

# They Write...

## PAUL W. FAIRMAN

“After thirty-five years, twenty of them spent at almost every kind of job you can think of, I went into the writing business. Spent most of my life in Chicago, moving to New York in 1950. In the past five years I’ve produced two children in collaboration with my wife, and 272 stories. Sold the entire production with the exception of the children. (I will not!)”



# fantastic

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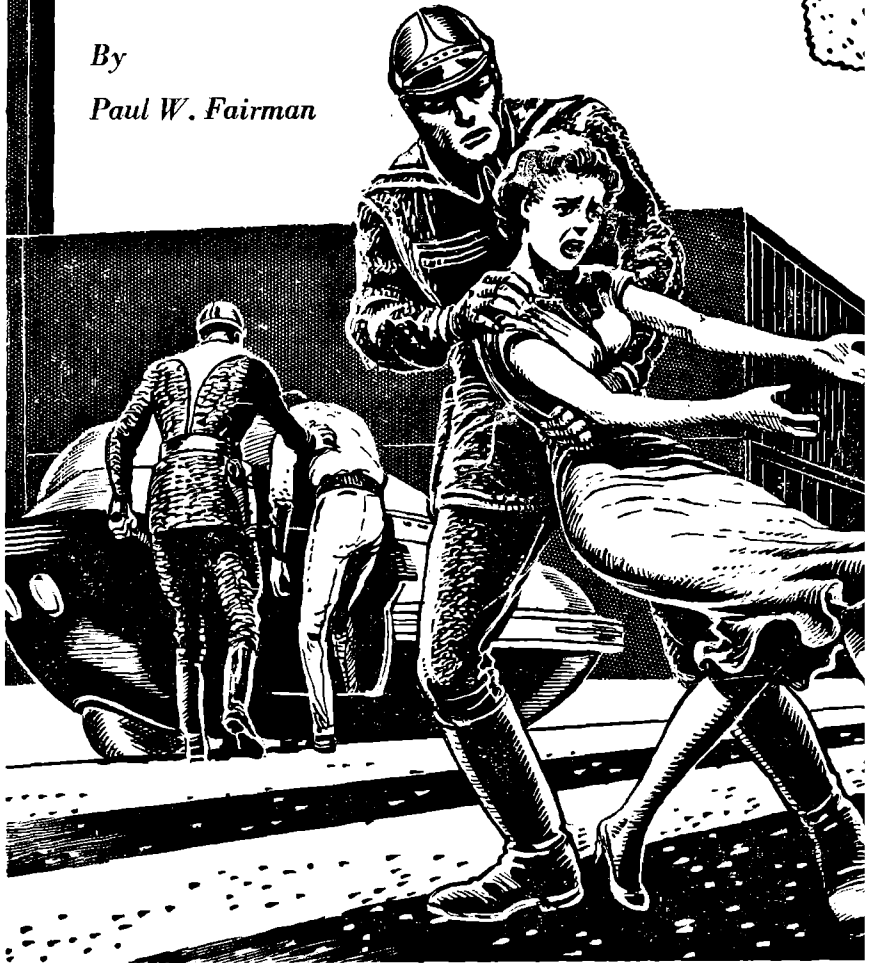


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# *“SOME DAY they’ll give us guns”*

By  
*Paul W. Fairman*



illustrator: Ed Emsler

*One of the more reliable plots in science-fiction is the invasion of Earth by alien hordes from outer space — an enemy so far in advance of our science that an atomic pile is something they give their kids for Christmas. This, of course, puts mankind in about the position of the Zulu Marching and Chowder Club as compared to the AEC.*

*It all sounds pretty grim, we'll admit. But so far the only indication that it might happen is a flying saucer here and there. And even if it should come to pass, take heart: Paul Fairman says we'll get by. It seems we've got a secret weapon that even the Martians can't handle!*



**D**ON'T gulp your food, dear. Please. You're not in that much of a hurry."

Johnny Carrol didn't answer his mother. He went right on bolting his breakfast. His mother sat across the table watching him, and his father stood by the window looking out into the street.

His father asked, "What are you planning for today, Johnny?" Asked it with a careful selection of words and tone; a caution which had become commonplace among parents since the invasion from space.

Johnny took his time about answering. "Curly and Bob and me —"

"Curly and Bob and I, dear."

Johnny frowned at his mother. "The three of us came out on top of our class. The highest marks. So we get a day off from school."

"But darling — you didn't tell us. I'm — I'm very proud of you." Helen Carrol spoke quickly, bit-

ing her lip at the end of the sentence.

"It wasn't anything," Johnny said. "Even the little kids on Septos do better."

Helen Carrol started to speak, but her husband cut her off. What with the strict regulations relative to parents' control over their children, it was so easy to make a mistake. Even the mildest criticism . . .

Frank Carrol walked slowly toward the breakfast table. "I probably won't be here when you come back, Johnny."

"Frank — Frank! Please!"

"I've been told to report to Divisional Control today. It seems the Septonians have dug up an old book I wrote on child psychology."

"One of the Counselors is going to spend the whole day with us," Johnny said. "His name is Barchard and — and he's swell. Just swell."

"Did you hear what I said, Johnny? *Divisional Control*."

The boy got up from the table with that cold, impersonal look he'd developed during the previous two years — since the Septonians had come across the galaxy and had taken Earth over with all their might and science. Frank Carrol's fists were tight in his pockets as he watched his son stop in the doorway to say, "I won't be home for dinner — and don't wait supper. I may be pretty late."

The door closed. Frank Carrol whispered, "Goodbye, son," and then he was standing close to his wife while she sobbed into the folds of his dressing gown.

The sobbing quieted and she whispered: "Don't go, darling. Don't go! Run — run away and hide! Others have!"

He stroked her head absently, his eyes on the closed door. "But only to be caught like rats. With no weapons but our bare hands. . . ." His thought trend changed. His voice came huskier: "He's a good boy still. They haven't changed him as much as some of the others."

"Darling! Please run away."

"No. I'll report as ordered. There's no other way to do."

Johnny Carrol raced down the block to Curly Dale's house and found Sam Dale standing on the porch. Sam not doing anything. Just standing there looking into space.

"Where's Curly?"

"He'll be out in a minute, I imagine." Dale's look was flat, empty, impersonal. He reached slowly into his pocket for a cigarette.

"Tell him I'm here."

But that wasn't necessary because Curly came pelting out of the house. "Hi! I'm ready. Let's go." They ran off down the street side by side, not bothering to say goodbye.

The two boys found Bob Brown waiting for them, slamming his front gate back and forth until the fence shook. Bob fell in beside them. They ran until they came to the stone wall along the south side of the park and each of them sailed over it with a high leap. Clearing it by a foot and then dashing right on to the fountain where Barchard was waiting.

Gasping for breath, Johnny asked, "Did you see that jump I made? I'll bet that's how they do it on Septo!"

Curly hung panting on the edge of the fountain. "Nuts! That wasn't like Septo. Only like some slew-footed Earthman!" And to Barchard: "Did you see my jump?"

The Septonians bred magnificent men. Barchard was six-and-a-half feet tall, broad, bronzed, perfectly proportioned. His teeth, white and even, showed in an engaging grin. "All the jumps were good. You fellows'll make it yet."

"You were going to knock out some flies for us," Bob said. "Remember? You told us yesterday you'd hit some."

"Sure," Barchard replied. "You didn't think I'd let you down, did you? When did I ever forget a promise to you guys?"

Barchard had brought along a baseball bat and half a dozen balls. He laid the bat on his shoulder and squinted off over the housetops.

"Knock it clear over the sun," Curly demanded fervently.

Barchard continued to grin. "That wouldn't be hard. You haven't got much of a sun in this System."

"You're telling us," Bob agreed. "It's a lot bigger on Septo, ain't it?"

"A great big blue one," Johnny said. "Three, four times the size of that little old yellow one."

Barchard said, "You fellows'll see that and lots more."

"Oh boy!"

"Shut up and let Barchard sock the balls."

Barchard tossed up one of the baseballs and swung the bat in a lazy arc. A sound like a pistol crack and the ball shot upward, a white streak which had hardly begun arcing when it went out of sight. Barchard squinted after it. "Not so good. Didn't hit it square."

The three boys whistled in unison. "Not so *good!* Septonians can do everything better than Earthlings. Gosh!"

"Don't worry. You boys are coming along fine." Barchard sent the other five balls higher and farther into the clear blue sky. When he finished he dropped the bat, and again the engaging grin. "Think the Yankees could use a few Septonians on their team?"

"The Yankees?" Curly asked. "Who are they?" And everybody laughed.

After that they all had a drink at the fountain and Barchard said, "Well, what'll it be, boys? This is your day, you know. Just name it."

"How about the Space Museum?" Curly asked. "All the ships and guns and things from Septos. You can tell us about them?"

Bob Brown was agreeable. "Oh boy! That'll be swell!"

Barchard's easy smile was a part of him. "How about you, Johnny?"

"Well . . . I kind of had another idea." He looked up from the ground in shy admiration at the huge Septonian. "You see, I learned to do something — all by myself — and I wanted to show you. Couldn't we go out for a hike in the woods?"

"I think that would be a good idea," Barchard said. "I'll get a lunch and we'll have a picnic. And then I'll tell you some more things about Septos you don't know."

Curly jumped into the air and clicked his heels. "What are we waiting for? Let's go."

Barchard stopped at a commissary and came out with a big lunch basket. He put it into the trunk of his car and then they drove ten miles out of the city, parked the car and began hiking along the river.

They'd traveled several miles before they reached the place

where Curly fell and turned his ankle. The boy emitted a yelp of pain, whereupon Barchard turned sharply. "What was the first rule I taught you?"

"A Septonian laughs at pain," the three boys replied in unison.

Barchard smiled. "That's right." He set down the lunch basket. "Let's have a look at it."

The three boys watched him in mute admiration as he worked deftly with Curly's ankle. After a while he straightened. "There. It won't bother you now."

It was amazing the things every Septonian knew. Their knowledge — norm so far exceeded that of Earthlings that they were regarded by the youth of Earth as supermen.

"Gosh," Curly marvelled. "All the pain's gone."

Barchard's smile. "Of course. You'll learn how to do things like that. How about lunch?"

The three boys were ready to pitch in. For a while nothing was said. Not until Barchard asked, "By the way — how are your parents behaving? Anything to report?"

"Naw," Curly said. "My mom and dad — they let me alone. They know better than to tell me what to do."

"My folks don't even ask where I'm going any more," Bob said, his mouth full of chicken.

Johnny put down half a sandwich and looked at Barchard.

"It's funny," he mused. "How come they can't see things the way us kids can? Why do they have to learn the hard way? You'd think they'd be able to see that you Septonians know so much more than we do — that they're way behind the times."

Barchard explained it in an almost fatherly tone. "It's because they're too old to learn and too stubborn to admit their ways are wrong. That's why we had to pass the laws to keep them from poisoning the minds of kids like you."

Johnny picked up his sandwich again. "I've learned an awful lot in the last two years."

"That sentiment is a sign of weakness?" Barchard prompted.

"That's right. And that if I work hard and study and learn, you Septonians'll teach me all you know."

"So we can have guns sometime," Curly said, "and go out and help you conquer other planets."

Bob Brown's eyes were shining. "Boy! That'll really be something! To ride in space ships with the Septonians and drop down on a planet some dark night and —"

Curly was on his feet. "— and zowie! Three or four hours of fast work and we got 'em!" He looked up at the Septonian Counselor. "When do we get guns to practice with, Barchard?"

The latter laughed. "That will come in time. There's a lot to

learn first. But when the time comes and you march along in the Earth Brigade wearing your gray uniforms — then you'll really thank us for what we've done for you."

"There must be an awful lot of planets to be conquered," Curly said seriously.

Johnny Carrol had gone scouting close by; now he came back with a long, slim stick. He sat down again near the lunch box. "Say — I didn't tell you. My father got called in to Divisional Control today, Barchard? You think they'll send him home again?"

Curly's eyes widened. "When he goes to Divisional Control? You're silly! Who ever comes back from there?"

"What's he been doing?" Bob



"Has anyone reported a missing link?"



asked. The boy selected another piece of cake and crammed a huge piece of it into his mouth.

"Oh, I don't know. Something about a book he wrote once. A book about kids."

"He's cooked," Curly said. "Boy, that chicken's good."

Johnny was squinting along the length of the stick he was holding. Now he looked up at Barchard. "This is what I learned to do that I wanted to show you. The Indians used to do it a long time ago. Can I borrow your knife?"

The pride in the boy's face was clearly apparent as he notched the stick at both ends and took a long leather thong from his pocket.

Barchard smiled and reached out his hand. "I know. It's quite a sport on Septos. Here. Let me help you."

The Septonians did everything with such ease and skill. Barchard fastened the thong to the bow using knots the boys had never seen before.

"That's a funny thing," Curly said. "What did the Indians do with it?"

"Gosh," Johnny said. "I'm not sure. I saw it in a book — one of my dad's books — and I was pretty sure I could make it."

"There's more to it," Barchard said. "You have to have a shaft. Swiftly he whittled out an arrow, found a three-cornered bit of stone and fastened it in place. Then, setting the arrow into the

bowstring, he lined it quickly and sent it whistling straight into a sapling some fifty yards away.

Johnny got up and ran to retrieve the arrow. He returned. "Gosh! Will you show me how?"

Barchard adjusted the arrow carefully into the leather thong. "You hold it like that and pick your target. Better aim at a close one to start with."

Johnny stepped away — one step — two — three. Then he turned and drove the arrow straight into Barchard's heart.

The Septonian died instantly, doing even that more quietly and gracefully than any Earthman. He sank to the ground and lay still.

Johnny stared down at the dead body, the bow frozen in his hands. The other two boys crouched motionless.

Curly broke the spell. He turned on Johnny savagely. "All right. How you going to cover it up? Come on! Show us! You better have some good ideas."

Bob was on his hands and knees, looking up like some alert, intense animal. "Don't worry about Johnny. He got top marks in school. He don't dive into things blind."

"It was him that got my dad," Johnny said dully. "When I told him Dad used to write, he dug out all his old books. It was Barchard."

"The hell with that," Curly snapped. "What you got figured out?"

Johnny came back with a start. "Figured out? Oh. That's easy." "Show us."

Johnny dropped the bow and began trembling. Tears welled up in his eyes and he was crying. He held out his hands in a pleading gesture. "Barchard was showing us about Septos and he made this thing that shoots sticks. I asked him if I could shoot it and he said sure and I asked where? And he went out a little ways and pointed to a tree and I said okay but you'd better get back because I never did this before. But he laughed and wouldn't do it. He said he had faith in my aim. He said he knew I could hit the tree all right, but I didn't. I — I hit Barchard."

There was almost a minute of silence except for Johnny's continued weeping. Then Curly said, "It's pretty good. I think you'll get away with it."

Bob went over and pulled the arrow out of Barchard's body. "Come on," he said. "We've got to get going. It's going to be a job lugging this guy back to the car."

The inquiry was long and arduous, but now it was over — a verdict of accidental death rendered — and three tired boys were walking home. They were low in spirits and little was said. They

stopped in front of Bob's house.

"Well," Curly muttered. "We got away with it. You ought to be happy, Johnny."

Johnny's face was pinched and miserable. "I wish I could have said goodbye to him — at least shaken his hand. Even . . . even kissed him."

Curly was amazed. "Who — Barchard?"

"No. My dad. And I wish I could do something for Mom."

Curly took Johnny's wrist and squeezed it tight. "Now cut it out, Johnny!"

"Sure," Bob said. "Cut it out! They licked us, didn't they? In twenty-four hours they had us on our backs. So their way is best — the right way."

"And we're learning. They're teaching us. Every day we learn more. So don't be a fool!"

Johnny grinned. "I'm okay, fellows. Don't worry about me. We'll keep on cramming it in, and someday they'll give us guns."

"That's right," the other two agreed. "Someday they'll give us guns."

"See you tomorrow," Bob said.

"Right. See you."

Bob Brown went into his house. Johnny and Curly walked on up the street.



SCIENCE is a cemetery of dead ideas.  
— Miguel de Unamuno