unpopularity was none of Bartlett's own doing. It was not the result of anything he had ever done. It was due to the fame of his illustrious brother.

WHEN he had first met the junior officers of the *Pollux*, they had at first been jovial.

"So you're the new Brains, eh? Nice work if you can get it."

"Bartlett?" some muttered audibly. "Did he say Bartlett? Is he related to Russell Bartlett?"

And that, of course, tore everything to shreds. For he was, indeed the younger brother of Space Commander Russell Bartlett, hero of East Fontanaland and New Thermopylae, D. S. R. and Knight of the Imperial Ionian Scarlet. Thereupon descended an invisible wall of suspicion, which effectively sealed him off from all hope of future friendship.

Everyone felt about it as did Ned Murchison, First Mate of the *Pollux*.

"Favoritism!" he grumbled. "That's what it is, rank favoritism. I've been in the Service seven years, and I'm no nearer a C. T. C.'s grid than I was when I first hoisted gravs. But here he comes, fresh out of the Academy, still wet behind the ears, and plumps himself into the softest berth afloat. The kid's just riding to glory on his brother's rep. Technical coordinator, bah! Let's leave him alone,"

Which they did, and severely.

Even the Skipper always addressed Bartlett as "Lieutenant," and never as "Rick" at the mess table. Yet the Old Man frequently called his other juniors by their Christian names, and when he spoke to his Chief Engineer, O'Rourke, his terminology sometimes bordered on the blasphemous.

This particular meal was no exception to the hundred-odd others that had preceded it. Bartlett made no effort to enter into the conversation. He glanced up from his plate only once, when an orderly, coming from the turret to Captain Warren's side, whispered something which brought Warren to his feet

with a muttered apology.

"Excuse me, gentlemen."

He left the room. Dover stared after him curiously.

"Now what? We off trajectory?"

Halloway shook his head. "We were oh-oh when I gave the bucket to Ned. The hypos must be acting up again."

Chief O'Rourke glared up from beneath red and shaggy thatches of brow.

"'Tis a lie!" he roared. "There's nothin' wrong with my motors, you impertinent young blatherskite."

Dover reverted to the use of the primitive senses on which, even in a highly mechanized age, spacemen were oftentimes dependent. He sniffed and listened. "Air's good," he said. "And the hypos do sound O. Q. I wonder what's up?"

Bartlett, too, was wondering. At his last General Check everything had been all right. The *Pollux* was thirteen weeks out of Io City on the Jupiter-Neptune run, nearing the single-satellited planet. Hypos, grav gear, air and water were O. Q. Trajectory and declension on the nose, acceleration right for far space travel. There was only one other possible thing: a message important enough to draw the Skipper from his dinner.

His guess was verified immediately. Into the telaudio plate on the messhall's wall came a bluish glow. The Old Man looked down upon them. His eyes were anxious.

"Lieutenant Bartlett — " he said. "Dover—Halloway—"

Instantly all three were on their feet. "Yes, sir?"

"Come to the bridge immediately. We are assigned to special duty. There has been an accident." Warren's eyes now evaded Rick Bartlett's stare.

"The *Iris* has crashed upon Davy Jones."

BARTLETT gasped as if he had been struck a physical blow. The *Iris*! The flagship of the Outer Fleet, commanded by Russ! He did not realize his face was white as, bursting first from the dining hall, he paced his fellow officers to the turret.

On the bridge were the Skipper,

Murchison, and Danny Muldoon, the ship Sparks. The message Sparks had received from New Oslo was ominous in its brevity:

SC POLLUX PROCEED INSTANTLY RELIEF IRIS DOWN PHOEBUS STOP SENDING ADDITIONAL AID IMMEDIATELY STOP.

"An' that's all I could get out of them," complained the radioman. "I bugged 'em for more information but didn't get an answer."

Ned Murchison frowned. "Probably," was his comment, "because that's all the information they have themselves. If they find out anything more, they'll undoubtedly pass it on." Ned Murchison already was strapped in the bucket-shaped pilot's seat, setting studs. "Course revision ready for check, sir."

"Good. Check course revision, Lieutenant Bartlett."

Bartlett rapidly checked the placements. "All O.Q., sir!" he approved.

"Increased acceleration," ordered Warren.

"Increased acceleration," repeated Bartlett.

He whistled down the tube to O'Rourke in the engine room. "Raise hypos to thirty-fourty Acks, and open all jets!"

It did not occur to him, nor did it register upon anyone else in the turret, that for the first time since this flight began Rick Bartlett had been called upon to assume the difficult role of emergency Technical Coordinator, and he had stepped quietly and capably into the breach. Bartlett had more important things to worry about. He fingered the pages of the Solar Constant chart, made a few swift mental calculations.

"Seven hours, sir," he said. "Maybe six. Time enough to prepare a landing party."

Halloway, the Third, looked confused.

"B-but you said Davy Jones, sir," he said to the Old Man. "The radiogram says the *Iris* crashed on Phoebus!"

Captain Warren turned to Bartlett. "What is known about Phoebus, Lieutenant?"

Bartlett closed his eyes, marshaled his thoughts. This was the major responsibility of his post, the reason men were specially trained to the office of C.T.C. So that in case of emergency there should be aboard each ship one man whose mind was a reservoir of technical knowledge. Mathematical, astronomical, biological facts that might prove of value in whatever situation arose. Memory flooded back to him.

"The only satellite of Neptune," he said. "Observed first almost three hundred years ago, in Eighteen-forty-seven, by Lassell, it was not named until Nineteen-eighty-three, at which time it was called Phoebus. Spacemen, finding this confusing with Phobos, Mars' inner moon, and Phoebe, ninth satellite of Saturn, nick-named it 'Davy Jones' in honor of the traditional companion of Neptune.

"Its distance from the mother planet is approximately the same as the moon's distance from Earth, two twenty thousand miles. Its period of rotation is five days, twenty-one hours. Phoebus revolves from east to west in a nearly circular orbit, inclined twenty degrees to Neptune's equator. Its rotation period is fifteen-point-eight hours and the direction of rotation east to west.

"Phoebus has a diameter of forty-two hundred miles, as reported by an Astrophysical Research Expedition in Twenty-one-oh-nine, and is, therefore, approximately the same size as the planet Mars. However, no effort has been made to colonize it because—"

HERE Rick Bartlett stopped, stricken suddenly with a realization of what his calm recital would mean to the Earthmen now down on the bleak satellite. Cap Warren coughed gruffly.

"Go on, Lieutenant," he said.

"Phoebus cannot be colonized by man because of the insurmountable difficulties of there establishing habitations suitable to Earth-humans," continued Bartlett. "Outwardly frigid, coated like its mother planet with a thick sheathing of ice, due to its great distance from the Sun, this satellite is still subject to vio-

lent volcanic disturbances, occasioned by the perturbations created by the erratic orbit of Pluto.

"No life, either animal or vegetable, has been found on Davy Jones. Without unusually adequate protection, human life could not be supported thereon for longer than—"

When he faltered this time, Captain Warren did not press him to continue. He knew, as did the others who had listened to these facts, how short a time the survivors of the *Iris*—if any—could last. Only while they had food, air and water. Which meant, if their ship was damaged—just so long as their emergency spacesuits held out. Twenty-four hours at the most!

Captain Warren turned to the speaking tube, and his voice was an edged blade.

"Chief O'Rourke, shift hypos to maximum velocity."

"Aye, sir."

The thrumming drone of motors gathered tempo and the *Pollux*, every jet spewing a scarlet flame in its wake, seemed to pick itself up and hurtle bodily forward as if thrust from the maw of a gigantic catapult. . . .

CHAPTER II

Lair of Evil Men

IF WHAT transpired, of what he did and said in those next action-fraught hours, Rick Bartlett was never afterwards certain. It was as if he were two men, two entities. One of these was young Ricky Bartlett, kid brother of Russ Bartlett, racked with fear and apprehension for the safety of one whom he loved with a fierce devotion. The other was Lieutenant Bartlett, Chief Technical Coordinator of the Space Cruiser *Pollux*—who coldly foresaw ordered, those things which must be done to save a Space Commander.

Dover he sent to the crew's quarters.

"Ask for volunteers. Select a dozen. Equip each of them with a bulger, per-

malloy semi-rigid model, and check the heating units. Oh, yes—see that each bulger is supplied with emergency rations, water, spare oxytank and cough drops."

"Er—cough drops?" said Dover in surprise. "Aye, sir!"

Dover left, on the jump, but even in this vigorous moment Bartlett felt the twisting hurt of that stifled query.

Had understanding been established between them, Second would have finished the question. As it was, Cap Warren asked it after Dover had gone below.

"Why cough drops, Lieutenant?"

"Methane irritants in Davy Jones' atmosphere," explained Bartlett. "Theoretically the spacesuits are leak-proof, but at extreme temperatures, being the semi-rigid type, they sometimes permit seepage at the junctures. The landing party may find need for something to relieve throat irritation."

He turned to the waiting Third. "Lieutenant Halloway."

"Yes, sir?"

"Ready sick-bay to take care of possible casualties. And advise Sparks to raise New Oslo and order radio silence. We may want to reach them in a hurry. Captain Warren, have I your permission to lead the landing party?"

"It's irregular, Lieutenant."

"I know, sir. But—"

Bartlett was on the verge of saying that his brother was the man for whom they sought. But he never finished. For at that moment Ned Murchison called from the control board.

"Davy Jones on the nose, sir. Check deceleration?"

Bartlett moved to the board to check. But at that moment disaster struck!

Even as through the *perilens* he glimpsed the gigantic snowball-in-space which was Davy Jones—its shimmering, blue-white surface whirled, bobbed, spun dizzily. There came a staggering shock, a feeling of oppressive weight struck him to his knees, he heard Cap Warren's roar of dismay through ears that pounded with a sudden surge of blood—and the *Pollux* smashed Phoe-

buswards with the wilful, unchecked violence of a meteoride.

The combined drag of a dozen gravs and unfathomable acceleration gripped him to the floor, but somehow he managed to lift his head. What he now saw mirrored in the *perilens* as Davy Jones loomed larger, larger and nearer, brought a cry to his bleeding lips.

"Captain!"

"Vector warp!" shouted the Old Man. "Grav drag must be greater than the reports said. Snared us—"

"It's not that at all!" cried Bartlett. "It's an enemy. Men down there. They're deliberately crashing us on a hypertensile beam. Murchison, jam on the Dixie rod—fast!"

Bartlett's words were wasted breath. The initial shock had jerked Murchison's head forward and down across the control, his face was buried in a tangle of untouched studs. From his left temple, where it lay plastered by ever-increasing acceleration to a thick, brass guide-bar, oozed a ribbon of red.

MURCHISON was out cold. Captain Warren was helpless—an aging man, pinned by imponderable weight to the flooring as if he were a mounted insect. It was up to Rick Bartlett. He alone could save the *Pollux* from sudden, complete disaster. Laboriously, each movement wrenching a groan of protest from his straining lips, he dragged himself across the floor to the controls. A yard. Another yard. A third—

His ears seemed nigh to bursting with the torrent of sound that assailed them. The high, thin scream of the *Pollux* as it hurtled from thin space into the weak upper reaches of the satellite's atmosphere—the hoarse, demanding cries from the audio as tortured crewmen in various parts of the vessel shouted queries to the bridge—from somewhere in the ship a scream of pain—from within himself the agonized labor of lungs strained almost beyond endurance.

And then—somehow—his hand was on the base of the Dixie bar. The deceleration bar. The bar which, if he

could summon the strength to reach up and draw it toward him, would throw a block against the tensile beam that was dragging them to destruction.

He drew a long and shuddering breath into his lungs. Across the room Captain Warren's stertorous breathing bespoke an intensity equal to his own. He poised himself for the all-important effort . . . gathered weight-laden muscles . . . and rose!

Only for an instant—but that instant was enough! For even as his staggering knees collapsed beneath him, Rick Bartlett threw himself forward, clenched both arms about the rod—and fell. And the actual force which had been their doom now became their salvation. The rod clanged into position. The *Pollux* trembled, quivered, as though pounded in the forejets with a gigantic maul. Bartlett thought he could hear its struts and girders groaning with the torsion of that halt.

And then, so suddenly that quick nausea rose, choked him, where weight had gripped him like an iron claw, changed into the precious peace of normality. Bleak Davy Jones, on the icy plateaux of which someone had mounted the weapon which had so nearly drawn the *Pollux* to destruction, continued to grow in the visiplat. Men, angrily gesticulating, poured from hidden dwellings to watch the ship settle easily to ground. Men in bulgers, armed men, grim of visage, surged forward to board the landing vessel.

But Rick Bartlett saw none of this. With face frozen in a grimace of mingled pain and triumph, he lay senseless on the metal deck of the *Pollux*.

From far distances of space came an eerie murmuring. The swift syllablation of a voice speaking meaningless words. Then nearer came the sound—nearer still and louder—clearer, more comprehensible.

Rick Bartlett opened his eyes, conscious at last and aware that the *Pollux* had grounded, to find himself still in the control turret of the cruiser, surrounded by strangers.

It was one of these who was bent over

him, shaking him to consciousness. Still others crowded the doorways. Across the room a man was prodding battered, bewildered Captain Warren with staccato questions.

"Come on, now, speak up, Captain," he shouted. "How did you know we were here? Who told you? Did you come alone? Who landed this ship?"

His queries were forcefully impatient. The Old Man, Rick saw, had—like himself—drawn a blank when the cruiser had crash-landed.

EVEN now Warren's mind was not clear. Nor did it aid his foggy thought-processes to have queries thrust at him in this rapid fashion, punctuated by shakes and backhand swipes across the face.

"Answer, blast you," snarled the stranger. And again he raised his hand.

Bartlett came to his feet in a bound. In three strides he had crossed the room, grasped the questioner's lifted arm and spun him around.

"Hold it, *theekol*," he gritted. "That's no way to get answers. Can't you see the Captain, warped? Lay off."

He had not taken time to choose his words, and the man whose wrist he held, turned purple. *Theekol* was a Martian word not commonly employed in polite drawing-room conversation. Its nearest English equivalent was "space rat."

Bartlett had succeeded in drawing this antagonist's attention to himself. The man tried to wrench himself free from Rick Bartlett's grip, reaching for the Lohrman holstered in his belt. As quickly Bartlett stabbed for his own weapon and found nothing! He had been stripped of his sidearms.

Perhaps the surprised expression on his face saved him, or perhaps in that brief instant the other man realized that he, after all, was the master of the situation. At any rate, his rage changed to a smile of derision and his gun-hand stayed its motion.

"Spoke a little hastily, didn't you, Lieutenant?" he sneered.

This time it was Bartlett who glared about him wildly, for the first time not-

ing that each of the group bore arms.

"What is this?" he asked. "Who are you, and by what right do you board a Space Patrol vessel?"

The other man smiled. It was not a pleasant smile.

"I'm afraid you still do not understand the situation, Lieutenant," he said. "I'm asking the questions around here, not you. However, I have no objection to telling you my name. I am John Fallon."

"Black Jack Fallon!"

Bartlett knew the name. Every staff and crewman in the Solar Space Patrol had seen the posters, issued by the Planetary Federation, offering rewards for the apprehension of this space pirate, dead or alive.

There had been a time—and not too long ago—when the void had been infested with scores of corsairs such as Fallon. Pirates, privateers, outlaws—once space had swarmed with their vessels. But that had been before the S.S.P., freed at last from martial duty by the Interplanetary Peace Pact of 2133, had been able to turn its full, undivided attention to this problem.

Within the last decade practically all the pirating gangs had been hunted down and sent to the Penal Colonies on the outer planets.

But one pirate—the most vicious of them all—had so far escaped the far-flung seine of the Patrol. That man was Black Jack Fallon, before whom Bartlett now stood, face-to-face.

"That is what they call me, Lieutenant. And now, a fair return for my answer. What brought you here to Davy Jones?"

"What? Why, a—" Bartlett was on the verge of giving an honest answer. And then, suddenly, he understood. Black Jack's anxiety was easy to understand.

THIS almost forgotten satellite—this tiny moon of Neptune spurned by land-granters and corporations alike—was Fallon's long-sought hideout.

"—a routine trip," finished Bartlett deftly. "Our patrol is the Uranus-Nep-

tune shuttle. There is nothing unusual in our visit."

"Then there are no ships following you?"

"No."

Fallon studied him shrewdly for a second. Then—

"You're lying, Lieutenant," he asserted flatly. "You know we shot down the *Iris* some hours ago. We happen to know the *Iris* sent an S.O.S. You picked it up and followed, isn't that right?"

His tone was stridently assured. But Rick Bartlett, who had been trained to watch the hands, rather than the eyes of suspect men, noted suddenly that Fallon's fingers stirred restlessly, querulously, on the zippered lining of his belt. And in that moment he knew that Fallon was bluffing!

Fallon did not know for sure that the *Iris* had sent an S.O.S. But—why not?

Rick's brain, desperately seeking a reason for the pirate's uncertainty, found the answer in his memory. Something he had heard once, read once. A fact included in the Astrographic Society's report on the satellite Phoebus:

A physical peculiarity of Neptune's satellite is the fact its Heaviside layer is highly static. This renders impossible radio intercourse outside the atmospheric confines of the sphere. Thus radio messages cannot be sent from or to stations on Phoebus . . .

He shook his head.

"No. We heard no message. The—the *Iris*, you say? You mean the flagship of the Fleet?"

There was mockery in Black Jack Fallon's reply.

"The flagship, sailor. Even it was not proof against our new hypertensile beam. That's the seventh ship we've brought down in the last two months. Yours is the eighth—" His eyes glinted. "And that reminds me—somehow you managed to operate the Dixie in time to keep from crashing. Who did that? Who landed this ship?"

"I did."

"So? Not bad, sailor. I could use a man like you. What's your name?"

Rick Bartlett did not answer that

question. It was answered for him unexpectedly, dramatically. From the outer corridor came a confusion of sounds: scuffling, the pounding of footsteps, voices harsh with anger. The door burst open. Three men, bulger-clad but with their helms thrown back, stood on the threshold. Two of these propelled a central one forward to the outlaw leader.

"Tried to escape, Chief," roared one of the pirates in explanation. "Broke out of the cave and sneaked on board this ship. We caught him."

At that moment the captive's gaze, lifting defiantly, settled upon Bartlett. Both men started. And before the lieutenant was able to warn his brother by word or sign, Space Commander Russell Bartlett spoke. "Rick! What are you doing here, kid?"

CHAPTER III

Death by Degrees

IT TOOK no camera eye to mark the likeness existing between the two men thus suddenly confronted. Family relationship was plainly delineated in their features, their identical builds, the way they stared at each other. And Black Jack Fallon was no fool.

He glanced from Russ Bartlett to Rick, then laughed curtly.

"Brothers, eh?"

"I'm O.Q., Russ," said Rick Bartlett swiftly. And to Fallon he said, "Yes, but I had no idea—"

"Never mind, Lieutenant. I think I understand now." You did come here seeking the *Iris*! But—" And again Black Jack Fallon chuckled grimly. "But you didn't see the ship."

Rick Bartlett scowled. That was right. Apparently the *Iris* had met its fate on or near this spot, but it was not now in sight. How could that be?

Fallon was all action now.

"I shall talk with you again, Lieutenant," he said significantly. "Meanwhile, there is work to be done. Your arrival

no doubt will bring other vessels of the Patrol nosing around here. Mills! Le-Grandant! Take our new guests to their quarters. And tell the men to hide this ship before more visitors arrive."

Then, as the designated guards prodded Bartlett and Captain Warren into bulgers, herded all three prisoners out of the turret, down the ramps and through the airlock to the snow-cruised terrain of Davy Jones, Black Jack hurried away.

Rick Bartlett learned with gladness that none of the *Pollux*' command or crew had been seriously injured in the landing of the ship. As they gained the outside, they were joined by a score of other bulger-clad figures.

Recognizable behind the quartzite face-ports of these were the features of Dover and Hallowy, O'Rourke and Lacey, Sparks, Slops—all the members of the Patrol. Only two forms had to be carried: that of Ned Murchison, still unconscious from the blow he had sustained on the temple, and that of one of the blasters, a chap named Wilkerson.

"Leg, Captain Warren," O'Rourke explained briefly. "Broken."

They were led across a quarter mile of flat, unbroken white toward what appeared to be nothing more than a series of roundtopped, irregular hummocks. But as they approached these, Rick understood where and what Black Jack's "hideout" was—and why it was so successful. For at the base of one of these tiny hills he saw a small black opening. A door.

This, then, made everything clear. Fallon had moved to the surface of Davy Jones a number of Domes, similar to those used by Earth prospectors on all the inhospitable dots that circle Earth's Sun, and had in them established a headquarters that, once covered with a layer of snow, would evade the search of punitive parties.

As Bartlett comprehended this, he deduced something else—how the *Iris* had been and the *Pollux* would be, concealed. Looking back, he saw that his guess was correct. Even now, Fallon's followers were engaged in the operation that

would make the *Pollux* invisible to those who came seeking her. They were busily hosing a fine spray of something—what? Bartlett wondered briefly. Carbon dioxide?—over the ship. The spray congealed even before it fell upon the glistening metal structure of the ship. Half of it still glinted silver in the reflected light of Neptune on the horizon, the other half was a mound, a rounded hillock, like those toward which they were now being led.

Russ Bartlett whose gaze had followed that of his brother, swore.

"No wonder we've never been able to find Fallon," he said. "Perfect camouflage. He and his gang can rule this roost indefinitely without being detected."

"A flare," Rick Bartlett said tentatively. "If we made a flame which was bright enough someone might rescue us."

RUSS BARTLETT'S bulger rippled minutely, indicated that within its depths he must have shrugged.

"With what?"

Then both men relapsed into silence as their guards, glaring at them suspiciously, motioned them into the cubicle that served as the prisoners' pen.

Prison it definitely was.

It was there, some few minutes later, that Lieutenant Rick Bartlett realized fully the helplessness of their plight.

There were a dozen men already in the small, underground metal Dome. The *Pollux* captives swelled the number to almost three-score, and these were scant quarters for so many men. But no one lamented the confined quarters. They mourned, instead, the loss of their comrades who would have cramped the space even more.

"We were not so fortunate as you were," said Commander Bartlett. "We were too near the surface when we fell. The *Iris* is a total wreck. We lost nine men."

"Those men will be avenged, Commander!" said Captain Warren. "Fallon can't get away with this. He's gone too

far this time. We came seeking you because of a message from New Oslo."

Russ nodded. "Our Sparks got a crash SOS out before we realized what we were up against."

"And that same message said that other assistance was following immediately. There'll be a half dozen vessels of the Fleet hovering over here within twenty-four hours."

Something had been vaguely troubling Rick Bartlett. Now he asked, "But why, Russ—I mean, Commander—why does Fallon risk discovery by shooting down two ships of the Fleet?" he inquired.

"Power mad!" explained his brother succinctly. "He has a perfect hideout and a powerful weapon. The hypertensile beam. Were he satisfied to do so, the pirate colony he has established could perch here from now to eternity, sniping off such occasional merchantmen. But he wants more than that. He is ambitious to command a fleet of marauding ships."

Frank Dover interposed. "But how about us, sir? We represent a problem. He can't maintain us here as prisoners forever. What does he plan to do?"

Commander Russell Bartlett's face was grim.

"How much food and water have you brought into this dungeon with you?" he asked Rick Bartlett.

"Only the emergency rations in our bulgers."

"Exactly. We are all in the same fix. By pooling our reserves of food and water, we have perhaps enough to sustain life for perhaps three days. After that will come slow starvation and death by thirst."

"So that was it!"

Rick Bartlett stared at his brother incredulously. It was not conceivable that in this day and age there should be a situation so cruelly savage as this, or a man so needlessly cruel. Then he studied again, and with a more critical eye, his surroundings. The future looked gloomy indeed. A hemispherical Dome of permalloy, artificially

heated and air-controlled but otherwise not at all equipped for the sustenance of life. No bunks, no stove, no equipment. Only, at the farther circle of the wall from where they were now gathered, a narrow viaduct spilling smoky liquid into a trough which, slicing across a short arc, disgorged its stream through a similar circular vent.

"Starvation, maybe, but not thirst," Rick Bartlett said. "At least we have water." He moved toward the tiny stream. Russ Bartlett's voice lifted in swift warning.

"Don't touch that."

Lieutenant Bartlett jerked his hand back. He had been saved in the nick of time for in his nostrils tingled the raw, familiar odor of a fluid he had oftentimes used in laboratory experiments.

HE GASPED. Then his blood ran cold at the narrowness of his escape.

"Sulphuric?"

"Right," his brother nodded grimly. "Vitriol. Don't ask me why that stream runs through there. I don't know. It was probably first intended for sanitation. Knowing Fallon, my guess would be that it is another evidence of his blood thirst. Nothing would delight him more than to learn that one of his 'guests' had ignorantly tried to drink from the rivulet. Jenkins started to—"

Bartlett nodded toward one of his spacemen, who presented mute proof in the form of a bandaged hand.

Rick Bartlett gazed thoughtfully at the fumed trickle of acid.

"I think I understand. Davy Jones is volcanic underneath its sheathing of ice and this natural sulphuric flows up underneath the section on which Fallon's Domes are built. It would be used for sanitation." Then a sudden thought struck him; his eyes narrowed.

"Where does this stream go when it leaves this Dome?"

His brother shrugged. "I don't know, Rick."

One of the spaceman, second class, spoke up.

"If the Commander will excuse me, sir—" He coughed nervously. "I happened to notice, while we was topside, seen it quite plain, sir, I did, that there stream empties into a pool. Sort of lake, sir, back of the Domes."

A half-formed thought occurred to Rick Bartlett.

"An exposed pool, spaceman?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

Captain Warren snorted.

"The man must be mistaken, Lieutenant. Davy Jones is a frigid planet. Even sulphuric acid freezes."

"But don't forget," interrupted Rick Bartlett excitedly, "this pool is being constantly replenished by hot acid from below. I think he's right, Captain! And if he is we can consider ourselves lucky."

He looked at his brother. "How long have we been in here?"

"Perhaps two hours."

"Then the relief ships should arrive in twenty more. We won't be able to see them, but we'll be able to hear their hypos, won't we?"

Russ Bartlett nodded.

"Yes. I heard yours. That's when I attempted to escape. But you won't be able to do what I did. They are more cautious now."

"We're not going to set foot outside this Dome," said Rick Bartlett excitedly. "As a matter of fact, we may find it necessary to defend ourselves in this room. But we are going to get a message to our friends when they arrive. Our hideout is camouflaged. Without some assistance our friends might search for us in vain. But there is one thing that will surely attract their attention, bring them unerringly to this spot."

"And that one thing will be what?"

"A sign of human life," said Rick Bartlett. "A flame blossoming in the icy waste where there is nothing to burn. Fallon will be helpless either to prevent or extinguish our signal. He will be powerless against more than one relief ship. His weapon is effective against only one at a time."

Halloway turned to Captain Warren bitterly.

"He's off his gravs, Captain. I've been thinking it over, and there's only one thing to do. Start a rumpus, make a break from this place, and go down fighting."

There was scorn in his voice; scorn and a veiled collection of the attitude which had always been a barrier between Rick Bartlett and his shipmates. A few days ago, Rick Bartlett would have withered before that reproof. But not now.

THIS was the final straw. He whirled on Halloway viciously.

"Lieutenant Halloway!" Rick Bartlett's voice crackled. "Let me hear no more insolence from you." He turned to the others with flashing eyes. "Captain Warren and Commander Bartlett: I realize you both outrank me, but in times of danger, under unusual and extraordinary circumstances, when the value of special technical skill becomes of paramount importance, a Technical Officer may assume command. That time is now. All of you here know the special clause in the Planetary Patrol Code to which I refer."

"Under the power thus invested in me, I now issue the following orders:

"Commander Bartlett, you and the men of the *Iris* will organize as a rear-guard detail to hold the door of this Dome in the event that the enemy should attempt to force entrance."

"Captain Warren, select five helpers. You will find that in each of the thirty-odd spacesuits there is a pocket gelatin-lined for the storage of flare cartridges. Tear each of these from its bulger and let me have it."

"Lieutenant Murchison!"

Ned Murchison was sitting up now. His head was bandaged, and he still looked a little groggy, but there was a smile on his lips. Perhaps he was remembering that it was Rick Bartlett who, when the chips were down, had taken control of the *Pollux* bridge. Perhaps he was remembering that it was the despised "Brains" who had managed to

jam on the Dixie when things looked blackest for the doomed ship. Or perhaps he just liked this new, fiery Rick Bartlett.

"Aye, sir," he said. "Orders acknowledged and understood, sir!"

That answer brought back the smile to Rick Bartlett's white lips.

"Thanks, Lieutenant," he said. "Listen, then! I want all the sugar supplies from the provision bags. Even the chocolate. Pack this in some of the sacks Captain Warren will give you. And in the remainder of the sacks you will place, pulverized, all the cough drops."

It seemed, thought Rick Bartlett oddly, he could not say that word without making someone gasp. This time it was his brother.

"Cough drops, Rick?"

Rick Bartlett made no reply. He was engrossed with pleasure in the overheard comment of Frank Dover who, like Murchison, had finally decided to play on his side. Dover was prodding the spacemen to action.

"O.Q., boys," he was saying. "Let's go! The Brains says we have a job of work to do, and time's awasting."

CHAPTER IV

Pool of Fire

LONG hours of monotonous drudgery followed. The prisoners were working entirely without tools; it was a laborious task to extract the delicate gelatinized membranes from the bulgers without rupturing them, an even more delicate task to fill them with those items Rick Bartlett had designated and secure them in taped bundles.

His brother doubted the likelihood of even a flame being spotted by the watchers above.

"Too small, Rick. This satellite is a blinding sheen of white light. You know that."

"But it won't be in another hour or so," Rick Bartlett told him. "By the time relief comes, it will be pitch black."

And thus it was, as the twentieth hour approached, a haggard Rick Bartlett looked happily upon the completion of his plan. The sacks of sugar and ground cough drops lay taped together as he had ordered. There remained but the last act, the finale for which the drone of hypatomic motors overhead should be the cue.

It was at this moment that he was summoned to appear before the outlaw leader.

Black Jack Fallon was in an amiable mood. He had a proposition to offer. He made it bluntly.

"I'll get down to cases without mincing words, Lieutenant. I've taken a fancy to you. I like any man of courage. If you'll throw in with me, I'll make it well worth any supposed 'honors' you lose in doing so. You'll be rich, Lieutenant. And you'll have power—greater power than anyone else in the universe. Except, of course, myself. Well?"

Rick Bartlett simulated hesitation. There was a chance, even yet, that freedom might be obtained by a ruse, and that his wildly spectacular "plan," with its possibility of failure, need not be thrown into operation.

"What about my brother?" Rick Bartlett asked.

Fallon frowned, then laughed.

"I'll set him loose in a skiff and let him take his own chances."

A life-skiff, as Rick Bartlett knew only too well, would not have a chance of ever gaining a sanctuary from the far reaches of Neptune. Concealing his rage, Rick Bartlett stalled for time.

"Let me think it over," he said. "Maybe I will join."

Fallon scowled and was about to make some fiery answer when a guard burst into the outlaw's headquarters.

"Chief! Patrol ships approaching in the eighty-third quad!"

"How many?"

"At least four. Maybe more."

Whatever Black Jack's faults, he was a leader of men. Instantly his personal grievance was submerged by this threat. He jabbed a finger at the men who had

brought Bartlett hither.

"Take him back. I'll see him after the Patrol's gone. Hughes, general black-out order. Kill all motors. We can't handle four enemy ships at once. Total silence, and they'll never find us."

As his guards led Rick Bartlett back across the snowy plain to the prison, Rick Bartlett saw in the jet velvet of far space night the coruscating streamers which were the wakes of their rescuers. And he noted especially, with a breath-taking rebirth of hope, that the sailor had been right. Beyond the prison Dome lay a hazy, bubbling pool, like a gaping maw against the white mantle of Davy Jones . . .

Plot and counterplot!

It was, Rick Bartlett knew, all or nothing now. He turned to his brother.

"I'll need help, Russ. Quick, men! Be ready to carry out the plan as I mapped it out."

OUTSIDE the Dome all was silent, all was dark. Then came a thin, far stir of sound. Like a lazy bumbling of a sweat-bee drowsily seeking pollen in the quiet heat of midsummer. Louder it grew as the ships drew nearer. It rose from a drone to a rumble, from a rumble to a muted rolling of tympani. Commander Bartlett glanced at his brother. "Now?" his eyes questioned.

"Wait!" breathed Rick Bartlett. They must be directly above, or as nearly so as the kind fates would guide them. There was but material for one brief signal. If it were not seen the situation would be desperate. The pirates would kill them all.

The thunder deepened. In the skies above, rockets flamed and mighty engines throbbed. The explosions were deafening, near and constant. Rick Bartlett's voice rose in a loud command. "Now!"

And he hurled two of the gelatinized sacks into the stream that traversed the Dome. Two, then two more. Russ Bartlett still did not know what his brother was doing, but he, too, began alternately lifting and hurling. The flimsy bags hit and splashed, murky acid splattering

dangerously close to the two men as they labored. The stream swirled angrily, tugged at the bags as if resentful, then swept them away, out of the Dome, into the pool beyond.

Again and again. Lift and toss. The last packages disappeared.

It was done! The sacks had vanished into the outer darkness. Rick Bartlett was conscious that he was cold with sweat, that his knees, now and unaccountably, were weak beneath him.

A cry rose from someone in the chamber.

"But nothing happened. What went wrong?"

"Wait," pleaded Rick. "Wait. It will work. It has to work!"

He was listening for the one sound that would spell an end to his doubts, the sound of rocket-motors cutting off. This would mean a rescue ship was gliding to ground.

And it came. Where the keen, space-trained ear had been able to determine the roar of four separate motors, suddenly there were but three. Then two. Then a single one—and it circling over and overhead, standing guard as its companion ships made landings.

There was no longer silence in the pirate camp. Loud cries arose, followed by the thud of their ordnance going into action. The heavier, sharper, more decisive slash of Patrol guns seeking an enemy, came next.

And as Rick Bartlett had foreseen, there was need for defense of their own prison. For footsteps approached their Dome, a key ground at the lock. But Russ Bartlett had not won honors at Fontanaland and the siege of New Thermopylae without reason. Even without arms, a defense of sorts had been arranged. Piled high against the portal were the three-score metal space-suits. They formed a bulwark beyond which the would-be invaders could not pass. The foremost, shearing a way through by main force, stumbled and lost his gun, arming one of the besieged. Another fell, his skull smashed like an eggshell by a lead-weighted bulger boot wielded by brawny Chief O'Rourke.

It was a losing battle the little garrison fought, but for the time element. That was what saved them. Because as the front rank wavered before the increasing ray-fire from outside, there came a withering blast into the rear of the attack party. The Patrolmen had landed and trapped the outlaws in a raking cross-fire. After that, it was all over . . .

THE clean-up operations were messy but brief. Black Jack Fallon knew only too well that he could expect no clemency from the Planetary Court which would sit in judgment on him. He presented his defense here on frigid Davy Jones. His steel-jacketed arguments cost the lives of seven spacemen.

But the Dome in which Fallon made his last stand was no match for the armament of the Patrol. In the end, it went up in a spume of flame, sharded metal and ice, and its destruction marked an end to the outlawry of Black Jack Fallon.

There remained the task of unearthing the ice-bound ships which had fallen prey to Fallon's tensor weapon. The *Pollux*, freed of its layer of camouflage, proved to be spaceworthy, as did two of the other vessels taken captive by the pirates. The *Iris* had to be abandoned. When this was known, the Captain of one of the ships came to Commander Russ Bartlett.

"I'm afraid the *Iris* is a total loss, sir. Except for the arms, which are being transferred to the other ships. If you would care to take the bridge of the *Orion*, sir?"

Commander Bartlett shook his head.

"No, thank you, Captain. I have selected the *Pollux* as temporary flagship."

"Very good, sir. We'll return to New Oslo, sir?"

"That's right."

The Captain, no ordinary spacemen being present, dropped a measure of his formality.

"We would all like to extend our congratulations, on your escape," he said. "And thanks for the landing beacon you lighted to signal us. Otherwise we might

never have found you."

Russ Bartlett grinned. "I'm afraid you're congratulating the wrong man, Captain. I was not responsible for the lighting of any flare. I didn't even know there was a flare. Perhaps my brother, Lieutenant Bartlett, C.T.C., can explain?"

There was pride in his voice, and in the gaze he turned upon Rick. Rick felt his cheeks warming gratefully. Some explanation, he knew, was due those who surrounded them. He said, "It—it was a desperate measure. I couldn't be

sure it would succeed, but it seemed to be worth trying—"

Red Halloway could no longer restrain his curiosity.

"How did you do it, Brains?" he demanded. "All we did was put sugar and busted-up cough drops in bags, and you and the Commander chucked 'em in the water—"

"Not water," corrected Rick Bartlett. "Sulphuric acid. That was what gave me the idea, you see.

"Our problem was to cause, in the darkness of Phoebus, a flame that would give the rescue ships a clue as to our location. We had no usual fire-making apparatus. Furthermore there are no inflammable substances on the surface of the satellite. And we had no access to the open air.

"But there ran through our dungeon a stream of acid which debouched into a surface pool. And we had on hand two substances, common sugar and potassium chlorate, a compound which forms the base of almost every pharmaceutical 'cough drop,' which, when combined with sulphuric acid, form a violently explosive, inflammable mixture.

"When we dumped these into the sulphuric stream in gelatinized sacks, we were gambling that they would reach the Outside before the sulphuric dissolved the containers. And as soon as that happened, combustion took place."

"Creating," nodded the man who had seen it, "a sudden pillar of flame that drew our attention. Most ingenious, Lieutenant. But dangerous."

RICK BARTLETT wished he had not said that.

"It was the only thing I could think of," he said apologetically.

A new voice spoke up, gruff but sturdy in his defense. The voice of Ned Murchison.

"Aw, it was better than good," growled the First Mate of the *Pollux*. "Trouble with you other spacehounds is you haven't the Brains we've got on the *Poll*! Us, we've got us a real set."

The danger was over now. There was no particular reason why Rick Bartlett's knees should have felt so strangely weak, or why his eyes should be so confounded misty, here in the clear-cut crispness of Phoebus' atmosphere.

Because they would be returning to Io City soon. There would be honors from an appreciative Advisory Council. Medals, a Commendation.

But these rewards, Rick Bartlett knew as he glanced about him, seeing the friendliness in the eyes of his own ship-mates, would be superfluous, an anti-climax. Because he had already won that which he wanted most.

From behind, Ned Murchison gave Rick Bartlett a nudge.

"Come on Brain," he growled. "Just because you pulled a slick stunt, do you think that gives you any excuse to stand around all night shootin' the wind about it? Let's go aboard, you lug."

Rick Bartlett turned savagely.

"Who're yuh shovin'?" he demanded.

Frank Dover promptly closed in from behind and the three, a tangle of arms and legs, fell into a nearby snow drift. For a few minutes they struggled mightily. Then Rick Bartlett combined forces with Murchison and helped to shove Dover so deep into the snow that he yelled for mercy. Then they pulled him out and all three walked off, arm in arm.

Rick Bartlett was happy now. At last he was really a member of the *Pollux*!



THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY .

PERIL ON PHOEBUS

On the other hand, the featured novelet in this issue—**PERIL ON PHOEBUS**, by Nelson S. Bond—started out to be a detective story of today right here on Earth and developed into a perfect scientifiction yarn without any detective business about it.

Mr. Bond writes:

As a general thing, I have little of interest to relate in this column about the piece appearing elsewhere in the book.

But it's a long worm that has no turning! For once in my life, I have a little secret to tell about *Peril on Phoebus*. It is a story that started out as a modern detective tale—and ended up several centuries in the future on a far world!

The germ of the story lies, of course, in the novel idea that two simple, easily procured substances and a very commonplace solvent can be combined to form a violent and instantaneous explosive. Discovering this little-known fact, my authorial sense immediately spotted the story possibility inherent thereto. I envisioned the tale as an arson crime committed to cover a murder. Business, you know, of a killer leaving town, mailing packages of the substances to himself, and thereby setting fire to an untenanted house—get it?

Yeah—so did I! Up to that point. Then not a step further. Because I couldn't for the life of me see how any dick, howsoever courageous or acute, could possibly solve the perfect crime I had invented!

So the plot went into the junk-pile. That was two years ago. Then, recently, I found it still lurking around the fringes of what I laughingly like to call "my brain"—and I began to see how the theme could be woven into a stf. story. I sat me down and did a little good old-fashioned brow-knitting, came up with all the necessary answers—and here it is, folks! For better or worse—*Peril on Phoebus*!

If you like it, tell the editor of **THRILLING WONDER STORIES**. If you don't, drop me a personal line in a heavily-sealed envelope edged in black. I don't want a good customer ever to find out you don't like my stories!—*Nelson S. Bond*.