

THEY WRITE...



WILLIAM P. MCGIVERN:

I've been a free-lance writer since 1939 with only two breaks—a stretch in the army and a stint as a reporter on the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*. Had previously met a very cute gal named Maureen and changed her last name from Daly to McGivern. After the newspaper chore, we spent a couple of years in Europe where I wrote mystery novels about New York and Philadelphia. Now we're back in Gotham and I'm doing a mystery with a Rome background. In Europe, I discovered how far *Fantastic Adventures* travels. Found a copy on a tiny Spanish island called Ibiza (pop. 200) and was told by the clerk it had been left by a vacationing priest.

MENDOZA:

Have had a varied career. Obtained my early education in France and began drawing at a very early age. What with tight money situation in the family, I worked at a variety of jobs between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. Jobs included mining coal in England and running a joy wheel at an English fair. Finally into the army for the first World War. After taking an art course on a post-war grant, took out painting in earnest, but with time out for a few roles as an actor in a repertory company. Hard luck came with the 2nd World War, putting me to work superintending a West Side club in London. Finally got clear. No more trouble.



ALFRED BESTOR:

I was born in New York City. I weighed 10 pounds and was 20 inches tall. In 39 years I've gained 200 pounds and 53 inches. Also, in the interim, I learned to read and write and eat with a fork. My wife and I live in an ancient brownstone in NYC filled with bell-pulls, speaking tubes, and ghosts of the mauve decade elite. Give any Central Park cab horse his head and he'll trot straight to our door, proving the joint must have jumped in Diamond Jim Brady's day. The *Roller Coaster* was written last summer on the beach at Fire Island. I wrote it in the sand with a sea shell while three blondes in Bikini suits did the proof reading. Fun.



FANTASTIC (combined with **FANTASTIC ADVENTURES**), Vol. 2, No. 3, May-June, 1953, is published bi-monthly by the Ziff-Davis Publishing Company at 185 North Wabash Avenue, Chicago 1, Illinois. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Chicago, Illinois. Additional entry in Concord, N. H. Subscription rates: U. S., Canada, Mexico, South and Central America and U. S. Possessions, \$4.00 for 12 issues; British Empire and all other foreign countries, \$5.00 for 12 issues.

fantastic

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY
Editorial and Executive Offices
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

Chairman of the Board
and Publisher

WILLIAM B. ZIFF

President

B. G. DAVIS

Vice Presidents —

H. J. MORGANROTH

Production Director

LYNN PHILLIPS, JR.

Advertising Director

H. G. STRONG

Circulation Director

LOUIS ZARA

Associate Editorial Director

Secretary-Treasurer

G. E. CARNEY

Art Director

ALBERT GRUEN



MAY-JUNE 1953
VOLUME 2 NUMBER 3

CONTENTS

JINN AND TONIC By William P. McGivern.....	4
RESERVATION DEFERRED By John Wyndham.....	28
SALLY By Isaac Asimov.....	34
GUEST ARTIST By Roger Dee.....	51
THE ROLLER COASTER By Alfred Bester.....	80
ROOM WITH A VIEW By Esther Carlson.....	89
HARDLY WORTH MENTIONING By Chad Oliver.....	96
CLASSIC SHORT STORY	
JOHNNY PYE AND THE FOOL-KILLER By Stephen Vincent Benet.....	141
SPECIAL FEATURE	
A PORTFOLIO By de Persiis.....	77

Cover: W. T. Mars

Editor
HOWARD BROWN

Managing Editor
PAUL W. FAIRMAN

Assistant Editor
MICHAEL KAGAN

Art Editor
L. R. SUMMERS

Copyright 1953 by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company. All rights reserved



The Roller Coaster

by **ALFRED BESTER**

Here is as startling a concept as we've come across lately in fantasy and science fiction. If you happen to be the type of reader who says, upon finishing a story, "You know, there could be something to that!" then it might be just as well for you to skip over to page 89 and get into Esther Carlson's masterpiece of quiet horror. For Bester's tale has a strong thread of plausibility running through it — just enough conviction, if fact, to wake you up in the middle of the night with a feeling that somebody stole the blankets!

*Alfred Bester's big claim to fame is that he wrote *The Demolished Man*: one of the truly great novels in the science-fantasy field. *The Roller Coaster* is sure to enhance his reputation.*

I KNIFED her a little. When you cut across the ribs it hurts like sin but it isn't dangerous. The knife slash showed white, then red. She backed away from me in astonishment, more startled at the knife than the cut. You don't feel those cuts at first for quite a few minutes. That's the trouble with a knife. It numbs and the pain comes slow.

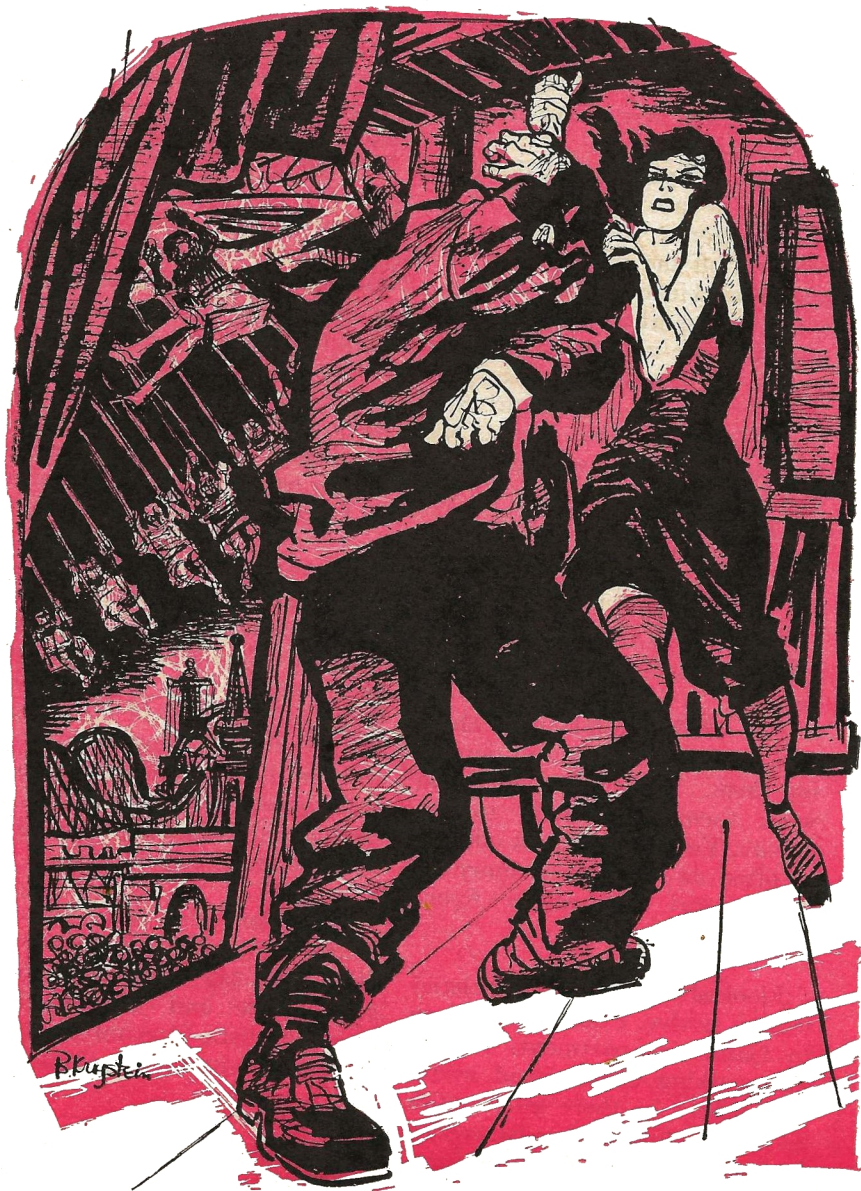
"Listen, lover," I said. I'd forgotten her name. "This is what

I've got for you. Look at it." I waggled the knife. "Feel it." I slapped her across the face with the blade. She stumbled back against the couch, sat down and began to shake. This was what I was waiting for.

"Go ahead, you bitch. Answer me."

"Please, David," she muttered. Dull. Not so good.

"I'm on my way out," I said. "You lousy hooker. You're like



Illustrator: B. Krigstein

all the rest of these cheap dames."

"Please, David," she repeated in a low voice.

No action here. Give her one more try.

"Figuring you for two dollars a night, I'm into you for twenty." I took money from my pocket, stripped off the twenty in singles and handed it to her. She wouldn't touch it. She sat on the edge of the couch, blue-naked, streaming blood, not looking at me. Just dull. And mind you, a girl that made love with her teeth. She used to scratch me with her nails like a cat. And now . . .

"Please, David," she said.

I tore up the money and threw it in her lap.

"Please, David," she said.

No tears. No screams. No action. She was impossible. I walked out.

The whole trouble with these neurotics is that you can't depend on them. You case them. You work them. You build to the climax. You trigger them off, but as often as not they dummy up like that girl. You just can't figure them.

I looked at my watch. The hand was on twelve. I decided to go up to Gandry's apartment. Freyda was working Gandry and would most likely be there setting him up for the climax. I needed advice from Freyda and I didn't have much time left.

I walked north on Sixth Avenue — no, The Avenue of the Americas; turned west on 55th and went to the house across the street from Mecca Temple — no, The New York City Center. I took the elevator up to the PH floor and was just going to ring Gandry's bell when I smelled gas. I knelt down and sniffed at the edge of Gandry's door. It was coming from his apartment.

I knew better than to ring the bell. I got out my keys, touched them to the elevator call-button to dissipate any electrostatic charge on them, and got to work on Gandry's door. I barbered the lock in two or three minutes, opened the door and went in with my handkerchief over my nose. The place was pitch dark. I went straight to the kitchen and stumbled over a body lying on the floor with its head in the oven. I turned off the gas and opened the window. I ran into the living room and opened windows. I stuck my head out for a breath, then came back and finished airing the apartment.

I checked the body. It was Gandry all right. He was still alive. His big face was swollen and purple and his breathing sounded a little Cheynes-Stokesish to me. I went to the phone and dialed Freyda.

"Hello?"

"Freyda?"

"Yes?"



"Where are you? Why aren't you up here with Gandry?"

"Is that you, David?"

"Yes. I just broke in and found Gandry half dead. He's trying suicide."

"Oh, David!"

"Gas. He's reached the climax all by his lonely lone self. You been building him?"

"Of course, but I never thought he'd —"

"He'd try to sneak out on the pay-off like this? I've told you a hundred times, Freyda. You can't depend on potential suicides like Gandry. I showed you those trial-cut scars on his wrist. His kind never give you any action. They —"

"Don't lecture me, David."

"Never mind. My girl was a bust, too. I thought she was the hot acid type. She turned out to be warm milk. I want to try that Bacon woman you mentioned.

Would you recommend her?"

"Definitely."

"How can I find her?"

"Through her husband, Eddie Bacon."

"How can I find him?"

"Try Shawn's or Dugal's or Breen's or The Greek's. But he's a quonker, David. A time-waster, and you haven't much time left."

"Doesn't matter if his wife's worth it."

"She's worth it, David. I told you about the gun."

"Right. Now what about Gandry?"

"Oh, to hell with Gandry," she snapped, and hung up.

That was all right with me. It was about time. Freyda got sense enough to lay off the psychotics. I hung up, closed all the windows, went back to the kitchen and turned on the gas. Gandry hadn't moved. I put out all the lights,

went down the hall and let myself out.

I went looking for Eddie Bacon. I tried for him at Breen's, at Shawn's, at Dugal's. I got the break at The Greek's on East 52nd Street.

I asked the bartender: "Is Eddie Bacon here?"

"In the back."

I looked past the juke box. The back was crowded. "Which one is Eddie Bacon?"

He pointed to a small man alone at a table in the corner. I went back and sat down. "Hi, Eddie."

Bacon glanced up at me. He had a seamed pouchy face, fair silky hair, bleak blue eyes. He wore a brown suit and a blue and white polka-dot tie. He caught me looking at the tie and said: "That's the tie I wear between wars. What are you drinking?"

"Scotch. Water. No ice."

"How English can you get?" He yelled: "Chris!"

I got my drink. "Where's Liz?" I asked.

"Who?"

"Your wife."

"I married eighteen feet of wives," he mumbled. "End to end. Six feet each."

"Three fathoms of show girls," I said.

"Which were you referring to?"

"The third. The most recent. I hear she left you."

"They all left me."

"Where's Liz?"

"It happened like this," Bacon said in a bewildered voice. "I can't figure it. Nobody can figure it. I took the kids to Coney Island. . . ."

"Never mind the kids. Where's Liz?"

"I'm getting there," Bacon said irritably. "Coney Island's the damndest place. Everybody ought to try that trap once. It's primitive stuff. Basic entertainment. They scare the hell out of you and you love it. Appeals to the ancient history in us. The Cro-Magnons and all that."

"The Cro-Magnons died out," I said. "You mean the Neanderthals."

"I mean prehistoric memories," Bacon went on. "They strap you into that roller coaster, they shove you off and you drop into a race with a dinosaur. He's chasing you and you're trying to keep it from ending in a dead heat. Basic. It appeals to the stone-age flesh in us. That's why kids dig it. Every kid's a vestigial remnant from the stone age."

"Grown-ups too. What about Liz?"

"Chris!" Bacon yelled. Another round of drinks came. "Yeah . . . Liz," he said. "The girl made me forget there ever was a Liz. I met her staggering off the roller coaster. She was waiting. Waiting to pounce. The Black Widow Spider."

"Liz?"

"No. The little whore that wasn't there."

"Who?"

"Haven't you heard about Bacon's Missing Mistress. The Invisible Vice Girl? Bacon's Thinking Affair?"

"No."

"Hell, where've you been? How Bacon rented an apartment for a dame that didn't exist. They're still laughing it up. All except Liz. It's all over the business."

"I'm not in your business."

"No?" He took a long drink, put his glass down and glowered at the table like a kid trying to crack an algebra problem. "Her name was Freyda. F-R-E-Y-D-A. Like Freya, Goddess of Spring. Eternal youth. She was like a Botticelli virgin outside. She was a tiger inside."

"Freyda what?"

"I don't know. I never found out. Maybe she didn't have any last name because she was imaginary like they keep telling me." He took a deep breath. "I do a crime show. I know every crook routine there is. That's my business — the thief business. But she pulled a new one. She picked me up by pretending she'd met the kids somewhere. Who can tell if a kid really knows someone or not? They're only half human anyway. I swallowed her routine. By the time I realized she was lying, I'd met her and I was dead. She had me on the hook."

"How do you mean?"

"A wife is a wife," Bacon said. "Three wives are just more of the same. But this was going to bed with a tiger." He smiled sourly. "Only it's all my imagination, they keep telling me. It's all inside my head. I never really killed her because she never really lived."

"You killed her? Freyda?"

"It was a war from the start," he said, "and it ended up with a killing. It wasn't love with her, it was war."

"This is all your imagination?"

"That's what the head-shrinkers tell me. I lost a week. Seven days. They tell me I rented an apartment all right, but I didn't put her in it because there never was any Freyda. We didn't tear each other apart because there was only me up there all the time. Alone. She wasn't a crazy, mauling bitch who used to say: 'Sigma, darling . . .'"

"Say what?"

"You heard me. 'Sigma, darling.' That's how she said goodbye. 'Sigma, darling.' That's what she said on the last day. With a crazy glitter in her virgin eyes. Told me it was no good between us. That she'd phoned Liz and told her all about it and was walking out. 'Sigma, darling,' she said and started for the door."

"She told Liz? Told your wife?"

Bacon nodded. "I grabbed her

and dragged her away from the door. I locked the door and phoned Liz. That tiger was tearing at me all the time. I got Liz on the horn and it was true. Liz was packing. I hung that phone up on that bitch's head. I was wild. I tore her clothes off. I dragged her into the bedroom and threw her down and choked her. Christ! How I strangled her . . ."

After a pause, I asked: "Liz?"

"They were pounding on the door outside," Bacon went on. "I knew she was dead. She had to be dead. I went and opened the door. There were six million cops and six million honest johns still squawking about the screaming. I thought to myself: 'Why, this is just like the show you do every week. Play it like the script.' I said to them: 'Come on in and join the murder —'" He broke off.

"Was she dead . . . Freyda?"

"There was no murder," he said slowly. "There was no Freyda. That apartment was ten floors up in the Kingston Hotel. There wasn't any fire-escape. There was only the front door jammed with cops and squares. And there was no one in the apartment but a crazy guy — naked, sweating and swearing. Me."

"She was gone? Where? How? It doesn't make sense."

He shook his head and stared

at the table in sullen confusion. After a long pause he continued: "There was nothing left from Freyda but a crazy souvenir. It must have busted off in the fight we had — the fight everybody said was imaginary. It was the dial of her watch."

"What was crazy about it?"

"It was numbered from two to twenty-four by twos. Two, four, six, eight, ten . . . and so on."

"Maybe it was a foreign watch. Europeans use the twenty-four hour system. I mean, noon is twelve and one o'clock is thirteen and —"

"Don't overwhelm me," Bacon interrupted wearily. "I was in the army. I know all about that. But I've never seen a clock-face like that used for it. No one has. It was out of this world. I mean that literally."

"Yes? How?"

"I met her again."

"Freyda?"

He nodded. "I met her in Coney Island again, hanging around the roller coaster. I was no fool. I went looking for her and I found her."

"Beat up?"

"Not a mark on her. Fresh and virgin all over again, though it was only a couple of weeks later. There she was, the Black Widow Spider, smelling the flies as they came staggering off the roller coaster. I went up behind her and I grabbed her. I pulled her around

into the alley between the freak tents and I said: 'Let out one peep and you're dead for sure this time.' "

"Did she fight?"

"No," he said. "She was loving it. She looked like she just found a million bucks. That glitter in her eyes . . ."

"I don't understand."

"I did when I looked at her. When I looked into that virgin face, happy and smiling because I was screaming at her. I said: 'The cops swear nobody was in the apartment but me. The talk-doc-tors swear nobody was ever in the apartment but me. That put you inside my head and that put me inside the Section Eight ward for a week.' I said: 'But I know how you got out and I know where you went.' " He stopped and looked hard at me. I looked hard at him.

"How drunk are you?" he asked.

"Drunk enough to believe anything."

"She went out through time," Bacon said. "Understand? Through time. To another time. To the future. She melted and dissolved right out."

"What? Time Travel? I'm not drunk enough to believe that."

"Time Travel." He nodded. "That's why she had that watch — some kind of time machine. That's how she got herself patched

up so fast. She could have stayed up there for a year and then come right back to Now or two weeks after Now. And that's why she said 'Sigma, darling.' It's how they talk up there."

"Now wait a minute, Eddie —"

"And that's why she wanted to come so close to getting herself killed."

"But that doesn't make sense. She wanted you to knock her around?"

"I told you. She loved it. They all love it. They come back here, the bastards, like we go to Coney Island. They don't come back to explore or study or any of that science-fiction junk. Our time's an amusement park for them, that's all. Like the roller coaster."

"What's the roller coaster?"

"Passion. Emotion. Screams and shrieks. Loving and hating and tearing and killing. That's their roller coaster. That's how they get their kicks. It must be forgotten up there in the future, like we've forgotten how it is to be chased by a dinosaur. So they come back here for it. This is the stone age for them."

"But —"

"All that stuff about the sudden up-swing in crime and violence and rape. It isn't us. We're no worse than we ever were. It's them. They come back here. They goad us. They macerate us. They stick pins in us until we blow our tops and give them their

roller coaster ride."

"And Liz?" I asked. "Did she believe this?"

He shook his head. "She never gave me a chance to tell her."

"I hear she kicked up quite a fuss."

"Yeah. Six beautiful feet of Irish rage. She took my gun off the study wall — the one I packed when I was with Patton. If it'd been loaded there wouldn't have been any make-believe murder."

"So I heard, Eddie. Where's Liz now?"

"Doing a burn in her old apartment."

"Where's that?"

"Ten-ten Park."

"Mrs. Elizabeth Bacon?"

"Not after Bacon got D.T.s nailed to the name in the papers. She's using her maiden name."

"Oh, yes. Elizabeth Noyes, isn't it?"

"Noyes? Where the hell did you get that? No. Elizabeth Macy." He yelled: "Chris! What is this — a desert!"

I looked at my time-meter. The hand was halfway from twelve to fourteen. That gave me eleven days more before I had to go up. Just enough time to work Liz Macy for some action. The gun was real promising. Freyda was right. It was a good lead. I got up from the table.

"Have to be going now, Eddie," I said. "Sigma, pal."