

# FUTURE

*combined with* **SCIENCE FICTION** *stories*

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## INCOMPLETE SUPERMAN

FEATURE NOVEL  
by Poul Anderson

## AGE OF PROPHECY

FEATURE NOVEL  
by Margaret  
St. Clair



A  
DOUBLE-ACTION  
MAGAZINE

ALL STORIES  
BRAND NEW



Robert W.  
Lowndes,  
Editor

Volume I

March, 1951

Number 6

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Cover by Milton Luros, illustrating "The Last Lunacy"

Interior illustrations by Finlay, Lawrence, Poulton, and Luros

FUTURE COMBINED WITH SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, published bi-monthly by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 241 Church Street, New York 13, New York. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass. under the act of March 3, 1879. Entire contents copyrighted 1950 by Columbia Publications, Inc., 20c per copy; yearly subscription \$1.20. When submitting manuscripts, enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope for their return, if found unavailable. The publishers will exercise care in the handling of unsolicited manuscripts, but assume no responsibility for their return. Printed in the U.S.A.



(Illustrated  
by Luros)

Lara felt herself caught, lifted against all her fury...

# The Last Lunacy

*by Lester del Rey*

(author of "Shadows of Empire")

Whoever held the moon, ruled Earth. And the rulers found a way to bring the moon monstrously close to Earth, without a break-up. But if the moon could be moved one way, it could be moved another...

**L**ARA SHIVERED in the breeze that was stirring, and the scant covering she wore barely moved in it, a few bits of gauze stirring with the moving air. She stared at them, trying to realize that here on the surface of the earth the breeze was normal, not a sign of something passing nearby. It was cold, after the uniform Lunar shelter, but she had been warned of that.

Now she crouched down, peering over the rubble that clogged what had once been a great street. There were only the buildings, and no signs of movement. Seen from a distance, as when she landed her tiny flitter, the buildings had seemed unharmed; from this spot, the pits and cracks showed all too plainly. She wondered how the Blues could live here in the shadow of the Great Builders and think no more of the buildings than possible shelters.

But above her, the gigantic sphere of the moon shown down, reminding her that she had work to do. She shivered again, took a last quick look down the street, and dashed rapidly into the shadow of a building.

It wasn't so bad there, though she missed the brightness of the fluorescents on Luna. For a moment, she paused with her eyes closed, to let her near-eidetic memory paint the ancient map for her. The subway—whatever it was—had run underground here, and reports had indicated it was still open.

She had trouble finding the entrance, but the map had been right;

it was easier going there, with cautious uses of her infra-red night-scanner. She could almost welcome the smell of mold and decay that permeated the tunnel.

Half an hour slow travelling led her near where the Attractor lay. She breathed easier, scanning carefully for the hidden entrance. She wasn't sure at first; then her eyes made out the cracks, and she moved forward, unconsciously shaking the hair back from a face she knew to be completely beautiful in a regal way as she prepared to fulfill her mission.

The heavy hands that caught her throat were noiseless—and stronger than human muscles could be. A grunt sounded, and the grip on her neck tightened, until her breath was completely cut off.

Then her attacker paused, running hard hands over her body. She struggled again and the shock of the sensations lent fresh fury to her efforts. But the hands had loosened.

"I'll be damned!" The voice was deep, firm, and as shocked as her own mind. Sudden yellow light sprang on, and she saw a blue hand going down from a helmet of some sort, while a yellow nimbus surrounded the blue body. He shook his head, staring at her, and his muscular hands swung her around, while his eyes made a careful study of every feature, until the scraps of clothing seemed to vanish before them. "A woman! A Lunatic!"



She tried to make her voice commanding, cutting off the fear, and succeeded. "A Master, Blue! You've pawed and you've stared, but I excuse that as ignorance of what you did. Don't provoke me further!"

He laughed! His eyes dropped—but only as far as her bosom. "I've seen Lunatic women from a distance—I ferried supplies up from here for a year. But I always thought the old accounts exaggerated. I used to dream about catching a real woman, sometime. Come here—maybe the books didn't exaggerate the rest of it, either!"

"Filth!" The little electrogun came out with a whipping motion, but he was quicker. He plucked it out of her hand, examined it, and pocketed it quietly. Lara jerked forward, and her teeth were raging for his neck.

He caught her, lifted her against all her fury. Then, before she could realize his intentions, her face was yanked around and his came down, forcing his lips against hers. And again, the shocking sensations sucked the energy from her body, until she could only stand frozen and white-faced until it was over.

**HIS BLUE-SKINNED** face crinkled into a grin. "Pleasant enough, but the ancient books exaggerated. Stand still! And this time, cooperate, or I'll squeeze your throat until your head pops off like a pit from a plum. You know how—you've books enough. At least, you've all you could find, leaving none for your blue slaves, as you thought. But things change in two centuries; cooperate, damn you!"

Lara shivered with rage, but the Blue obviously wasn't exaggerating—and she would do no good as a dead Master. Somehow, she caught control of her mind. His words gave her some clue—there'd been times when she had had her own romantic dreams of what the past had been like. And she'd had a few scraps of film. Now she summoned what skill she could, trying to relax and be soft against him, until his guard dropped.

But the sheer savage force he put into it was more than she had expected. She was gasping, uncertain, when he released her.

"It improves. But it can wait. What were you doing here?" He saw her gesture, and shook his head. "I'm not a slave, Lunatic! I'm one of the dead, according to your records. That's why I hide myself and my laboratories here—along with the books. I'm not in awe of you, but I know enough not to let you escape. I'm trading you a little life for common sense. Why were you going into my laboratories? As a spy?"

He had thrown the door the crack was supposed to conceal back now, and was dragging her after him, into a huge cavern, filled with the wrecks of great generators and a surprising collection of the tools of physics. Her eyes leaped unconsciously toward the camouflaged controls of the Attractor, spotted them, and went back to the laboratory. A Blue who did not respect the Masters! One who had read and studied—and now one who was doing science, the great forbidden act for the Blues!

"Then the rumors—" She couldn't finish it; it was starkly incredible. The Blues couldn't revolt. They were born to be slaves, reared as such, and knew no other fate. Besides, they had no weapons—or should have had none. This laboratory and the yellow nimbus about him left her less certain.

"War," he admitted calmly. "We have a debt to settle. Tomorrow night, we take the first steps. We've labored down here too long in want, to maintain a few of you in luxury on the moon. Now it's over. By the way, my name is Bruce; and since you're my woman by ancient right of conquest, what's yours?"

She told him, recognizing that there was no resisting his strength. "I could give you freedom, luxury—a woman Blue—as many as you want!"

He grimaced. "I've seen them. Fat, soft breeding animals you keep on the moon to maintain your stock. I revolted because I was to be a male

breeder! After the mutation your war bred in my people, you had a hard time keeping it pure, didn't you? And it's only transmitted through the female. Too bad those females were unable fully to calcify their bones, and were imbeciles without exception. But don't expect me to increase your slaves! I ...come here!"

"What—what—?" Anything to change the subject, to sway his mind, to give her time to think! "And didn't my people suffer? You had breeding females saved for you by our kindness—while we almost lost out last men!"

"Yeah. I've seen those, too. You should have put them to work instead of letting them turn into such fragile little things. The histories of a place called France had 'dandies' in them that made your men look like lisping weaklings. Now be still; I've got to get out and direct things in another hour."



He reached for her again, and she shrank back. "What do you intend—want...?"

He told her, and his reason for the advisability of cooperation left no room for argument. And finally, as she met his eyes, she could feel tears on her own. Surprisingly, his own look softened, and the arms that drew her to him were strangely gentle. But he shook his head.

"You can't really believe what a slave thinks—I don't believe it myself. Do you think I want a stupid war of vengeance? I'm not a fool. But if I take you out there, they'll do things you couldn't imagine. I can't let you go back to report to the Lunatics. And somehow, you might get free if I leave you—unless I know you'll never dare go back. This way, you won't. They'd hear—

I'd see to that—and you'd wish our rebels had done their worst. Patriotic pride in purity!"

He hesitated, and finally laughed again, grimly. "Tyrants on the moon, pig-men turning to blood-crazed jackals on earth. I wanted to be a student once, like those of old. Maybe you had dreams. But now we're what our worlds have made us. Cry if you want to."

**S**HE DIDN'T cry, then; but when he finally left, fastening the door behind him, she was crying. There was no rage in her now, nor even the drive to escape. There was no place to escape. In that, he'd been only too correct; she wasn't of the Moon now, and she could never be a Blue. She tried to whip her body into fury, but it was as limp as her mind.

From a small shaft above, the cries and rallying sounds of a mob came down, and she realized it must comprise all the Blues on earth. But the war against her pitifully few people seemed eons away. It wouldn't matter, anyhow. The moon was safe; it had always been inviolate, impregnable. Who owned the moon owned earth.

It had been that way when the first space-ship crawled up to it and established a base. It had proven so when a rival nation had struck at it, and the radioactives from the moon had wiped out most of the earth and brought the mutation of Blueness. Did it matter if nearly all the men on Luna had died as well, so that the women had to take over?

They had done well enough in two centuries, too; they'd found the shield against gravity, and learned to use it to create gravity. Moon surface now was at normal earth gravity, while a few miles up, the encircling shield cut off all gravity from earth, to enable them to approach within a distance easy for space-ferrying. In the early days the moon would have broken up from gravitational pulls at five times that distance; now, held by the bare thread of the Attractor field that was artificially maintained

between the two bodies, it circled slowly in a small orbit, still ruling the earth below it. The moon would always rule.

In the darkness, something small and furry scurried along the wall, and she shrieked, drawing back into a corner. The strength came back to her legs, and she made the laboratory table in a great leap, curling up against the wall, and into a cubbyhole of sorts that was there. The animal had gone. She waited for another, but it did not seem there were more, since none appeared. The one had been as frightened as she was.

Then the lethargy that had replaced all her other emotions began to assert itself. The cries of the Blues above faded away, and the thin shaft of light dimmed. She huddled back into the cubbyhole and let the sleep she had never expected wash over her.

It was a scurry of little feet that awakened her. The animal had come back—with all its friends. Something sharp dashed its clawy feet across her legs!

From somewhere, a hand fell over her mouth, and an arm lifted her quivering, leaping body back against the wall. "Shut up, you fool! If any of the men hear you... They're only rats, scared by my coming back. Hush! Do you have to behave as the old books said women did? You're safe."

He started to shake free, but she clung to him, digging her face into his shoulder, trying to cover all of her body with his. He shook her free, grinning again, and pointed to food he'd brought. "Eat it. If you knew the risk I'm running in sneaking back here when the men are getting the ships ready, you'd know it isn't to be wasted."

"Ships?"

"Of course. For every ship that was ruined between here and Luna, two were faked. We've been accumulating them for three generations. And we've finally found the shield we wanted against your radiation weapons—this yellow glow you see. My father began it, I finished it. Here, eat the rest of it."

**I**T SHOOK her. But there was still the great anti-gravity outer shield. It could be hardened down until nothing could get through, except the Attractor field. And there was another thing that could be done.

He swept the crumbs into the cloth and stuck it into a pouch at his side. "You can climb the shaft, if you want, up to a little opening. You can see the despised Blues taking off after your precious Lunatics. And since it's too late for you to warn Luna—if you were fool enough to try—I won't lock you in."

The door was barely closing behind him when the scurrying came again. He leaped back, slamming it shut and grabbing for her, to cut off her cry. But the scream died as she buried her head against his breast. "They—they—Bruce, stay here!"

"Because of a few rats, half-tame ones." He pulled her face up, started to turn away, and then swung back. The grin was crooked on his face, and his arms were tautening slowly. "Well, why not? For a time."

She broke free long enough to use a word she hadn't known she knew. He made no answer, but his face twisted, and she knew suddenly that he hated himself as thoroughly as she could hate him—or herself—hated the wrongness with all this outward fulfillment of his boyhood dreams of what might have been long ago. For a moment she clung tighter to him, shaking her head, sharing the hatred. There was a rat in a shaft of light, watching her. It no longer mattered. Behind Bruce, her hand found a crumbled bit of rock, and threw it. The rat scampered away, and she found his lips again.

There was no shock now in the caress. She was no longer of Luna, and whatever happened here on this subject world to give her even a moment's forgetfulness was welcome.

But memories came back, after he had gone, along with the too-long neglected job she had come to do. She found the Attractor, and culled the needed facts from her mental pictures, setting back the force of it

in its false-front of generator controls. They had sent her down to correct a sudden, unexplainable shift of the moon two percent closer to earth. Now let them wonder why the planet moved out to twice its former distance—out where the salvaged ships of the Blues could never reach it, with the size of their fuel tanks. It was her last gesture toward the world that had been ripped from her with a grin and a savage hand.

Then she climbed slowly up the shaft, still vague in her movements and without purpose in her mind. Sometime, she promised herself, she'd find a knife to use on his back; but he was still too watchful. Then she could kill herself. But she'd think of that some other time. She worked her way up, to find a tiny ledge just under the small opening. Beyond, she could see three ships being moved out into a cleared space, while another took off. But the moon was invisible, hidden by part of the building. A bit of the sky showed, however, totally wrong.

"Halloo!" The call came from below, and she looked down, upsetting a bit of rubble. "Halloo, Bruce. Time to—Hey! Hey! Men! A Lunatic—a White!"

The man began climbing up the shaft, but Lara wasted no time. The broken rock around the opening to the outside crumbled in her fingers, and went spinning down against the climber. She shoved her shoulders through the opening, found it wide enough, and was out—squarely in front of a heavy, muscular Blue.

Chaos broke out then. She was darting, running, leaping in and out, barely missing hands that kept coming closer. And the cry rose higher behind her. Suddenly, her arm was grabbed in a crushing fist, and she went spinning around, to be thrown over a yellow-glowing Blue's shoulder.

"Shut up! Lie still!" Bruce's voice hit her ears, jerking her head down to see it was he who had caught her. "You fool. Maybe they'll think I've captured you for a second."

But they were already breaking

away from the others. Then the cry came up from behind, the man who'd first seen her calling his news to the others. Bruce added a bit more to his speed, but her weight told against him.

His breathing was heavy, but he gasped out a few words. "Book about apemen when kids—used to play—hang on, if timber's still there. Hang on!"

**THEY WERE** falling through emptiness, down a huge, deep shaft as the words came out. She screamed, and heard his own voice echo it, just as his arms caught something, threatening to tear her from his shoulders by the shock. He groaned, then wiggled onto his stomach, and wormed rapidly under an overhang. Above, voices called down, and a light flashed on, showing muddy water at the bottom.

"Safe," he finally told her. "They think we're down there, dead. Safe, at least until we have to show ourselves to get tools, or the war kills us all. We can crawl through here, into another tunnel, follow that about three miles, and be outside the old city. I used to have a cave on a hill there, when I was eight, before they put me on full-time work to satisfy your people. Damn the Lunatics. They could have come down after the war and bred with us; there could have been a start toward a new race—we have some rather nice inherited abilities, such as triple reaction time. Instead, they had to play Ruler and Slave, and breed both true. Ouch, watch that place—broken glass."

"Why'd you save me?" she asked. later. "You're an outcast now, too—aren't you?"

"Instinct. Not because I wanted to. Pure instinct to save a mate, whatever you think of her. Same drive that's half responsible for the Blue's hatred of Luna, and the Lunatics' cold-blooded fanaticism today. Repressed instincts. Men don't breed like cattle. Less than five hundred Blues here. How many on Luna?"

"Blues—thirty-five women. Maybe two hundred of—of the others. Bruce, how much further?"



"Fifteen yards, and we can walk."

They went on silently then. And finally they came out to a broken road among trees that wandered up a hill. They were in a clearing near the top, and Bruce went into a tiny cave, coming out with an old velvoplast robe and airmattress that he threw on a rock. She had slumped against it, and he had to lift her up and turn her head to the sky. She was tired, emotionally spent, and she sank back against him almost gratefully.

The sky was red.

She studied it, making no sense of it. The moon was glowing with a brilliant red that seemed to set the whole sky afire—and it was nearer—nearer than it had ever been. It should have been further away.

"Heterodyned," he said. "They found your gravity-shield frequency, and they've set up a counter force. It's heating up, it seems. I knew they had it, but didn't know it would work."

"But—" Then she understood. They must have been trying it out for weeks. It couldn't cut through the gravity shield until it broke it completely, of course. But it was wasting some of its energy in Attractor force, channeling itself to a frequency that stepped up the little force applied, and bringing the moon in closer.

**S**OMETHING nagged at her, but she shook it off. She was an outcast—what difference did it make? And the change was still unreal, after the fixed orbits of her whole life. She bent her head up toward the sky, and he kissed her. She made no attempt to draw away, even tried responding. It was pleasant, in a way, if she didn't think about it.

"All the men from here are un there—we're all there's left on earth," he told her. "Be quite a spectacle when the shield cracks. The moon will get down within two hundred miles of earth, at her velocity! And then the Blues will have their fill of blood and revenge, I suppose!"

The nagging thought hit her. "Roche's limit!"

"Huh?"

"Roche's limit. At that range, it's going to crack up, like Saturn's rings—even if it doesn't draw nearer, it's within less than a fifth of the distance it would have to be to stand. Bruce! Bruce, we've got to go back."

He shook his head. "Let it crack. All the moon ever brought was lunacy. It used to be in every superstition as the source of insanity. And it turned out to be the biggest insanity of all. To hell with it!"

"It'll take us with it! Bruce, it can be stopped. That's what I came for—to change the real attraction that holds us; it isn't gravity any more—the shield is perfect, as long as it stands. Your people, the others, Earth itself..."

"Does it matter?" he asked, and his grin was back, twisted more than ever. "Maybe it does. Maybe earth does, at least. It wasn't her fault we went wrong. All right, lead on; we can make it in an hour, if we hurry."

The moon was sinking lower as they went, and her legs were leaden. Somewhere, he found a horse, and put her on it, leading the animal, but they made slow time. He dashed into another building at the edge of the tall buildings and came back with dark bread and thick molasses dripping from it, handing it to her while he swallowed what she left. He was right—they needed nourishment badly.

But at last they reached the laboratory, and he shoved back the half-opened door. The moon was brighter now, so lurid that no light was needed as she found her way by the illumination from the shaft, and began playing with the difficult dials of the deceptive panel.

She dragged him out, up the ladders that led through various levels. And finally he looked up, and his grunt was the first really surprised sound she had heard.

The moon was moving outward, picking up speed as it went at a seemingly impossible rate, and shrinking almost visibly. Its color had dropped a fraction, also.

"The Attractor can also repulse,

if reversed—and it has full power now—plus the waste energy from the shield, which will take form in negative Attraction as well as positive. I'm a field expert—or was. Maybe they'll be able to get a ship down and anchor on Mars, since it's heading for that orbit. Mars will have three moons and we'll have none, then."

He nodded. "Unless they kill each other off. If they don't, let them learn to breed like humans—and feed themselves on their hydroponics. Well, there goes the next to the last lunacy."

She looked at him, trying to make sense of his final words, but he only grinned at her. His arms came out, picking her up and setting her on the horse. "We'll go back near the cave—there's an old house there, still sturdy. We can sleep in the cave tonight, start rebuilding tomorrow. Or you can take the horse and go where you like. But you'll probably starve to death without me to show you how to live. That's the last lunacy, Lara—the two of us,

this whole business between us. It's over, too."

But he kept his hand on the horse's neck, guiding it.

She studied the hand, blue in color, but strong and lithe, sure of itself, sometimes cruel in its mockery, but equally gentle when it should be. The color, along with defects in the females, was passed on by the female Blues only. Their children would be the old color of men before the mutation. But they'd need hands like that in the world which was left for them to repopulate.

"Let's hurry back to the cave—beloved," she said. The last word came hard, from the rusty files of history. But time would remedy that.

He reached up, lifted her down onto his shoulder, and then into his arms. His legs were steady and unfaltering as he marched forward with her toward the cave.

Neither looked up for the receding moon.

THE END