

# THE ORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

35¢

Volume 8

Number 2

September, 1957

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Editor: ROBERT A. W. LOWNDES                      MARIE A. PARK, Asso. Ed.  
COVER BY EMESH                                      DOROTHY B. SEADOR, Asso. Ed.  
Illustrations by Emsh, Freas, and Orban

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SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, September, 1957, 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 copyright 1957 by Columbia Publications, Inc. 35c per copy; yearly subscriptions \$2.10. Printed in the U. S. A.

# THE RETURN FROM TROY

by Russ Winterbotham

illustrated by FREAS

**Who but an antiquarian like Fernando Einhardt would come up with the idea that his ward should have two suitors, instead of one, and that the best man should win her?**

**W**ILHELM EMORY, the bard of New Haven, wrote in the 81st Century: "To be, never not to be, that is the future. For whilst it lies not within the powers of man to foretell what may happen tomorrow, all men can say with certainty that, whether or no the human race is here to receive it, there will be a 100th Century."

And now it was here. In some ways disappointing; in others everything that was anticipated. The blondes were more yummy; the brunettes more luscious, the redheads more invigorating. Man was healthier and sturdier, more broad of brow and beam. His internal organs had adjusted

themselves to his walking upright instead of on all fours.

But the greatest legacy of the human race was the wealth of ideas and gadgets, the heritage of a million years of thinking that were on hand to permit man to arrive, to live and to depart from the earth with greater ease.

Yet in spite of these things, man was his natural self.

He did not realize it, and playing the sage, Fernando Einhardt—perky and sturdy in spite of his white hair—sought to improve his granddaughter's chances for happiness by guiding the footsteps of the man who had asked for her hand.

It began on a bright day

Janna sent the  
young man  
flying ..



in May, the year 10,001, in the home where the orphaned girl Janna lived in the care of old Fernando. The house was two centuries old, made of durable materials both above and below the ground.

Deep beneath the surface, in a restored old bombshelter, which may have dated back to the ancient atomic wars, Fernando indulged his hobbies, which all dealt with manners and customs of antiquity.

Fernando today was spinning a top, just as schoolboys had spun tops in the springtime for thousands of years. In one corner of the room, its magnesium frame glinting in the soft glow of the sunlamps, stood a machine of antiquity, an ancient mechanical brain. Fernando had made the machine with his own hands, constructing it on a pattern handed down since the 23rd Century.

**H**E MIGHT have bought a pocket-sized electronic device at any department store, but Fernando was an antiquarian. Besides, the modern mechanical brains were equipped with human complexes and desires, and Fernando considered them unreliable. Fernando was interested only in the physical, mathematical qualities of the universe.

And today, when Vince Canes asked Fernando for Janna's hand, the old man

considered mathematical probabilities, rather than wraithlike biological predestination.

"It was an ancient custom, lad, that a man must win his bride, even fight for her. What in the hell have you ever done along that line?"

"I kissed her once, and believe me, sir, it wasn't easy. She's been studying wrestling at night school."

"Janna is an innocent child. She knows nothing of man's coarse ways. You are the only boy friend she ever had."

"Perhaps I'm all she ever wanted," said Vince; "she picked my card out of thousands at the Bureau of Genes and Chromosomes, and invited me over to play chess."

"Were you the only one she could find who was biologically suited?" Fernando set the top in motion, and the electric eye of the mechanical brain focussed upon it.

"I like to tell myself that she liked my picture," said Vince. He hesitated and looked troubled. "Of course, my card *might* have been on top, among the C's, you know. But I hope it was because of my curly hair, and my profile, and my athletic body. You can hardly call me the tag-end of the human race, sir."

**"I**NDEED I do not," agreed Fernando, examining the youth with his eyes. The young man wore shorts and a tight-fitting collarless shirt. The muscles seemed

molded into his clothing. Even without his thick-lensed glasses, Fernando could see that Vince was made of swoon stuff. "Be that as it may, I believe a young man should win his bride, by fair means or foul—just as they did in early times."

"Well, why not?" Vince laughed agreeably. He was convinced that he had a start on any competition that might be brought into his pursuit of the lovely Janna at this late hour.

"That is real sporting of you, son," said Fernando. "I'll find a candidate. After you've won her, you love will be deeper."

Fernando reached down and picked up the top, squeezing it to a stop with a calloused hand. "Do you think I'm too old to play with a peg top?"

"Well—er—after all it's a child's toy."

"Not a mere toy," Fernando said, examining the top. "An ancient and honorable relic. The oldest, or one of the older things that man has used for his entertainment. It certainly antedates crossword puzzles. Some of the earliest works mention it—or at least my classical dictionary of antiquity tells me so."

Vince smiled. "I did not wish to depreciate your hobby, sir. Everyone knows your enthusiasm for digging into the past. In fact that is a fail-

ing of mine, too. We'll spend many weary hours together after Janna and I are married. It's possible we might unlock the secrets of the 20th Century."

"That indeed would be an accomplishment," said Fernando. "However, this spinning top is a scientific experiment—more accurately, a simple problem." He trotted over to the machine and punched the controls. The machine chattered and rumbled. From an ancient sound track, which Fernando had rewired so that it spoke the modern Nglishi tongue that all Earthmen used, came a voice: "A complex problem, not incapable of solution."

Fernando looked proud as he glanced at Vince. "You see? It is helping me learn things. Of course what I learn is not the slightest use; but I'm learning things, anyhow." He turned to the machine and spoke clearly into a microphone. "Select a point in space outside our galaxy."

**T**HE MACHINE clicked. "South of the Magellanic Cloud."

"All right," Fernando went on. "Now describe the absolute motion of the top, in terms of the Galactic movement and rotation, the solar orbit within the galaxy, the earth's orbit and rotation, and the spinning of the top itself, not forgetting the precessional motion of the top's axis

from maximum to minimum."

The machine clicked twelve times. "Shall I include the precessional motion of the earth?"

"Well, the factor will not amount to much, but we want accuracy above everything. Yes, include it. Carry each factor to the twelfth decimal."

"Shall I prepare a graph?"

"Goodness no! There's not enough paper in the house for that. Just give me the mathematics."

The machine clicked twice more. A bell rang, and then the motors hummed and lights flashed. Fernando turned to Vince. "Interesting, isn't it?"

"Forgive me for saying so, sir, but it seems like a waste of time."

"Hah! You think a man of my age does not have time to waste. Believe me, boy, the only precious time *is* the time we waste. At least it is the time we enjoy most; procrastination delights the heart and clears the mind."

Vince frowned a little and seemed, after a moment, to decide that it wasn't worth worrying about. "When shall I meet my rival, sir?"

"First, I must select him," said Fernando, "I'll let you know."

**L**EAVING the mechanical brain to solve the problem of the spinning top, Fernando rode up in the elevator

with Vince. After letting the young man out the front door, the white-haired man went through the house to find his grand-daughter.

Janna was in the hydroponic gardens admiring the flowers and greenery that hung from the marble tanks.

"Vince Canes has told me that he wishes to marry you, dear," Fernando told her.

"I do not think he lied, grandpop. His behavior toward me is quite Freudian, only two weeks ago, he kissed me. I could have prevented it with a flying mare, but I hated to muss up his beautiful hair."

"Do you think he would be a fitting mate?"

Janna studied an orchid-rose artificial hybrid. She was dark, with deep brown eyes. Her high cheek bones gave her an ethereal look, and her figure held a symphonic grace.

"He is earnest, determined and ambitious. I'm sure he'll be a success in any line of work he undertakes. He has a serious mind and a magnificent brain. I am told that he speaks several ancient languages—including Glisnig, the language of the 50th Century from which our own language evolved. He intends to study that atrocious dead language, English someday. Not more than a dozen men in the world can speak it."

"But he doesn't have a job?"

"He is busy at the National Archives, studying. How can a man choose a career until he knows what he is best fitted for?"

"SMALL MATTER," said Fernando. "He can help me waste time till he finds something. I understand he's quite wealthy, and can support you in the manner in which you are accustomed, whether he works or not?"

"Isn't everybody rich?"

"Not everyone, child. Only five years ago, they gave the Nobel prize to a man for being poor, the first real case of poverty in 50 years. Perhaps Vince could lose all his money and become another national hero."

"I don't think I would like that, grandpop. You have to be so terribly good. Not that I want to be sinful, but it's nice to know you can afford it if you want to be."

"Do you love him, dear?"

Janna frowned. "What a strange thing to ask! Don't you think emotions are rather absurd, grandpop? I suppose in time I'll feel emotionally attached to Vince; but it is much wiser to let the sorting machine at the Bureau of Genes and Chromosomes select one's husband."

"I want you to be happy," said Fernando, "In ancient times, love was quite important in selecting a mate; men even fought each other for a woman's favor. I was hoping

that you might honor the custom and forget about the standards of the Bureau."

"Of course, grandpop. If it will make you any happier, I'll see a psychiatrist and have him wind me up in some inhibitions and emotions and so on, so I will fall in love with Vince."

"That's not necessary. I believe if you would tolerate a rival for a few weeks, that you might make a choice between two men. You'd broaden your outlook if you shopped around a little, instead of marrying the first man you met without examining others."

Janna smiled sweetly and nodded her head. "You and your crazy ideas. But it sounds like fun. Who will be Vince's rival?"

"Let's do it up right," Fernando replied. "We'll let fate decide it. Let's stand in front of the house and stop the first nice-looking man that walks down the street."

**A**LEK WEED had just returned from an expedition to the stars. Earth looked good to him. Man was tailored for Earth, and that must be the reason Earth always looked better than anyplace else, he decided. There were other planets like Earth, but none that were identical. There was always something—

And Alek had his eyes on a black haired, brown-eyed

woman who was waving at him from across the street. She was standing on the steps of an old mansion; beside her was a white-haired old man who was smiling and bobbing his head.

"Greetings, young man," said the old fellow. "I'm Fernando Einhardt and this is my grand-daughter Janna. We need a third at chess. Would you care to stop in for a moment?"

"A third at chess?"

"Grandpop and I always play our best when someone is watching," said Janna.

Alek thought privately that chess was tedious, especially for a third party. But it would not be tedious watching such a beautiful young woman.

"I should love to be your kibitzer," he said. "In fact, such a pastime could become a hobby."

**T**HE NEXT day, two problems had been solved. Fernando's mechanical brain turned in complete mathematical equations on the spinning top, and Fernando had a rival set up for Vince Cane's suit for his grand-daughter's hand.

He called Vince on the vidiphone and invited him to meet his rival. Then he sent to a caterer and ordered a dinner of synthetic foods that would have confounded the dieticians.

"There is an ancient say-

ing that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach," said Fernando. "Tonight we mean to find out whether it is an aphorism of Freud or of an idiot."

Although neither Vince nor Alek made any amatory gestures—such as tossing kisses at Janna—at the table, it could easily be seen that they enjoyed themselves.

"Never before have I eaten like this," said Alek. "Pray tell me what the exotic flavor was in the main dish?"

"It is a food known in antiquity as Spam," said Fernando. "I learned about it in reading old works."

Alek laughed. "I know little about antiquity, and I care little where things came from. What matters most to me is that they're here."

Vince smirked, thinking that his new rival was already cutting his own throat. "When Janna and I are married, we'll eat good old concentrated food pills. It saves a lot of time."

Alek raised his eyebrows. "You did not tell me you were engaged, Janna."

"Not actually," Fernando put in quickly. "It is my idea that Vince must win her. And, my dear Alek, I hope you will forgive our subterfuge in pretending to ask you to play chess with us. I had decided that, in order to make Vince prove his worth, there must be a rival. You looked like a good candidate."



"Indeed?" Alek's face brightened. "I feel highly honored. I hope I can really test Vince's metal. And may the best man win."

"Naturally," said Vince. "The best man always wins."

"Of course," Alek agreed. "How long must I play the part of rival?"

"That depends on a number of things," said Fernando. "As you know, it is an age-old custom for the bride to make the wedding plans. I assume, therefore, that it will be up to Janna to establish the length of the contest for her heart."

**JANNA SHOOK** her head. "I can't decide tonight. Besides, it would not be fair to Alek not to give him plenty of opportunity to test Vince."

Alek smiled more broadly. "That will give you time also to plan an elaborate wedding ceremony."

"Ceremony?" Janna's brow puckered. "There is no ceremony to the signing of a wedding contract."

Alek looked at Fernando. "I thought, sir, with your knowledge and interest in antiquity, that you might be planning one of those ancient **weddings**—with bridesmaids, maids of honor, flower girls, page boys, best men, ushers and all of that?"

It was Fernando's turn to look thoughtful. "For a man who takes no interest in antiquity it is a highly worthy

idea. You know, Janna dear, those barbaric rites might have been a good thing after all. It impressed young couples with responsibility, made the marriage seem more than a legal agreement."

"Pure ostentatiousness," said Vince.

"Not in the least. It was a beautiful event for a beautiful girl."

"Of course," Vince added hastily, feeling that he might have said the wrong thing when he disagreed, "if Janna wants something of that sort, I'll go through with it."

"Alek could be best man," said Fernando.

"I shall be best man," declared Vince, rather indignantly. "Janna will have nothing less than the best for her husband."

"It simply means best friend of the bridegroom."

"**WE'LL HAVE** the most gorgeous ceremony," Janna said enthusiastically. "We'll use the most thrilling ritual we can find."

"We have many centuries to choose from," said Alek. "I'm sure we'll overlook nothing to give you the best. Both Vince and I will work on it."

"The difficulty," Fernando pointed out, "is language. When you go back beyond the 50th Century, most of the documents are in English, French, German and all of those other dead tongues."

"Perhaps we can find trans-

lations," Vince suggested. "I'm sure the National Archives has facsimiles of translations."

"Of course; many oldtime classics have been translated into Glisnig. Vince is quite fluent in that tongue."

"Shakespeare has even been translated into Nglisi," Janna said. "I once read a story that he wrote—*Romeo and Juliet*. It seems that it was a love story, although I don't believe we'd like the ceremony they had, both *Romeo and Juliet* died from it."

"Yes, a suicidal ceremony is out. I'm sure there are better ones," said Vince quickly. "I'll check in the Archives tomorrow."

**Q**UITE EARLY the next day Alek appeared at the National Archives. He had the sorter go through the cards and he selected a truckload of books, which he had carted away. Then, smiling quietly to himself, he waited until Vince appeared at the files, in search of something dealing with ancient marriage rites.

Vince seemed surprised to see Alek. "I thought you were my rival. Should a rival assist a rival plan his wedding ceremony?"

"It may be my ceremony."

"Don't live in a dream world. But if you're here, perhaps you can assist me. Have you any ideas?"

"It just happens that I

have," said Alek. "I read a great deal when I traveled in space, and once I ran across a reference to a volume entitled "*Iliad and Odyssey*", by a man named Homer something-or-other—I never did get his last name. From the title, I suppose it was something like the "*Romeo and Juliet*" that our wonderful Janna has read."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, it was about the most beautiful woman in the world, and her marriage. Her face was supposed to launch a thousand ships."

Vince pondered. "I do not understand how a woman could launch an interplanetary voyage with her face. Perhaps they did it with electronics."

He turned to the files and quickly found the volume by its title: "*Iliad and Odyssey*", by *Homer*. "It must be a very old book. There's no date of first publication."

He studied the cards. "There are no modern Nglisi translations, but there are a thousand in English and Glisnig."

He took the cards to a librarian. She studied them and punched buttons. An hour later she reported: "All of the volumes you ask for have been checked out."

"Now what do you know about that?"

"This fellow Homer must be a popular writer," Alek declared.

"We have a few facsimilies of the original text," said the Librarian. "However, they are written in Grik; I doubt if anyone in the world speaks Grik."

"Give me the book," declared Vince. "If there is any way to read it, I'll find it."

"Attaboy," said Alek, "love will find a way."

**T**HE BOOK was written with characters that did not even look like the alphabet, except vaguely. "Bad type," said Vince, "No," said the librarian. "Dead language. Grik has not been spoken since—well, way back in history."

"The language must be nearly as old as English!"

"Possibly two or three centuries older. This particular volume hasn't been checked out since the 69th Century."

Vince took the book home with him. A beautiful love story, that told of a woman launching a thousand ships into space, would certainly tell of a ceremony honoring such a lovely woman as Janna.

The next day he visited Janna and found her playing chess with Alek. He told her of his find. "I'm going to translate it all by myself," Vince said. "That will be my way of winning you."

"But Vince, dear," said Janna. "Life is short. It may take a year or two to learn Grik and translate this love

story of Iliad and Odyssey. Let's try something easier."

"My dear girl," said Alek, "would you allow yourself to be won by anything less than the best effort? Indeed, you should not hold yourself so cheaply."

Janna did not seem to like the price, but she nodded. "All right, Vince, but hurry."

"I love a man with determination," said Alek.

A month later Alek brought all his translations in for renewal. There had been no further calls for them, so the request was granted. Vince was so busily engaged learning Grik that he had forgotten that there were translations.

**V**INCE LEARNED that there were 24 letters in the Grik alphabet. A few of them had a remote similarity to letters he knew, but others bore not the slightest resemblance.

Frequently Alek dropped in to see him and learn how he was getting along. Alek always praised his rival highly. "Janna should be proud of you, Vince. You are really proving yourself worthy of her by learning a language that has been dead for nearly a hundred centuries."

"I'm not learning it very fast," Vince admitted.

"Do not falter in your determination. I'll keep Janna from growing lonesome, and pining away for you."

"You are indeed the best friend a bridegroom ever had," said Vince.

Another month passed, and Vince emerged from his home carrying the ancient book under his arm. He had managed to learn that one or two letters were vowels, and that others were consonants, but he had not yet learned any Grik words. However, he was faltering. He had decided not to rely wholly upon his brain, but he would use Fernando's mechanical brain. A machine that could plot the absolute motion of a spinning top, certainly could translate a language.

Fernando received the suitor cordially. Vince briefly stated his trouble.

"Twenty-four letters, hey?" Fernando's white head bobbed. "Well, you've learned something. Takes a child several years to learn there are 32 in our modern alphabet."

"Actually only 26, sir," said Vince "you forget that the umlaut characters and special vowels in Nglisi were really modified from other letters to assist in phonetic reading."

"Hmm, if they did that in Grik, you wouldn't have much left. Looks to me as if you'll spend most of your life translating that book."

"Please, sir, can I have assistance from your mechanical brain?"

FERNANDO looked sternly at Vince. "Son, it wouldn't be fair. The old custom was for the man to win the girl by his own brains and brawn; if I let you use my electronic brain, you wouldn't deserve my grand-daughter's hand in marriage."

Vince went back home, carrying his book under his arm. It had been a long time since he'd seen Janna, he hoped she was bearing up.

Suddenly, he remembered the translations. He went to the library and found them all gone. Somewhere in the city were a thousand books telling the secret he wanted to know and he could not lay hands on them. The librarian refused steadfastly to tell him who had the books.

If there was only one book available that told the story of lovely Iliad and her lover Odysseey! There must be! Alek had told of a reference to the work that he had read; perhaps the story was told elsewhere. Perhaps in some encyclopedia or classical dictionary. Then he realized that he knew where there was a classical dictionary. Old Fernando had one; he often mentioned it. It told about everything. Surely it would contain a reference to a love story so important that it had been translated into English and Glisnig. That night, Vince went to the authorities and purchased a burglar's license.

He waited till a late hour, then went to old Fernando's home. He climbed the back wall, found himself in the hydroponic gardens, and hesitated as he heard the sound of voices.

On a bench in the moonlight he made out the figures of Janna and Alek, talking in low and confidential tones.

"Lover, dear," said Janna. "Was there ever a love like ours?"

"Never," said Alek. "It outshines Romeo and Juliet, and that of all the lovers of history. You are more beautiful even than Helen of Troy, whose face launched a thousand ships!"

*The idiot, thought Vince, he does not know who launched a thousand ships with her face. It was Iliad, not Helen.*

"The phrase is familiar," said Janna. "Isn't that part of that horrible love story that Vince has been translating to win me?"

"Indeed it is," said Alek. "I've been reading a translation."

VINCE crept back over the wall. This was the wrong house for burglary. Alek had a translation! Hastily he sped by helicopter to Alek's home. Stacked there in every room were huge piles of translations of *"Iliad and Odyssey"*. And one copy was in Nglisi!

Vince picked up the book

and read. It was indeed a love story, about a woman named Helen, who was kidnapped. There was a long war, a siege of a city called Troy, in an effort to rescue her. Many men died, including a brave warrior name Achilles, and finally the city was destroyed. But there was no description of a marriage ceremony, unless the wooden horse had something to do with it.

The story told of Odysseus, and how he returned from Troy to find his wife Penelope besieged—as Troy had been—by lovers; but Odysseus had destroyed them all. Vince was determined to destroy the single lover who was taking advantage of his absence by wooing Janna.

In anger, Vince strode to the police station to buy a license to commit murder. However, these licenses were only sold during the open season, and were not available now.

HE EXPLAINED his predicament. "Well, the Unwritten Law was written in the 81st Century," said the officer. "If you were married, you'd be entitled to one shot at your wife's lover."

"But I'm not married."

"Is your wife married to this guy?"

"No." Vince suddenly smiled. "If he was married,

and I made love to his wife, he could shoot at me?"

"Just once."

"Could I shoot back in self defense?"

"Once."

Vince ran back to the darkened house of Old Fernando. Alek was holding Janna in his arms and she had seemingly forgotten all she knew about wrestling.

"You must marry her" said Vince.

"By Trojan rites?" Alek asked.

"By any rites; I want to make love to her."

"I don't want you to make love to me," said Janna. "I like you only for your intellectual qualities."

"Do you love Alek for his?"

"Of course not; I just love him."

"Then you mustn't marry him. You're my betrothed."

There was a footstep behind Vince, and a voice cried out:

"She *will* marry Alek, or else."

Vince swung around, and saw white-haired Fernando standing in the doorway. In his hands he held a strange-looking instrument.

"Grandpop," asked Janna, "what is that thing you're holding in your arms?"

"Part of an old-fashioned marriage rite sweetheart. It's called a shotgun."

Vince sighed and went away. He stopped off at Alek's home and read the rest of the book. It said that Helen made a mighty fine wife after she was brought back from Troy. She married somebody name Stanislaus, or Menelaus, or something.

The trouble was Janna was not Helen of Troy. She was Penelope. And somehow, Vince was no Odysseus; it wasn't open season on lovers.

