

PLANET STORIES



T. T. SCOTT, Pres.

MALCOLM REISS, Gen. Mgr.

PAUL L. PAYNE, Ed.

FASCINATING FULL-LENGTH NOVEL

CITADEL OF THE GREEN DEATH . . . By Emmett McDowell 4

At the coldly gleaming Experimental Station they flung this choice in Outlaw Joel Hakkyt's teeth: "Grinding, endless slavery on Asgard, that Alpha Centauri hell—or a writhing, screaming, guinea-pig's death here?" He chose Asgard, naturally. But what was natural—on Asgard?

TWO EXCITING NOVELETTES

AGAINST THE STONE BEASTS By James Blish 74

Down the time-track tumbled Andreson, to land in a continuum of ghastly matter-and-space reversal—and find a love that shattered the very laws of life!

VALKYRIE FROM THE VOID By Basil Wells 102

Staggering under the blasting heat of a great ringed sun, she fought only to cross her savage, alimy world. The lithe Priestess Yida knew not that her goal lay, bright and shining, a thousand light-years away.

FIVE THRILLING STORIES

WHEN KOHONNES SCREAMED By Gardner F. Fox 43

Kohonnes breathed out across his little world and made the waters back up and the stones crawl and the trees writhe abominably. Why couldn't he do this to men's souls?

MARS IS HEAVEN! By Ray Bradbury 56

You won't believe this story, which is a strange thing to say, Captain John Black and his crew didn't believe it either, but they saw it through. And so will you.

PREVIEW OF PERIL by A. Bertram Chandler 67

Nobody knew into what awful dimension the Mannschen Drive would hurl that first test-ship—nobody but Martin Wayne. And he found out too late—or was it too soon?

BROOKLYN PROJECT By William Tenn 90

The last and greatest Project, this—and the safest to watch. Just two steel balls, going off into time. Why was Press Correspondent Culpepper so nervous?

SYNTHETIC HERO By Erik Fennel 96

George Carlin had ruthlessly trampled his way to industrial power. Naturally, to win undying gratitude, he had to buy a one-way ticket to the moon!

AND PLANET'S REGULAR FEATURE

THE VIZIGRAPH 2

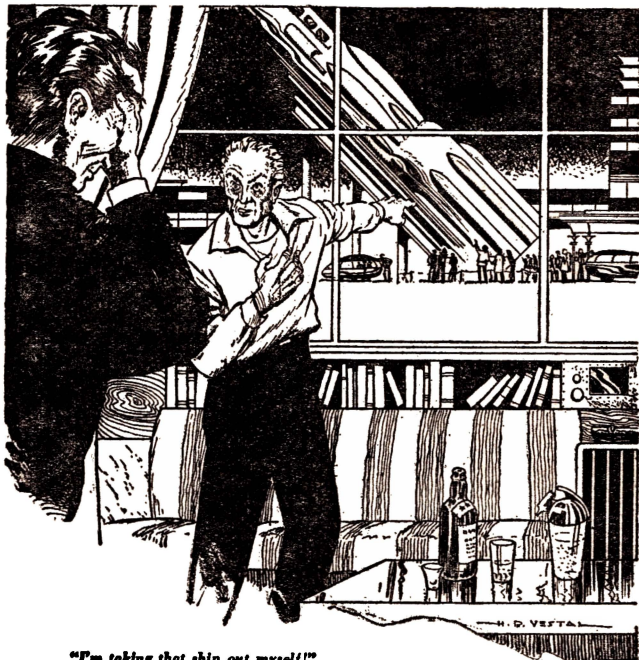
Fall Issue 1948



Vol. III, No. 12

20c per copy

PLANET STORIES: Issued Quarterly by The American News Company Limited, 474 Wellington Street West, Toronto 2-B, Ontario, by arrangements with Love Romances Publishing Co., Inc., 670 Fifth Ave., New York 19, New York. The entire contents of this magazine are Copyrighted 1948 by Love Romances Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved. Entered as second-class matter, October 2, 1944, at the Post Office, at New York 1, New York under the Act of March 3, 1879. Second class mailing in Canada privilege applied for at the Post Office Department, Ottawa. While due care is always exercised, the publishers will not be responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts. For advertising rates address: Advertising Director, Fiction House, Inc., 670 Fifth Ave., New York 19, N. Y. Printed in Canada at Toronto.



"I'm taking that ship out myself!"

Synthetic Hero

By **ERIK FENNEL**

George Carlin had ruthlessly trampled his way to industrial power. Naturally, to win undying gratitude, he had to buy a one-way ticket to the moon.

EVERY DAY PEOPLE TRAVEL great distances to stand in silence before the statue at Southwestern Spaceport. It is a shrine.

The figure stands with arms raised in an upreaching, yearning gesture that invokes thoughts of man's potential greatness, and the face seen beneath the helmet wears an expression of inspired nobility and idealism. In the indestructible imperium alloy image that is his masterpiece,

Hayden Brush successfully captured the spirit of enthusiasm and adulation which swept the world. In a strange way it is not so much a statue of an individual as of an idea, for the sculptor worked entirely from photographs taken with a telephoto lens. He never met his subject.

A plaque on the granite base carries numerous words—sacrifice for the Greater Good—advancement of Man's frontiers—conquest of disease and death. And a name,

George Carlin. Whenever I read that I recall the ancient witticism about this history being the fabric of accepted lies. In it there is much truth.

On the moon is another shrine, unvisited because the surface of Luna is still a perilous and inhospitable place. No compelling work of art is to be found there. Nothing but a roughly circular blasted area containing scattered fragments of spaceship hull that scorch in the direct sunlight and freeze in the unrelieved darkness, riddled by colonies of creeping moon-lice that penetrate the toughest metal.

That is the real, the veritable shrine.

THE IDEA of building a spaceship did not enter George Carlin's mind until after he contracted the dread—and at that time incurable—Matson's Disease. And then he thought of it only as the most spectacular form of suicide ever devised. That was typical of the man.

George Carlin, owner of Carlin Industries and indubitably the richest and worst spoiled individual on the North American continent, was an irresponsible egocentric who had never done anyone a good turn in all his thirty-six years of life. Bad turns he had done in plenty.

Take just this one example. A doctor had the effrontery to submit to a medical journal an article suggesting a possible connection between the bone-destroying virus infection called Matson's Disease and Carlin Industries' highly profitable operations in thawing Antarctic areas with atomic heat. He hinted that age-old spores might have been released from the melting ice, and been carried to seaports.

Carlin's private intelligence operatives got wind of the article before publication, and Carlin himself ordered that measures be taken. The campaign was short and filthy, ending with the unfortunate doctor discredited and barred from practice on framed evidence. The article was not printed.

And then came a morning when George Carlin noticed a slight soreness in his ribs and his fingers detected a peculiar flexibility. For a while he could not believe it. Such things just did not happen to him. To others perhaps, but he was above them. For he was George Carlin.

7—Planet—Fall

But when the symptoms not only persisted but increased he was at last forced to a realization of doom. Gradually his bones would soften and dissolve, until in a year or two he would be a mere lump of quivering flesh without a skeleton to give it shape. He did not tell his physician. That was useless, for the atypical plague had defied all efforts of medical science. Instead he reacted in characteristic fashion by getting grossly and disgustingly drunk.

During the hangover he decided upon suicide. There was nothing unique about this; thousands upon thousands of victims had taken the short road rather than helplessly endure the horrors of the final stages. But mere suicide was not enough for George Carlin. He was not just anybody. He was different.

With his money it had always been easier to arrange spectacular gestures than to force himself through the hard work necessary for more constructive achievements, and the substitutes had been just as satisfying to his ego. This habit of thought persisted even in planning his own death.

Verne Harris was an obscure junior engineer at one of Carlin Industries' minor branch plants. A confidential report rated him as extremely brilliant and original, although somewhat visionary and inclined to overlook commercial possibilities. His very obscurity was one of the reasons he was placed in charge of constructing the spaceship. He could be handled, and the impression would be given in all publicity releases that George Carlin himself was the moving force.

Carlin was annoyed at their first personal interview. Harris appeared fascinated by the technical problems presented and insufficiently impressed by George himself. Carlin felt slighted, but Harris possessed the ability. The only stipulations upon which Carlin insisted were that work be rushed and that all major arrangements should be made through him personally. It pleased him to keep the reins in his own hands.

And so the spaceship went into design and then production, with all other projects of Carlin Industries postponed or cancelled outright. Nothing, absolutely nothing, was allowed to interfere, and money was no object.

Once Harris recommended that three particular specialists be hired to work on the navigation equipment. When Carlin discovered that the men were under exclusive contract to American Calculator Company, which did not wish to release them, he issued orders backed by eighty million dollars. When the flurry of reorganization was over he owned majority control of American Calculator and took revenge for the slight delay by instituting policies that soon forced the other directors into bankruptcy.

Seven months later the ship lay in its launching rack on the Arizona desert. It was sleek and relatively small, built to carry a single man and fuel for a one-way trip to the moon, with oxygen and supplies to last five weeks. Harris had performed miracles of design, including several intricate devices intended to insure a not-too-rough landing, and in the nose compartment was stored a huge folding reflector and high-intensity light which could be set up and operated from the ship's electron-displacement power packs. Trajectory and power settings had been worked out and set up in the automatic control equipment.

The ship was intended to land in the dark of the moon, as Harris had calculated it would be easier to generate heat than to dissipate it on an airless surface.

Harris tried to explain to Carlin why he had not used the almost unlimited power of nuclear fission in the driving rockets. No shield against the deadly radiations had been devised and a human would have lived less than five minutes. But Carlin had not been interested. He lacked a technical education, and he was quite content that the ship was incapable of a round trip. It was more spectacular that way.

There had been a tremendous barrage of publicity throughout the construction period, but all of it dealt with Carlin Industries or George Carlin himself. Not a single public mention of Verne Harris had been made.

Carlin had spent those seven months alternating between prolonged drinking bouts and periods of flogging his organization to ever more frantic activity. Anything to avoid thinking. And it required increasingly clever and time-consuming use of cosmetics to hide the progress of his disease. Concealment was a compulsive psy-

chological necessity, for Matson's Disease was so common, so plebeian, that he felt deeply ashamed. More and more he insisted upon being entirely alone, afraid his secret might be discovered, conducting his affairs by telephone and radio.

THEN one evening, with the ship awaiting only final loading, Harris drove over from the technicians' camp to the luxurious desert villa which Carlin had caused to be built near the launching site. The two men had come face to face only half a dozen times.

It was a thinner, older-looking Verne Harris than the young engineer who had accepted the assignment with such enthusiasm, and the haggard lines in his face showed the almost inhuman lengths to which he had driven himself.

"Arrangements for the liquid oxygen are complete and I'll be ready to blast off next Tuesday morning, right on schedule," the engineer opened the interview. "I came over to thank you for the wonderful opportunity you are giving me, and I promise you, sir, that I shall make the most of it."

Carlin came out of his chair with a roar.

"You don't think you are going to take that ship out?" he bellowed.

Verne looked profoundly shocked. No words had passed between them about who was to handle the vessel and Harris had assumed unquestioningly it would be he. It was only logical. Carlin had been smart enough to let him think that way, knowing that thus he would receive Harris' greatest efforts.

"Then who is?" the engineer asked.

"Me. I'll take it myself. That's why I had it built."

Harris looked incredulous. "But why?"

Carlin did not believe he owed him any explanation—he was receiving a fair salary—but something, perhaps a couple of drinks, made him speak.

"The ship is my way out," he said. "A way by which I shall be remembered. I have Matson's Disease."

If he had expected sympathy he was disappointed.

"So have I," Harris announced. "Can't you see?"

Carlin could, now that his attention was called to it. That subtle softening of the lines . . .

A flush spread across Harris' hollowed cheeks and his eyes took on an almost maniacal glitter.

"Look here, you. To you this is just a great big childish show-off trick. Like those people who hesitate and draw a big crowd before jumping from some tall building. And it will accomplish just about as much. You'll either louse up the controls and crash, or else you'll have enough liquor aboard to stay in a drunken stupor until your oxygen runs out."

Carlin, livid at those outrageously disrespectful words, tried to break in as Harris continued in mingled pleading and fury.

"My God, man, don't you see what this means? This is the first spaceship ever built without scrimping and cutting expenses. This one will reach the moon *without crashing*. Why do you think I had it equipped with all sorts of scientific instruments? And why do you think I put so much thought into that light-flash communicator?"

A thought came to him. "Good Lord, you probably don't even know Morse!" he said disgustedly.

Carlin spluttered.

"I had planned a definite program of investigation," Harris continued. "Physical studies of the moon's surface, astronomical observations without atmospheric interference, collection of experimental data that could forward the progress of space-flight by at least a century. And you, an untrained individual who knows nothing but money, would throw away that chance merely to satisfy your ego!"

Carlin looked thoughtful and made a few remarks about reconsidering the matter. He could be extremely sly and devious when that would gain his ends, and Verne Harris was completely taken in.

But Carlin was taking no chances on having his show spoiled by some pipsqueak engineer he could buy and sell ten thousand times over. It was easy enough, with his money and influence, to have Harris adjudged insane and quietly committed to an asylum. The matter was attended to the next morning.

Carlin spent the night before blast-off alone in his desert villa. He had given orders not to be disturbed under any circumstances, so he was not informed that

Harris had escaped. And he had enough drinks during the evening to miss the sound of a window catch being jimmied and the tiptoeing footsteps behind him.

Only when the hypodermic needle plunged into the muscles of his neck did he know anything was amiss, and then it was too late.

HE AWOKE five days later in a hot and dingy furnished room in a nearby city. His clothes were strange, cheap, and did not fit. In his pockets was a large roll of money—and nothing else. Even the signet ring had been removed from his finger. He was ravenously hungry, and after a period of indecision he went out in search of a restaurant.

Less than a block away he passed a newsstand.

"CARLIN LANDS ON MOON!" the headlines screamed. Almost the entire front page was devoted to the story, and several inside pages recounted in greatest detail how George Carlin had come out to his ship alone, his body taped and encased in a bulky pressure suit, mumbled a "no comment" which had produced a deeper impression than any elaborate speech, waved once to the huge throng that had gathered, and then left Earth in a blast of flame while every telescope in the hemisphere swiveled to follow his flight.

George Carlin walked into a liquor store and pointed to a very superior brand of whisky. "Give me a bottle. No, make it two."

Then he went back to the room in which he had awakened. He had no place else to go. For the hundredth time he searched himself for some proof of identity, and for the hundredth time found nothing. For hours he sat with his head in his hands, trying to think of something to do. Finally he opened the second bottle.

Next day the headlines read, "CARLIN REPORTS LIFE ON MOON."

George Carlin had no cosmetics with which to hide the increasingly visible ravages of his illness. He bought a supply of food as well as liquor and did not emerge for another six days. Thus he missed the period in which the world waited with bated breath for further news from the moon. It was during this time that a spontaneous wave of mass emotion

swept the world and George Carlin became a hero. The grasping, evil deeds of the organization he headed—and they were numerous—were forgotten. No publicity staff could have produced such a reaction.

"CARLIN BELIEVES DISCOVERED CURE FOR MATSON'S DISEASE!" The newspapers brought out their largest type and public acceptance verged on hysteria.

Reports from the moon were carefully condensed, for the power available from the electron-displacement packs was strictly limited and every flicker of light must be made to count. Carlin did not even sign his name but all the world knew who he was.

The story, as pieced out and expanded by the news services, was this: On the moon Carlin had found creatures resembling the terrestrial louse. They looked like insects but they were of an entirely different chemical structure and their metabolism was suited to their airless surroundings. Their food was apparently any metal or ore.

While he was engaged in setting up the reflector, working in darkness and terrible cold, one of these tiny creatures had climbed the leg of the pioneer's armored suit and punctured it, eating its way through the metal shell and rubberized fabric liner. Only hasty application of an emergency patch had prevented disaster from loss of air.

The man had run to the shelter of his ship, but before he could remove his armor the alien creature had bitten him on the upper leg. There had been excruciating pain from the venom the thing injected, and a large ulcer had since developed.

But, the dots and dashes reported, the course of Matson's Disease had been not only arrested but reversed. His bones were hardening again. Perhaps under proper conditions the venom might . . .

It was the first hint that the pioneer had been suffering from the deadly plague, and public sympathy and fascination multiplied.

George Carlin bought more whisky.

Two days later the light on the moon winked again. A rough analysis of moon-lose venom showed it to be a complex pseudo-protein, with silicon substituting

for carbon and chlorine for oxygen.

There followed a series of recommendations that set the press and radio of the world completely wild. There was almost no questioning of the wisdom of the voice from the moon, only acceptance and enthusiasm that swept aside all hesitation.

Within hours the leading governments of Earth had pooled their resources in one gigantic effort. The officers of Carlin Industries accepted the message as a command from the owner and all personnel who had had anything to do with construction of the first spaceship were assigned to supervisory and coordinating positions.

Fifteen spaceships were to be built at top speed, and each was to carry to the moon as much excess fuel as it could lift. There all fuel would be transferred to one ship, which would return with a supply of living moon-lice.

Thousands of welders were at work on the plates of a huge, hermetically sealed laboratory building, while an army of machinists prepared the vacuum pumps and huge refrigerating machines that would reproduce lunar conditions for the alien creatures, and special laboratory equipment was being assembled.

But George Carlin knew little of all this.

ONE more message flashed from the moon. The pioneer was dying. His Matson's Disease had been cured but the ulcer was spreading into vital areas. However, he suggested, tiny doses of diluted venom, administered over a long period of time, might . . .

The message ended in the middle of a word as through their telescopes astronomers saw a great flare go up from the moon's surface, a thousand times brighter than the communications light.

The explanation was self-evident. Electron displacement power packs were treacherous. When their stored power reached a certain minimum level they became highly explosive. The pioneer had sacrificed his remaining days of life to transmit vital information to the world which had given him birth.

Everything stopped for a day and night as the entire civilized world went into deepest mourning for the man who had died 238,840 miles away—everything but

work on the fleet of spaceships. That did not even falter.

George Carlin gave up his rented room, bought a car, and drove across country to the Midwestern city housing the headquarters of Carlin Industries.

He did not get past the outer offices. Carlin Industries had been forced long before to develop a system for handling cranks and crackpots, and it operated only too well. Matson's Disease had made such changes in Carlin's features that he was not recognized. At last he was forcibly ejected.

That was his final effort. He had become a nonentity, a nobody, and so he wanted only to die. But with his identity he had lost his nerve. He did, however, have enough money to avoid drawing even one sober breath.

It is history how nine rockets reached the moon, transferred their remaining fuel, and one finally returned bearing a cargo of living moon-lice as a gift beyond all price. The frantic medical campaign, during which two thousand victims of Matson's Disease had their deaths hastened as doctors sought the proper dosage, is also history.

But then there was a cure—and another—and still more. The treatment became standardized as means were found for stabilizing the venom and controlling its potency. The government assumed charge, and every citizen afflicted with the plague was not only entitled to treatment but compelled to take it.

When the health officers found George Carlin in his isolated cabin he was almost dead. His skeleton had softened to such an extent that he could not stand, and could crawl across the dirty, littered floor only with the greatest difficulty. His atrophied muscles had almost nothing against which to work, and malnutrition and alcoholism complicated the case.

After six months in a sanitarium bed he had recovered enough to become bored. He borrowed a book from the man in the next bed and was disappointed to find it an advanced treatise on rocket fuels. But he read it through and surprised himself by becoming interested.

Still flat on his back, unable to move,

he began an intensive course of study. He had been so nearly boneless when admitted, one of the most advanced cases to survive, that the complete cure took three and a half years.

When he was finally released he had learned enough to obtain a minor job as technical assistant—under an assumed name—in the Carlin Institute For Research which had replaced the old Carlin Industries. He has been there fourteen years now, trying to compensate for lack of brilliance by earnest effort and long hours.

He still has one dream. He hopes some day to stand on a barren, airless spot marked by twisted fragments of a spaceship. And he hopes Verne Harris' spirit still hovers there to hear his apologies.

He has long since given up trying to have his story believed. The myth is too deeply embedded in the public consciousness, and no one has ever heard of Verne Harris. Even the history books teach the children that George Carlin was the first man to reach the moon alive. The last time he attempted to tell the truth he was excoriated as an evil-minded muckracker, probably insane, and received a fractured nose at the hands of an irate listener for maligning a world hero. So he has surrendered to the inevitable.

How do I know all this?

Once I was George Carlin.