

# Fantasy and Science Fiction

OCTOBER *Including Venture Science Fiction*

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Cover by Chesley Bonestell  
(Unloading empty fuel tanks on the moon)

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*They had flung themselves over the void to where the stars clustered thick as grapes on autumn vines, had done what no people from Earth had ever done before . . . .*

## THE SIGHT OF EDEN

*by Howard Fast*

THEY WERE IN ORBIT, AND IT was over. They had crossed the void, leaped all the gaps of time and imagination, and bridged the unbridgeable, and they had been through the seven fires of hell. They were sane, although they had touched all the fringes of insanity. They could smile, although they had known all the profound depths of grief and suicidal depression; and they were alive, although they had flirted with all the varieties of death that boundless space can concoct.

They had come through fear and terror indescribable, and now they could speak about it and to each other. There were seven of them, three women and four men, and they had been locked away in this starship for five interminable years. They were light years beyond calculation from the Planet Earth; they had leaped their ship across the strange curves and tricks of space, played havoc with

all the calculus and geometry known to men, and had flung themselves over the void to where the stars clustered thick as grapes on autumn vines. They had done what they were ordained to do, and what no people from the Planet Earth had ever done before. And now they were in silent, flowing orbit over a planet as blue and green and lovely as the one they had left behind them.

It was something to think about and to crow about. It gave them a sense of themselves that was unique. It made them look at each other in a certain way as they sat together in the wardroom. They had done it.

For that reason, all words that could be said to the point were pointless; in five years, all the words had been said, all the reactions had been tested, all the tears had been wept. Now there remained only the fact, and the fact was the planet beneath them,

bathed in sunshine, washed with air, and laced with rivers and lakes and lagoons. It was the proof of the universe, all they had ventured their lives and sanity to prove—proof that life was not limited to the Planet Earth and the Solar System, but was a part of the logic of the universe. The fact was a planet slightly larger than Earth, perhaps of somewhat less density, with a breathable nitrogen-oxygen atmosphere, well-watered and with abundant plant life. Its revolution upon its axis was thirty hours; its year, as well as they could calculate, was four hundred and fifteen days. Its sun was a Sol-type sun, somewhat better than 900,000 miles in diameter and at this moment 112,000,576 miles from the planet it warmed. There were eleven other planets in the system; but first this one, the other ten could wait.

Their own orbit time was five hours and sixteen minutes, and since they had gone into orbit to study the planet, their starship had made eight revolutions. This was their final meeting in the wardroom for comparative discussion. It would be a short meeting, and then they would descend.

Briggs, the pilot and as much the captain as anyone was captain on the starship, looked from face to face and said, "Not very much left to talk about, unless someone has a reason not to go down?"

"All the reasons," Frances Rhodes, the physician, nodded. "Bugs, germs, virus, radiation—and none of them hold water." She smiled—and she was lovely then, as they all were in the radiance of their accomplishment. "We'd go down if they had the plague, wouldn't we?"

They would have gone down if it were boiling lava under them, because they had endured all the confinement that is endurable and had felt all the nakedness of empty space that men can feel and remain sane.

"I'm not worried about bugs," Carrington, the agronomist, said. "Disease doesn't work that way. Not about radiation either. Something else."

Gene Ling, second navigator and Nobel Prize winner, nodded. She was a slender, gentle half-Chinese from San Francisco. "Yes, something else," she said. "No oceans."

"No deserts either," said Carrington.

"No lights in the cities at night," said Gluckman, the engineer.

"If they are cities." McCaffery, the navigator.

"The nights are full of starlight," Briggs thought. "Perhaps they sleep at night. It must be different. Why do we forget how different it must be?"

"They must see us," said Laura Shawn, the biologist. "Why don't

they call to us, signal us, come up to us?"

"They?"

"In the scopes, it looks like fairyland," Phillips, 2nd engineer, observed self-consciously. "I don't like that."

"Where was your childhood, Phillips?"

"I don't like it."

"Arms?" Gluckman wanted to know.

"I suppose so," said Briggs uneasily. "Sidearms anyway."

"In fairyland?" Laura Shawn smiled.

But it wasn't as light and pleasant as it seemed, and if it went on this way, Briggs realized, it could top a note of hysteria. They were clinging to reality with a thin hold, and the meeting was pointless and becoming too long.

"We go down now," Briggs said. "Go to your stations."

They were relieved, and they didn't want to talk about it. They went to their stations, and the starship slid down its electro-magnetic web until it rode its anti-gravitic tensors a foot above the planet's surface. Then they opened their airlocks and went out.

The air was sweet as honey. Where the sun shone, it was warm and beneficent and in the shade it was seventy degrees Fahrenheit. They had landed upon a broad meadow, half a thousand acres of meadow where the green grass

was cropped an inch high; but when they examined it, they saw that it bent upon itself and controlled and conditioned itself. Through the meadow, winding lazily, a little river took its way, and the banks of the river were lined with a million flowers of red and blue and yellow and every other color. Bees hummed among the flowers and the air was full of their fragrance, and here and there about the meadow was a tree heavy with blue or golden fruit. About a half a mile down the river, a filigree bridge arched gracefully.

They had been five years in the starship, so at first they just stood and looked and breathed the air. Then some of them sat down on the grass. They all wept a little; that was to be expected. If they had faced danger or horror or the unbelievable, their reaction would have been different. It was the beauty and the peace, almost unendurable, that made them weep. They felt better when they had but mostly they sprawled on the grass and listened to the soft breeze blowing. No one said anything and no one wanted to say anything. A half hour went by, and Briggs said:

"We can't just stay here."

"Why not?" Laura Shawn wanted to know.

They were all thinking, as Briggs also thought, that it was a dream or an illusion or that they

were dead. It was a bubble that could burst, they were thinking; and Briggs said:

"Gluckman and Phillips—go into the ship and follow us!"

Then the other five set out on foot, with the great, shining starship sliding behind them on its magnetic web. They walked to the filigree bridge, which seemed to be made of crystal lace, and they crossed the river. A little road or pathway, full of dancing light and color, led up over the brow of a low hill. On the other side of the hill was a garden and in the center of the garden a building that was like a castle in fairyland or a dream, or the laughter of children, if a building can be like laughter of children.

If the building was like the laughter of children, then the garden was like all the dreams that city children ever dreamed about a garden. It was about a mile square, and as Briggs led them on a winding path through it, it appeared to open endless arms of delight and wonder. There were the fountains. Golden water from one, pink water from another, green water from a third, a rainbow of colors from a fourth—and there were hundreds of fountains, ornamented with dancing, laughing children carved out of stone of as many different shades as the water showed. There were nooks and corners of secret delight. There were benches to rest on that

were marvels of beauty and comfort. There were hedges of green and yellow and blue. There were beds of flowers and bold beautiful birds, and there were drinking fountains to quench the thirst of those who used the garden.

Gene Ling bent to drink at one of these. They watched her, but they didn't try to stop her.

"It's water," she said. "Clean and cold."

Then they all drank. They didn't care. Their defenses were crumbling too quickly.

Gluckman brought the starship to rest in front of the building, and all seven of them went inside together. As they entered, music began, and they stopped nervously.

"It's automatic," McCaffery guessed. "Body relay or photo electric."

Their momentary nerves could not contend against the music—an outpouring of sound that vibrated with welcome and assurance and sheer delight—that filled them with a sense of innocence and purity. Wherever they went in the building, the music was with them. They went into an auditorium large enough to hold a thousand people, but empty, and with a great silver screen at one end. They wandered along empty corridors, lined with colorful and masterful murals of naked children at play. They looked into rooms full of couches, where the

music made them drowsy almost immediately, and there were other rooms that were dining rooms, play rooms, classrooms—all recognizable and all different. In each case, they sensed that this was how it should be, and in each case, the memories of earth which they used for comparison become crude and ugly. They left, and went back to the starship.

With its viewplates open, the starship moved across the planet's surface, a hundred feet above the ground. They saw gardens as beautiful and more beautiful than the one they had been in. They saw forests of old and splendid trees, with colored paths among the trees. They saw mighty amphitheatres that could seat a hundred thousand people and smaller ones too. Buildings of glass and alabaster, pink stone and violet stone, green crystal. They saw groups of buildings that reminded them of the Acropolis of ancient Athens, if the Athenians had but a thousand years more to work and plan for some ultimate beauty. They saw lakes where boats were moored to docks, ready for use, but small boats, pleasure boats. They saw bathing pavilions—or so they surmised—playing fields, arbors, bowers, every structure for beauty and delight that they had ever imagined and a thousand that they had never imagined.

But nowhere did they see a living man, woman or child.

After nightfall, after they had eaten, they sat and talked. Their talk went in circles, and it was full of fear and speculation. They had come too far; space had enveloped them, and although their starship hung a thousand feet in the air above a planet as large as the Planet Earth, they felt that they had passed across the edge of nowhere.

"Just suppose," Carrington said, "that all our dreams had taken shape."

"All the memories and wishes of our childhoods," said Francis Rhodes.

"Taken shape," Carrington repeated. "Who knows what the fabric of space is or what it does?"

"It does strange things," Gene Ling, the physicist, agreed.

"Or what thought is," Carrington persisted. "A planet like this one—it's a fairy land—it's the stuff of dreams—all the dreams we brought with us from home, all the longings and desires, and out of our thoughts it was shaped."

"Who was it said, we will make the earth like a garden?"

"Oh, I don't buy any of that," Briggs said, more harshly than was called for, because he found himself leaning toward the madness of their theories. "I don't buy it one bit! It's metaphysical bosh, and you're all falling for it. You

don't think a planet into existence."

"How do you know?" Laura Shawn asked dreamily.

"How do I know? I know. I know the fact and the substance of dreams and the fact and the substance of matter, and the two are different!"

"And we trap a curve of space and go from tomorrow into yesterday—is that real?" asked Gene Ling.

"This planet is real," Briggs insisted.

"Without people?"

"Or cities?"

"Industry? You don't spin palaces out of thin air—or do you, Briggs? Where is the industry?"

"Who cultivates it?" Carrington, an agronomist and in mental agony over this. "Who tends a million flower beds? Who fertilizes it? Who plants? Who crops the hedges?"

"And who paints the murals of earth children? And who carves the statues of Earth children?"

"Why must they be Earth children?" Briggs said slowly and doggedly. "Why must man be a freak of Earth, an accident on one planet out of a billion? Is the sun an accident?"

Carrington said, "I could swear by all we believe in that those flower beds were tended yesterday. Where are the people today?"

"If there is any today—"

"Enough of that," Briggs snapped. "We've seen only a tiny corner of this world. Tomorrow, we'll see more of it. Eight hours sleep won't hurt any of us, and maybe it'll clear some of the metaphysical cobwebs away."

Tomorrow came, and at a speed of five hundred miles an hour, the starship cruised across the planet, a thousand feet high. They sat at the viewplates, and looked at gardens and lakes and golden, winding rivers, and palaces and all the joyous beauty that man had ever imagined and so much that he had never imagined. They watched it until it became unbearable in its glowing abundance, and then the sun set. But they saw no people. The world was empty.

That night, they talked again; and when they had talked themselves close to the edge of madness, Briggs ordered them to silence and sleep. But he knew that he was not too far from the edge of madness himself.

On the third day, the starship came to rest on the edge of a lake whose shores were marked with pleasure houses and dream places. They could think of no other names for the buildings. Phillip and Gluckman remained with the ship; Briggs led the others down to a dock that appeared to be carved out of alabaster, and he selected a boat moored there

large enough to hold them all. As they took their places in the boat, it stirred to life with the strange, haunting music of the planet, and the music washed away their fears and their cares, and Briggs saw that they were smiling at some inner fulfillment.

"We could remain here," Laura Shawn said lazily.

Briggs knew what she meant. Five years in the starship had merged all their secrets, all their memories. Laura Shawn was a product of poverty, unhappiness, and finally divorce. Her scientific triumphs had left a string of emotional defeats behind her. She had never been happy before, and Briggs wondered whether any of them had? Yet they were happy now—and he himself, too, for all of his struggle to preserve in himself a fortress of skepticism and wary doubt. Doubt was anathema in this place.

The boat had a wheel and a lever. The lever gave it motion; the wheel steered it. There was no sign of a propeller; it glided through the water by its own inner force; but this was not disturbing since their own starship rode the waves and currents of magnetism and force that pervaded the universe. So it was, Briggs thought to himself, with all the mysteries and wonders that man had faced from his very beginning; they were miracles and beyond explanation until man dis-

covered the reason, and then in the simplicity and self-evidence of the reason, he could smile at his former fear and superstition. Was this planet any more wonderful or puzzling than the web of force that held the universe in place and order? And when the explanation came, if it ever did, he was certain it would be simple and even obvious.

Meanwhile, he steered the boat across the lake, and as they skirted the shore, building after building welcomed them with music and invited them to its own particular pleasure. He ran the boat through a canal bordered with great, flower-bearing trees, into another lake, where the water was so clear and pure that they could see all the gold and red and purple rocks on the bottom and watch gold and silver fish swimming and darting here and there. Then they entered a winding river, placid and lovely and bucolic, and they had gone a mile or so along this river, when they saw the man.

He stood on a landing place of pink, translucent stone, where there was a circle of carved benches, and he waved to them, almost casually. "Did we also think him into being?" Briggs asked caustically, as he turned the boat toward the dock. They rode to the mooring, and the man helped them out of the boat onto the steps that led up to the dock.



He was a tall, well-built man, smiling and pleasant, his brown hair cut in the page-boy style of the olden times on Earth. He was of an indeterminate middle age, and he wore a robe of some light blue material, belted at the waist.

"Please—join me and make yourselves comfortable," he said to them, his voice warm and rich and his English without an accent. "I am sorry for these three days of bewilderment, but there were things I had to do. Now, if you will sit down here, we can relax for a while and talk about some problems we have in common."

His four companions were speechless; as for Briggs, he could only say, "Well, I'll be damned!"

"Call me Smith," he said. "I don't have a name in your sense of the word. Smith will make it easier for you. No, you're not dreaming. I am real. You are real. The place we are in is real. There is no reason for fear, believe me. Please sit down."

They sat down on the translucent benches. He answered the thought in their minds:

"No, I am not an Earth Man. Only a man."

"Then you read our minds?" Francis Rhodes wondered, not speaking aloud.

"I read your minds," Smith nodded. "That is one reason why I talk your language so easily."

"And the other reason?" McCaffery was thinking.

"We've listened to your radio signals many years—a great many years. I'm a student of English."

"And this planet," Briggs whispered. "Do you live here, alone?"

"No one lives here," Smith smiled, "except the custodians. And when we knew you would land here, we asked them to leave for a little while."

"In God's name," Carrington cried, "what is this place?"

"Only what it appears to be." Smith smiled and shook his head. "No mystery, believe me. What does it appear to be?"

"A garden," Laura Shawn said slowly, "the garden of all my dreams."

"Then you dream well, Miss Shawn," Smith nodded. "You have places like this on your planet—parks, playgrounds. This is a park, a playground for children. That's why no one lives here. It's a place for children to come to and play and learn a little about life and beauty—you see, in our culture, the two are not separate."

"What children?"

"The children of the Galaxy," Smith nodded, waving a hand toward the sky. "There are a great many children—a great many playgrounds and parks, not unlike this one. Today, it is empty—tomorrow, five million children—they come and they go, even as

they do in your own parks—”

“Our own parks,” Briggs was thinking bitterly.

“No, I am not sneering, Pilot Briggs. I am trying to answer your questions and your thoughts—and to connect these things with what you know and understand.”

“You’re telling us that the Galaxy is inhabited—by men?” Briggs asked.

“Why not by men? Can you really believe that man is an accident on one planet in a billion? Wherever there is life, in time man appears—and he lives now on more than half a million planets—in our galaxy alone. And he makes places like this place for his children.”

“And who are you?” Carrington said. “And why are you here alone?”

“How would you think of me?” Smith wondered. “We don’t have government in your terms. We don’t have nations. I could call myself an administrator—we have a good many. And I was sent here to meet you and talk to you. We have been watching you for a long time, tracing you—yes, we’ve watched Earth too, for a long time.”

“Talk to us—” Francis Rhodes said softly.

“Yes.”

“About what?” Briggs demanded.

“About your sickness,” Smith replied sadly.

An hour had passed. They sat silently, looking at Smith, and he watched them, and then Briggs said,

“For heaven’s sake, don’t pity us. We don’t ask for pity—not from you or any of your breed of supermen.”

“Not pity,” Smith told them. “We don’t have pity—it’s a part of yourselves, not of us. Sorrow is a better word.”

“Spare us that too,” said Gene Ling.

Carrington refused to allow anger or impatience to disturb his own reasoning. He felt a compulsion to demonstrate to Smith that he could reason dispassionately, and he said quietly and firmly,

“You see, Smith—you ask a great deal when you ask us for an admission of our own insanity. You pointed out, quite properly, I think, that we were egotistical and unscientific to believe that man was limited by nature to one obscure planet on the edge of the Galaxy. I hold that it is just as unscientific for you to claim that of all the races of man on all the planets, only the people of Earth are mentally sick, emotionally unstable—yes, insane, the one word you were kind enough not to use—”

“Carrington, you’re wasting your time,” Briggs said sourly. “He can read our thoughts—all of them.”

“Which doesn’t change any of

my arguments," Carrington said to Smith. "You mention our wars, our history of mass slaughter, our use of atomic weapons, our record of murdering and destroying each other—but these are the particulars and the wasteful errors of our development—"

"They are the specifics of your development," Smith nodded reluctantly. "I hate to repeat that no other race of men in all the universe pursues murder as his major occupation and force of development—yet I must. Only on Earth—"

"But we are not all murderers," Frances Rhodes protested. "I am a physician. If you know Earth so well, you know the history of medicine and healing on Earth."

"A physician who carries a gun in a holster at her side," Smith shrugged.

"For my protection only!" she cried.

"Protection? Against whom, Miss Rhodes?"

"We didn't know—"

"I'm sorry," Smith sighed. "I'm sorry."

"I told you it's no use," Briggs snapped. "He reads our thoughts. He knows. God help us, he knows!"

"Yes, I know," Smith agreed.

"Then you must know that people like ourselves are not murderers," Carrington persisted, his voice still calm and controlled. "We are scientists. We are civi-

lized people. You speak of how we are ridden with superstition, with gargantuan lies, with a love of the obscene and the monstrous. You mention half a billion Earth people who vocalize Christianity while none of them practice it. You talk about the millions we have slain in the name of freedom, brotherhood and God. You talk of our greed, our meanness, our perversion of love and sex and beauty—don't you realize that we know these things, that our best and bravest have struggled against them for ages?"

"I realize that," Smith nodded.

"He reads our thoughts," Briggs repeated stubbornly.

"We are scientists," Carrington continued. "We built this starship that brought us here. We lay in its hull for five endless years—that the frontiers of space might be conquered. And now, when we discover a universe of men—men talented and wonderful beyond all our dreams and imaginings, you tell us that this is barred to us forever—that we must live and die on our own speck of dust—"

"Yes, I am afraid it must be that way," Smith agreed.

"Everything but pity," said Laura Shawn.

Smith opened his robe, let it slip off his body to the ground, and stood before them naked. The women instinctively turned their heads away. The men reacted in

shocked disbelief. Smith picked up his robe and clothed himself again.

"You see," he said.

The five men and women stared at him, realization dawning now.

"In all the universe," Smith said, "there is only one race of man that holds its bodies in shame and contempt. All others walk naked in pride and unashamed. Only Earth has made the image of man into a curse and a shame. What else must I say?"

"Do you intend to destroy us?" Briggs asked harshly.

Smith looked at us with regret. "We don't destroy, Briggs. We don't kill."

"What then?"

"You have something we don't have," Smith said softly, gently. "We had no need of it, but you had to create it—otherwise you would have perished in your sickness. You know what it is."

"Conscience," Gene Ling whispered.

"Yes—conscience. It will help. Go back to your starship and plot your course for home. And then you must make the decision to forget. When you make that decision, we will help you—"

"If we make it," Briggs said.

"If you make it," Smith agreed.

"Hold out some hope," Laura Shawn begged him. "Don't send us away like this. We came across—we were the first—"

"You weren't the first," Smith said, the sadness in his voice unbearable. "There were others from Earth, but each time they destroyed each other and the knowledge too. You weren't the first and you won't be the last—"

"Can we hope?" Laura Shawn pleaded.

"All men hope," Smith said. "More than that—I don't know."

The starship circled the beautiful planet, and the seven people of Earth sat in the wardroom. Gluckman and Phillips had been told of the encounter, and by now they had all discussed it into silence and weariness. Only Briggs had said nothing—until now, and now he said:

"Why can't we remember that he reads our thoughts? He knew."

"I'm selfish," Laura Shawn whispered through her tears. "It is easier to give up all it might mean to mankind than to give up my own memories."

"Of three days of childhood?" Briggs said bitterly. "To hell with that! To hell with his damned utopia! To hell with the stars! We'll make an atmosphere on Mars and drain the poison gas from Venus! To hell with him and his gardens! We have a job of work! So set your stinking course for home, McCaffery—and the rest of you to bed. There's another day tomorrow!"

That was the virtue of Briggs;

for he more than any of them knew how right Smith was, and he wept his own tears into his pillow for hours before sleep came. In the morning, he was better. By then, the starship had flung itself a hundred million miles in the direction of home, and that gave Briggs a good feeling.

Like the others, he remembered only a wasteland of burning suns, and in all the galaxy, no other planets than those of the Solar System. Like the others, he knew that he was returning to a place unique and precious in its singularity—Earth, the sole habitat of man.

