

FUTURE

MAR. SCIENCE FICTION

25¢

ALL STORIES
NEW
No Reprints



COURIER OF CHAOS

Dynamic Novelet

by Poul Anderson

A
DOUBLE ACTION
MAGAZINE

FUTURE

SCIENCE FICTION

March
1953

Volume
3
Number
6

Robert W. Lowndes

Editor

FEATURE STORY

- ... AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE** Clifford D. Simak 52
Hope stirs in the heart of the lone human when the expedition finds what appears to be the resting-place of his kind . . .

NOVELETS

- COURIER OF CHAOS** Paul Anderson 10
From millennia to come comes Ushtu on a mission as strange as himself.
- COLD WAR** Harry Warner, Jr. 64
They didn't talk about weather; they did things about it!

SHORT STORIES and DEPARTMENTS

- DOWN TO EARTH** (editorial comment and readers' letters) 6
- THE MOON IS DEATH** (illustrated on cover) Raymond F. Jones 27
Anyone could discover the moon's secret, but no one could tell it.
- ROMANCE** H. B. Fyfe 37
Carl Leland discovers that Earthlings don't know the meaning of complication!
- A BIG MAN WITH THE GIRLS** James MacCreigh & Judith Merrill 45
Now if Bart Mandell hadn't been just mildly jealous . . .
- READIN' AND WRITHIN'** (Book Reviews) Robert W. Lowndes 62
- REMEMBERED WORDS** (These readers have won original illustrations) 96
- THE RECKONING** (A Report upon how You rated the November issue) 98
- READERS' PREFERENCE COLUMN** (Where busy readers can vote on this issue) 98

Cover by Milton Luros, illustrating "The Moon Is Death".
Interior Illustrations by Tom Beecham, Milton Luros and Paul Orban

Next Issue On Sale March 1st

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION, March 1953, published bi-monthly by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 241 Church Street, New York 13, N. Y. Registered as second class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass. under the act of March 3, 1979. Entire contents copyrighted 1953 by Columbia Publications, Inc. 25¢ per copy; yearly subscription \$1.50. 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.



In the bunks lay scores of human remains...

THE MOON IS DEATH

by
Raymond F. Jones

(illustrated by Murphy)

Someday, someone would take those deadly stones back to Earth, unless . . .

YOU DON'T know what age means until you've seen the Moon at close range. It's not like the friendly face of an old man who's lived a good, full life; it's the white skeleton of a desert traveler, lost and picked clean by the buzzards. Ten thousand years ago.

They sent two of them down the first trip. McAuliffe and Joe Siddons. McAuliffe was a geologist, and Joe was an electromagnetic field man. Joe supposed that sort of combination was as likely to find the trouble on the Moon as any other, but he would have preferred someone nearer his own line. There was nothing for Mac and him to talk about. Just the trip itself, and

neither of them wanted to talk much about that.

It should have been at least a five-man party, Joe told himself. He knew the kind of hassle that could spring up on these two-man patrols, and he didn't relish the idea of any argument with Mac. The geologist was a big, broad-shouldered man who looked more like a stevedore than a pebble chaser.

Joe was big enough to take care of himself in most corners he was liable to back into, but he didn't want to stir up a hassle with anybody just now. He wanted to find out why nobody had ever come back from the Moon. He wanted to know what had happened to his closest friend, Dr. Radon Harcourt, who had been with Expedition Five.

Mac was handling the controls of the small rocket jumper. His eyes stayed on the glaring sector of the Moon's disc that lit up the forward port. Joe felt of his straps, and glanced to starboard where the hovering space station provided a jump-off point for this Moon investigation.

He consulted the chart on the panel and pointed ahead of them. "A little to starboard, Mac. That's the Caucasus Mountains over there. Base Five is somewhere along the foot of them at the edge of Mare Imbrium."

Mac glanced at the chart for himself and corrected their fall. Above him, the television screen showed the row of officers watching from inside the space station itself, watching every move made by the two men in the rocket. Listening to every word they said.

Buzzards, Joe thought.

He shook the animosity out of his mind. This was a poor way to begin. Nobody could be blamed for Harcourt's death; not yet, anyway. And nobody had forced him and Mac to come on this trip. They had volunteered to try for a Moon landing.

Men had been trying for twenty years or more. The first rockets nat-

urally aimed for the Moon; they didn't come back. The flash equipment, the mass of radio components—nothing had ever come out of the Moon to show that the expeditions had landed with the men alive.

There had been eight expeditions altogether before they finally gave up. By that time the atomics were ready, and Mars was as close to a man with a reactor pile as the Moon was to one with a rocket. Men had actually landed and returned from Mars without ever having walked upon the face of the Moon—as far as anyone knew.

The Moon was a jinx, they began to say. Men refused to sign for any new attempts on Earth's own satellite, while they grasped eagerly for a chance at Mars again, or Venus.

But another Moon trip was finally organized. Expedition Five they called it, because it was the fifth under current operation or consideration. In it were three of the largest atomic ships, and almost two hundred men. Including Radon Harcourt.

None of them were ever seen again.

They had landed; that much was known. There had been messages telling of routine exploration, describing the cold, dead surface of the satellite. But within hours, almost, there came news of some kind of disaster. There were frantic, garbled reports of a division among members of the expedition. And then silence.

IT WAS DECIDED that something had to be done. This was a challenge that could be ignored no longer. The Moon had to be opened to exploration and its mystery solved. For this purpose, a space station, of the type built in an orbit around earth, was erected and towed into place in a Lunar orbit. A thousand specialists were poised to demand an answer concerning the fate of the vanished men.

There were no precedents. Two-man crews in small jumper-rockets were arbitrarily decided upon to open a line of attack. Where hundreds had failed,

perhaps two could find a simple answer as to why. McAuliffe and Siddons were the first to go, selected by lot from among the volunteers available.

They were eight miles up now, skimming the barren plain of Mare Imbrium. Joe put his eye to the telescope, searching for evidence of Base Five.

"Got it," he said suddenly. "Three ships in a triangle with the huts in the center. That's it."

"All right, turnover," said Mac. His fingers punched down.

Joe steeled himself against the side-wig tug and roll of the rockets as they turned the ship, halting its forward motion in an upward arc, then lowering it slowly on the tail jets. Mac steered carefully to bring them close to the deserted base. The jets blasted a cloud of pumice dust higher than the ship, and the rocket settled into the shallow crater.

Mac switched off the igniters. "End of the line, and nobody's ever made the return trip. Why do you suppose we were damn fools enough to get into such a predicament as this?"

"There's no predicament, yet," said Joe. "As of now we could push the buttons and go right on back to the station."

Mac looked carefully out the port at the dismal, aged Moonscape visible now as the dust cloud settled. "I wonder if it wouldn't be a good idea to do just that," he said. "Just to break the luck of this damned place!"

Their first task was to set up the television transmitters which would keep the base area under surveillance of the officers aboard the space station. They would explore the area in full view of the men aboard the station. When they entered one of the huts, or the abandoned space ships, they were to be out of sight no more than twenty minutes. Their absence for a longer period would be the signal for the launching of a second rocket-jumper, whose occupants would go directly to the spot where Mac and Joe

were last seen. And if this did not serve to locate the difficulty, other tricks were in reserve.

In their weighted suits they climbed down the fin ladder and scrambled up the side of the shallow depression blasted by the rockets. Straight ahead were the crags of the Caucasus Mountains, a sunlit bone heap.

AT A DISTANCE of a hundred feet from the rocket, they turned. Joe spoke. "Joe Siddons reporting to Commander Ormsby. We have rigged the television cameras and are proceeding toward Base Five. Are we in view? Is the alignment satisfactory?"

"Very good," said Ormsby. "Proceed according to plan."

The men turned and slogged forward, dust foaming about their feet. Joe could imagine how it was up there on the station—the men crowding the television screens, the relief rocket standing by for emergency—

Mac was a dozen feet away from him, and Joe paused, looking ahead to the bony crags rising out of the plain. The aura of infinite age and desolation was all but tangible. It soaked through the plastic of his suit, and seemed to eat at his bones. Mars was the Garden of Eden beside this.

The Moon was a thousand times older than Earth, he thought.

He saw Mac, ahead of him, stop abruptly and kneel in the dust. The geologist gave a coarse shout over the phones. And then as Joe hurried to him, he lifted a bulky object that had been half buried.

It was a space-suited figure lying face down, arms outspread as if the man had fallen as he walked.

"Take his arm," said Mac.

Gently, they turned the corpse on its back. Joe brushed the face plate until the slanting rays of the sun lighted the dark cavern of the helmet.

His hand grew still, and the breathing of both men came to a deep pause as they glimpsed the remains of the man who had died in the suit. The

head was a shining skull; scarcely a trace of leathery flesh remained. The depths of the eye sockets were naked and white.

"He looks as if he's been here for a million years," breathed Mac. "A corpse doesn't look that way when it quick-freezes—as it would out here. It doesn't look that way anywhere, after only six months."

"Maybe the alternate heating by the direct rays of the sun, and the cooling at night—" said Joe. "We've never seen a man dead on the Moon before."

But he didn't believe it, and neither did the geologist. "It's not the way he ought to look," said Mac.

They got to their feet, leaving the figure where it lay. Joe reported briefly what they had found.

"No signs of physical violence?" said Commander Ormsby.

"None that are obvious," said Joe.

"It will require laboratory tests, of course, to determine if the suit was defective or tampered with, and whether death came by disease or poison. Unless you find something of much greater significance, make it a point to bring the corpse with you when you return."

"Yes, sir," said Joe.

When we return, he thought. He looked up at the pinpoint of light that was the hovering space station, and at the green disc of Earth, visible on the horizon. He felt cold and lonely and very, very old.

"Come on," said Mac. "Let's make a quick tour through the base and get it over with."

He was feeling it, too, Joe thought, and they had only been on the Moon's surface a few minutes. How had the men felt after days of watching each other die here, as they must have watched?

THEY MOVED on. Ahead were the guardian pillars of the three ships; they were huge—six or eight times the height of the little rocket-jumper. The

two men could see the outer lock doors hanging open on two of the ships, but the third was shut up as if prepared for flight. Joe wondered if there had been a wild, last minute attempt to get away that failed.

In the center of the triangle were the pressurized huts, set up for the expedition's work. Only two of them had been erected before disaster hit—the barracks hut and the Commander's headquarters.

They chose the barracks hut for initial inspection. The building was of the familiar Quonset type, hermetically sealed and equipped with air locks at either end and two on each side. These were for quick exit or entry of the expedition's full complement of men, in case of emergency.

The locks on the nearest sides were sealed. "Do you suppose there is still an atmosphere?" said Mac. "Could the machinery be operating yet?"

Joe spread his hands. "There's no reason why not. I don't imagine they deliberately turned it off—not even the last guy alive in there. Let's try the other side."

They found one lock open on the opposite end, out of sight of the television cameras. Joe queried Ormsby. "We can make an entrance of the barracks through the lock. Do you wish us both to enter, or should one remain in sight?"

"The two of you may as well go ahead," said the Commander. "Your transmitters won't work inside the huts, but do not break communication for more than twenty minutes. Remember, the second jumper will be dispatched if you do not appear within that time."

The two men crawled through the two-foot opening into the outer chamber of the lock. They drew it shut and clamped it against the pressure that might appear when they opened the inner door. Mac approached the valve panel and twisted the handles sharply. Snowy mist fell to the floor as air hissed from the pipes.

"Air," said Joe, "and warm, to boot—or it would have become completely dry long ago."

When the hissing ceased, and the film of snow vanished from the floor, Joe undogged the inner door and stepped through into the barracks hall. Mac followed. His sharp intake of breath and muttered curse came over the phones.

The room was a mess. In the bunks lay scores of human remains. Others were sprawled upon the floor, hunched over the tables, or slumped in the few chairs available. And every one was reduced to a gleaming skeleton. Like the one they had found outside, these had only scraps of leather clinging to the bones, showing that flesh had once clothed them.

THE TWO men advanced slowly down the length of the barracks. "It's like a catacomb," murmured Joe. "You'd swear they had been here for centuries, instead of six months. Just like the guy outside."

Mac glanced at a thermometer hanging on the wall and started to unscrew the helmet of his suit. Joe touched his arm. "Better not; it might be some kind of disease that hit them."

"Germs couldn't have been lying dormant here on the Moon since Jupiter knows when."

"They could," Joe insisted. "Spores out of space, even. We'll know when the lab men get on this. But we had better stay tight in our suits until we get back to the station and get thoroughly disinfected."

"Then I vote that we get back. We've found what we came to find," said Mac.

They continued walking slowly to the end of the charnal house of the barracks. The skeletons lay in every conceivable attitude, but it seemed to Joe that the predominant one was helpless collapse in the very midst of some activity. And it seemed that they

had been stricken almost simultaneously.

He searched anxiously for some clue to the remains of his friend, Dr. Harcourt. But he knew it was hopeless until the clothing and immediate possessions of all of them could be examined minutely. The skeletons were anonymous in death.

"Suppose we look in on the Headquarters hut next?" said Joe. "The log might tell how this thing started."

Mac nodded, but he was scarcely paying attention to Joe's words. His eyes had been caught by a group of figures slumped about a table near the far wall of the room. Or, rather, by the objects on that table.

He moved closer. There was a small pile of round stones. They were like water worn pebbles, varying in size from peas to walnuts, with a few that ranged as high as three inches in diameter. They had the smoothness of milky quartz, but their outstanding characteristic was a faint yellow phosphorescence.

Mac picked up one of the largest stones and turned it over in his hands. "A strange type of formation to be found on the Moon. I wonder where they were collected. It looks as if the men gathered them as souvenirs rather than as part of any systematic sampling."

He dropped the glowing stone into the pocket of the spacesuit. "It will be interesting to make a chemical analysis when we get back to the station. I doubt that the luminescence comes from any form of radioactivity."

Joe glanced at the watch dial in the side of his helmet. "We've got to get out. Eighteen minutes since we contacted Ormsby."

They hurried past the strewn skeletons, and into the airlock once more. Outside, they stood in view of the television eye and sent a call to the station. Joe gave a quick report on conditions in the barracks.

"Still no violence?" said Ormsby.

"None," said Joe. "It must have been disease—spores that may have been dormant for perhaps hundreds of thousands of years. Everything that comes back from the Moon will have to be thoroughly disinfected. We intend to inspect the Headquarters hut next."

"We will arrange the disinfection," said Ormsby. "Select any papers at Headquarters, which you believe might throw light on this matter."

It was all set now, Joe told himself as they pushed through the pumice dust to the other hut. Nothing but disease germs. No mystery. Just a freak of nature that had almost licked man's attempt to gain the stars.

Did he really believe that? he thought. Did he really believe it was all as simple as that? The aura of age crept about him and clung coldly to the suit in which he was a solitary prisoner. It wasn't that simple. It couldn't be, he admitted in panic. But if not that, then what was it?

He paused and turned as his companion suddenly bent down and began pawing the dust lightly with his fingers. "What the devil are you—?"

Mac straightened and held up an object triumphantly. "I thought I felt them as we walked. The stones—the Moonstones, if you please—they're all over here, down in the dust."

JOE BENT down and felt around for himself. In a moment he had found three or four of the polished stones. "No wonder they were picking them up for souvenirs! They're as plentiful as shells on a beach. How do you suppose such a formation happens to occur?"

Mac turned the pebble over and shook his head. "That's one I can't figure out. Probably it will be very simple when we know the answer, but right now I'd hate to be the one to suggest that there was once an actual lake here that might have polished them with its washing!"

In the Headquarters hut they found

the body of Commander Maxwell, leader of Expedition Five. He had been at his desk with the log of the expedition open before him. His fingers had scrawled final, unintelligible lines even as he died.

Mac reached for the book eagerly, while Joe jerked open the drawers of cabinets and desks in the room. There was nothing in these but records of equipment and personnel and schedules of the expedition's objectives.

Mac gave an exclamation as he read. "Three and a half days," he said. "That's all it took, from the time of their landing until this—" He gestured toward the skeletal remains of the Commander.

"Did he have an idea what it was?" said Joe.

"No. A score of men were hit by the end of the first day. Maxwell says it seemed to shrivel them and take all their strength. By the beginning of the third day, all but a handful had it, and they had to quit the work of the expedition completely, with only these two huts erected.

"Then they split up. Some of them tried to capture one of the ships and return to earth. That's what we heard in the last garbled radio reports. Maxwell thought it was disease, all right, and gave orders that no one was to leave, carrying it home. Two or three dozen men were killed in the battle that followed. Evidently Maxwell won."

He slipped the book into one of the sealed specimen bags and deposited it in a pocket of the suit. "That seems to be it. From here on, it's up to the medicos."

As they turned to go, they spotted one of the Moonstones resting on top of a cabinet. "Everybody seems to have been collecting them," said Joe.

They reported again to Commander Ormsby and made their way toward one of the atomic ships for their final inspection before returning to the station in the rocket jumper. They chose the ship with the closed ports because it was evidently the one which had

been the scene of the final struggle to get away.

IT TOOK a few moments to open the unfamiliar seals, which automatically closed the inner doors of the locks before permitting the outer hatch to open. Once inside, the men observed that the ship, like the huts below, had retained its warm atmosphere intact. They stepped into the corridor that led to the spiral stairway stretching the length of the ship's axis.

"Why don't we split up?" said Mac, impatiently. "We've found all we need to know. Just a quick glance through the ship will be enough for Ormsby, and then we can get back to the station."

"Suits me," said Joe. "I'll go up and take a look at the control room. You see what things are like on the engine deck."

Mac grunted agreement and turned away while Joe climbed the stairway. If Mac thought he knew the answer, why was he so anxious to get away? Joe wondered. Why were they both so anxious? He tried to shrug off the unpleasant apprehensions that clung to him.

Without pausing he passed the numerous corridors that turned off to the intermediate levels. On one deck he glimpsed a fallen spaceman with a knife in the skeleton hand. On another level three of them were huddled near the stairway, a sub-machine gun beside them. It *had* been a battle; what an ending for the expedition that had started so magnificently!

Abruptly the stairway ended, and he was looking down a corridor toward the control-room of the vessel. Even there, he could see a partial view of a figure slumped over one of the control tables. A sub-machine gun lay on the floor beside him. Evidently he had defended himself on the lower levels and come up here, dying at the very moment he was about to set the ship in motion.

Joe picked up the gun and moved it out of the way. And then he observed something else. At the feet of the man was a large sack, heavy with the weight of Moonstones inside it.

Joe whistled softly to himself. Why would anybody have bothered with so many of these at a time when every moment counted in their attempt to escape? He wondered if it were possible that the stones would have some great intrinsic worth back on Earth. Apparently the dead man had thought so, anyway.

As he came closer he saw that the man had slumped and died while writing some notes, even as Commander Maxwell had done. And then Joe stared at the sprawling script in the notebook.

It was the handwriting of Dr. Radon Harcourt.

There was no mistake. Joe was sure he would know that hasty, running hand in hell itself. With regret, and deep reverence, he looked upon the skeletal features that lay twisted inside the spaceman's crash helmet. He felt a sick longing to do some final thing for his old friend.

He lifted the notebook from beneath the finger bones and began reading. If anyone of the expedition had truly found the cause of the tragedy, it would be here in these pages.

"I am alone," Harcourt had written. *"Davis and Galloway dead. I can't make it any longer. I can't get down to the engine room now. No one of this expedition will take the ship back to Earth, but someday someone will come and find a way to take the stones—and death—to Earth."*

JOE FELT a swift coldness at the back of his neck. He glanced down at the heavy sack on the floor, and flipped the pages to an earlier entry.

"I understand what it is now," Harcourt wrote. *"They all think we are dying of some mysterious disease. Maxwell is trying to whip our biologists into a solution. As if they could*

find the antidote for a new illness that is fatal within hours!

"But we can't blame Maxwell; we're all in a panic. What they won't believe is that we're dying of senility. Our own natural life-processes. I've tried to tell them, but they won't believe me. I understand what is happening. I am an old man; I have aged fifty years in the last twelve hours.

"It is the stones. I found it out by watching the men as they picked them up. I didn't know at first, but it wouldn't have done any good, anyway. Just being on the surface of the Moon is enough to be afflicted by them.

"The time-magnets, I call them. I cannot explain them, but I know what they do. They hold a time-field just as a block of steel will hold a magnetic field. When any life, or mechanical motion, comes within very close range of these concentrated time fields, the stones begin to discharge that field. It's like a magnet discharging when thrust into a flame.

"They must have come out of space—and how fortunate that they did not strike Earth when they came! Through the ages they have partially discharged and made the Moon the ancient thing that it is. All of us have felt this incredible age here. The Moon can not grow any older! And the mass of this field remains undischarged. It has made us old men in a day, and we are dying of old age even as we try to move about our tasks."

There was more, but Joe put the notebook down. His face was sweaty, and he took off the helmet of the suit. There was no need to fear germs in the atmosphere now, he thought. He peeled off the outer shell of the space-suit and sat in the inner lining, staring at the skull of his dead friend. Then he glanced at his image in the polished metal rim of the control panel. His cheeks were thinner and more hollow. There were leathery lines in his forehead, which hadn't been there

when he shaved that morning in his quarters aboard the station.

Old.

He had felt it out in space just looking down at the Moon. He had felt it crossing the dust plain to the base. He had felt it in these ancient corpses that littered the barracks and ships. Six months! These men had died ten thousand years ago.

The sweat kept rolling down the lines of his face. It was Harcourt's last scrawled entry as he died that held Joe's mind. Some day men would find a way to take the stones to Earth. Like slow cancer they would begin to discharge their eternal fields of time from wherever they were; only an ancient miracle had kept them from Earth in the first place as they crashed out of space.

Joe knew it would happen. No matter how careful they tried to be, men would find a way. They would shield the stones; they would experiment with them; they would take them to Earth. And death would creep over the planet.

He had to keep it from happening.

Harcourt must have had the same thought. That was why he had seized control of the space ship, which was evidently the only one ready for immediate flight. He had stood armed with the machine-gun and killed them—or held them off until they died in their own old age.

But there was something else.

Why had Harcourt lamented his failure to reach the engine room? What purpose could he have had there? And why had he brought the sack of stones aboard the ship himself?

Perhaps he hadn't brought them, Joe thought. They might have been captured from some of the others who had taken them aboard. But Harcourt would not have bothered to bring them to the control-room.

There was something missing. A piece he didn't see.

HE THOUGHT of Mac, and knew what Mac would do. Mac was a geologist; he couldn't let the stones alone. Even now he carried one in the pocket of his spacesuit. Mac would try to take them to Earth, Joe thought. He would scoff at Harcourt's warning and surround himself with so-called precautions.

But the stones would get loose. They couldn't be allowed to reach Earth *ever*.

Joe glanced at the dial in the helmet. Fourteen minutes since they had reported to Ormsby; deadline for the next report was six minutes away. What could he do? What could anyone do, he thought in agony, to assure that the stones would never be taken to Earth?

There had been some plan in Harcourt's mind; Joe was sure of it. He couldn't get the missing piece to fit. The engine room. The sack of stones.

But Harcourt had died. The siege in the control room had cost him too much time, and he couldn't carry out whatever plan he had. Yet what plan could possibly exist for making sure the time-magnets would never menace earth?

Joe felt a desperate, choking sensation rise in his throat as he looked again upon the skeleton of Harcourt and heard the distant sound of Mac's moving up through the ship. He guessed that the geologist had tried to contact him by radio, which had been disconnected when he removed his own helmet.

It didn't matter. He and Mac had nothing to say to each other. Soon, they would have nothing to say to anyone, ever.

Motion.

Motion or life, Harcourt had said. These would discharge the time-magnets as a flame would destroy a steel magnet. Enough motion would draw out all the time field and disperse it—

Suddenly, Joe saw it; he knew what Harcourt's desperate plan had been.

He knew how it was possible to free the Earth from the menace that had circled it through the eons in its own satellite.

Mac's steps were loud on the circular stairway now. Joe glanced at the time. Three minutes. There was no time to argue with Mac, to explain to him, to try to convince him. And in the end, he would probably never be convinced.

Joe picked up the sub-machine gun that Harcourt had used. He sat with it in his lap waiting as Mac's footsteps sounded in the ship. The geologist reached the top of the stairway and lumbered impatiently toward the control room. Joe met him as he came in from the corridor.

THE MACHINE-GUN made a ragged thunder within the metal room. And then it seemed infinitely quiet as Mac crumpled to the floor; blood streaming through his shattered helmet.

Wearily, Joe put the gun down and gathered the sack of stones that had lain at Harcourt's feet. Stepping over Mac's body, he dragged the sack down the corridor and began the descent of the spiral stairway. Ormsby would even now be giving orders for another rocket-jumper to leave the station. But it would take a full twelve minutes for the ship to make a landing. He should be able to make it.

It took him eight of those minutes to get the sack to the engine room. It must have been a terrific feat, he thought, for Harcourt to get them to the control room in the first place. It must have been necessary to protect them while fighting off the crewmen in the lower levels.

At last Joe reached his objective and permitted himself a moment's rest. He stood on the engineers' catwalk overlooking the massive reactor which provided power for the ship.

Motion, he thought again. There was motion in its ultimate state. Or would be—with the sudden influx of

accelerated time-field. Not merely a fraction of a percent of the fissionable material would contribute to the blast; probably close to one hundred percent of the mass would explode at once. In that terrific blast, every time-magnet on the Moon should discharge its field. He wondered just what would happen to the Moon itself. If it contained a percentage of native radioactive materials—

Suddenly Joe felt himself trembling. A weakness was creeping through his limbs. He glanced at his own hands, shocked by what he saw. The skin was withered, and dry, and half-transparent—like the flesh of an old, old man.

He understood. The terrific field from the bag of stones was discharging through him. He laughed a little hysterically as he realized he was dying now of old age. He had never supposed that a spaceman would live so long!

And then he hurled the bag of time-magnets with all his feeble, waning strength. He watched it tumble straight down upon the ship's reactor.

ON EARTH the explosion was observed. It awoke the sleeping inhabitants of a hemisphere and sent hysterical masses screaming to their cathedrals.

The observatories were shaken with the fury of the inquiries, but they had no answer nor any explanation for the disaster which shattered the Moon and destroyed the space station circling near it.

And shortly they knew that they would never have an explanation; for that was the night when the Moon turned to blood and hung in the sky, a crimson glowing reminder now that man would never set foot upon the half-molten surface of his satellite.

