

# SCIENCE FICTION

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# PINNACLE

B Y L E E J. F O X

Along with the mineralogists, the cartographers and military engineers who go to the moon, there will be a silent group of men with axes and nylon ropes. They will seek out and climb Mount Huygens for the same reason they climbed Everest, Annapurna and K2; not for fame, riches or personal gain, but simply because they are there.

Carleton lay as he had fallen, one leg crumpled uselessly under his body, at the bottom of a deep defile. The stark, harsh rocks of the Moon's landscape rose in jagged splendor all around him. The mountains marched away in serrated ranks as far as his eyes could see, painted in blazing white and darkest black, incredible and fearful. Surprisingly, he did not lie in black shadow, but in the full glare of the sun's light, deflected downward by some quirk of refraction. Above him towered the grim face of Mount Huygens, rising five miles into the atmosphereless sky. And somewhere higher on the mountain's side—8,000 feet or more—was the rest of Carleton's climbing party.

He supposed the slow motion fall, caused by the one-third

gravity of the moon, had prevented his being killed outright. But the bouncing, slow as it was, had battered his radio to useless junk. His leg must be broken, although he felt no pain, for how else could it be so twisted beneath him. The slow gentle hiss of escaping oxygen meant that his air hose must have been punctured at some time during his headlong fall by jagged shards of rock. He guessed he had about 15 or 20 more minutes to live. It would take the rescue party, which must already be under way, several hours to inch their way downward toward him. Even a radio call of their base at Lunar City for a rescue "scooter" could not possibly reach him in time.

Dying is a lonely thing for any man. And dying alone on

the moon at the bottom of some crevasse is a hell of a place to die, Carleton thought.

Just what makes a man spend his whole life climbing mountains: Carleton thought back on his own exploits of mountaineering—back to the beginning of his interest in climbing when Edmond Hillary's ascent of Mount Everest in 1953 electrified the world. Carleton had been ten years old at the time—an impressionable boy who made Edmond Hillary his ideal, and vowed to follow in his footsteps.

And he had. He, too, climbed Everest, being the first to ascend the grim North face where Mallory and Irvine were last seen. Hillary's ascent had been from the south. He became a world renowned authority on mountaineering, and made many spectacular climbs in the Himalaya mountains. Dhaulagiri and Makalu, treacherous rock and ice giants of the Himalayas fell to his repeated assaults, although they had once been pronounced unclimbable. And now, at the age of 39 he was leading the first expedition to climb Mount Huygens, the highest mountain on the moon.

For eighteen years Carleton had done all kinds of mountain climbing—rock climbing and snow climbing; he had scaled perpendicular rock chimneys and

hacked his way up icy glaciers. It had become his philosophy, his way of life. Conquest of Nature's most challenging obstacles. To brave all manner of hardships, dangers, and elements; to surmount all these at last and stand on the pinnacle, wind whipping across your face, knowing you can go no higher. To know that you had finally achieved the top, fulfilling oneself—that was living, and it was good.

He now lay mostly in shadow. The light, inching across the rocks had left him to shine on other debris, tossed there perhaps millions of years ago. It was more comfortable to be out of the blazing glare of the sun, but more difficult to be found. But there wasn't time.

He looked up at the sky, always awe inspiring when viewed from the atmosphereless moon. It lay above him like a cup, ebony black and pinpointed with myriads of cold white dots of light. The sun was a blazing ball of white fire far to the left, dimming out all stars in its vicinity, while the earth swam over a dark, jagged crest, green and glowing.

Thank God for that, breathed Carleton.

The earth was three-quarters full, and as the shadow of the sun ran across the Earth's face, Carleton could faintly see the

geographical outlines traced. The Earth was turned so that he saw the vague outlines of the Americas, and the Rocky Mountains where he had done his first climbing as a boy.

There have been others to die like this—brave men who died pursuing their ideal. I guess it's not such a bad way to go, he mused.

And then miraculously there was sound in his dead ear-phones. Clipped British accents were calling his name.

"Carleton! Robert Carleton! Are you there?"

He saw them then, several men scrambling down the vertical wall toward him.

"I say, old man," continued the voice, "you have had a nasty fall. Let's help you up."

Strong arms reached for him, lifting him to his feet. They smiled as they helped him.

"My leg, I think, is broken, and my air line has a leak," Carleton began.

There was something odd about these men.

"Who are you fellows, anyway?"

"I'm George Leigh-Mallory, and this is A. F. Mummery, and here is Andrew Irvine, and Dudley Wolfe, and Herman Schaller," came the reply.

And then Carleton knew what was wrong. These men were dressed for mountain climbing, with warm clothes, sturdy boots, ice axe and coiled rope hanging from their belts, but no space suits. And the familiar names were those of famous mountaineers who had been killed while climbing.

"You won't need your space suit, now," one of the group remarked.

Carleton suddenly became filled with a wondrous expectation as Mallory gently helped him out of the cumbersome gear.

"All right, fellow," spoke Mallory, "let's go to the top."

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