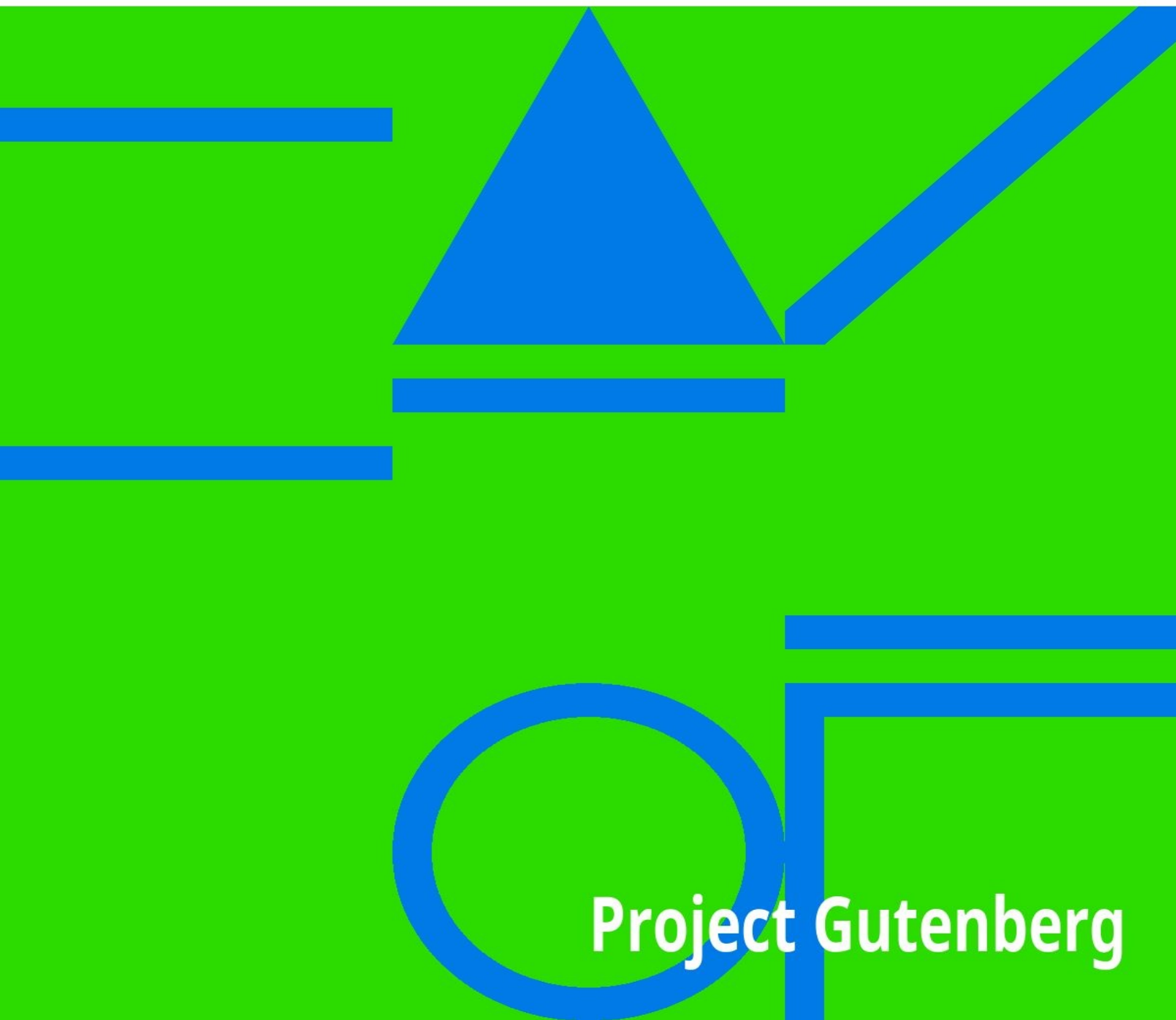


# Cancer World

Harry Warner



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cover

**Greg tried desperately to find an illegal method of joining his family on Mars; for the law said that no healthy man could land on a—**

# CANCER WORLD

*By*

*Harry Warner, Jr.*

family

"We won the Patagonian trust case," Greg Marson's jubilant tones filled the apartment—the hall in which he stood, the automatic kitchen in the rear, the living quarters, bedroom and nursery in between.

But no one replied. Greg let his bulging, expensive briefcase slip to the floor, strode through the empty hall, poked his head into the kitchen, then entered the nursery.

Dennis dashed to his father on two-year-old legs, and baby Phyllis gurgled twice in her pen. Greg wrinkled his nose in puzzlement, then punched the babyviewer.

"You can cut service," he told the girl whose blonde head appeared on the screen.

She nodded, counted on her fingers, and said: "That will be seven hours of viewing. No extras. The children behaved beautifully."

The screen darkened. Greg stared foolishly at it, then turned to Dennis.

"Where'd your mother go?"

Dennis smiled vaguely, and began to tinker with his molecule builder. Phyllis gurgled again.

Greg looked at the remains of the lunch that had hopped automatically from its can at noon, and the lowered reservoir of milk in the baby's feeder. Dora obviously hadn't been there since morning, and she didn't like to trust the babyview service so long. It was Wednesday, and bridge club was Tuesday. They'd subscribed to the telebuying service, so Dora hadn't gone shopping for months. The new baby wasn't due for five months, so a hurry-up trip to a doctor was unlikely....

The front door screeched, its bad hinge audible in the nursery, and Greg relaxed. "I'm back here, Dora," he called, and headed for the hall, closing the nursery door behind him.

Greg saw the policeman before he saw Dora. She was being lead toward the living room sofa, her face white, her coat soiled.

"What's wrong?" Greg rushed forward.

"You're Marson? Relax. Your wife just got excited for a minute. Lots of them try what she did. We won't hold it against her."

Dora pressed close to Greg, her head pushing against his chest, her body trembling. Reproachfully, the policeman was saying:

"You should have stayed home on her check day. If she could have reached you when she heard the news—" He brushed invisible specks from his spotless uniform and walked out of the apartment.

Greg led his wife to the sofa and sank down beside her. Check day. He stared at her with disbelief.

"I'm sorry," she said in a whisper, not looking at him. "You never could remember anniversaries or dates, and I didn't want to worry you." She started to quiver again.

"How bad is it?" Greg fought for words, blinking to try to drive away the haze before his eyes.

"It isn't serious at all," she said, raising her head and looking at him for the first time. "They said that the operation will take only a few minutes. They said cancer wouldn't ever be dangerous if they always found it as quickly as this time. We—I'm really very lucky, they said."

"But you should have told me that this was your check day. I was worried about the Patagonian case, and I just—"

Then Greg stared straight at his wife, trying to pierce the strangeness that covered her eyes. He realized in a flood of terror the full implications of this day.

"Dora—do they let you have the child if you're pregnant when they find cancer? I don't remember...."

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She sat erect and pushed the hair away from her eyes, suddenly the stronger of the two. "Of course, I can have the child," she said. "And please don't worry about today. I was silly, and fainted when they brought in the report, and when I came to I tried to pretend that I'd suffered amnesia. It was foolish because they could have identified me from their records, but they told me that lots of women get the same idea, so maybe I'm not so terrible after all."

Dennis wailed from the nursery and Phyllis' thin cry joined his. "They're lonely," Dora said. "I'll go and see—"

"Wait. You didn't make a decision?"

"Of course I did." She smiled palely. "I reserved passage."

"But you can't go away! What would I do without you and the kids?"

"Don't shout so. You'll frighten them. And stop thinking about yourself. You know I'd be willing to undergo sterilization. But we can't inflict it on the kids when they're still too young to decide for themselves."

"I'll find some way out. There must be someone who'd be willing to be bought —"

"Don't talk that way," she tried to laugh. "After all, you've always said you'd like to have the children see another planet."

Greg sat down again and covered his face with his hands. "Don't say that, Dora. Sure, I'd like to take my family to Venus if they ever opened it up for colonization. But that's a fine planet. Mars is hell, and the law says I can't go with you or the kids."

"That's exactly right. The law says that we're breeding a cancer-free race of humans on Earth by sending to Mars all the people who prove to be susceptible."

Greg shook his head. "That plan wasn't set up just to breed out cancer prones. It was partly to keep Earth from starvation when overpopulation became an impossible problem. It isn't really a moral issue. Look, you can probably cancel your passage, and we can arrange sterilization. The kids will approve when they grow up."

Now it was Dora who held Greg close. "I don't want to leave you," she said

desperately, "but there's nothing else to do. You know the Carstairs, and the Andresens. The same thing happened to both of those girls. They talked it over with their husbands and decided on sterilization, and the Andresens broke up the next year and Mrs. Carstairs is in a mental home...."

Greg was silent for a moment. Then he looked at her.

"When do you leave?"

The children wailed again. "I won't be here next Wednesday," she arose and walked unsteadily toward the nursery.



Greg drove the next morning through narrow streets and backed his car into a parking space close to his destination. He sat for a moment, frowning at the antiquated, dirty buildings, half-residential, half-business. Then he left the car and walked up the half-dozen uneven stone steps to Modern Laboratories.

Behind the small front office, Modern Laboratories contained an array of testtubes, some sluggish guinea pigs, and dusty bottles. A man who Greg knew must be Dr. Haskett stood in front of the bottles and looked dubiously at him.

"My contact told me to say that I need altitude shots," Greg said. "He also told me to say that I've heard of your success in transplantations."

"Sit down."

Greg found a stool, and looked unhappily at the grimy fingernails of Dr. Haskett which were now tapping the sink's edge. "Did your friend explain how much it will cost?"

"The check's written." Greg handed it over. "It's dated ahead. I can stop payment if you don't do what you promise. And secrecy is important. My wife doesn't know what I'm doing."

"Marta," Dr. Haskett called. A girl from the front office came into the laboratory, and in bored fashion pulled a soiled white robe over her street dress.

"Lie down here." Dr. Haskett shoved two tables together to provide a large, flat surface, and Marta shoved home the lock on the single door leading out of the

room. "But sign this release, first. And undress. You prefer intravenous anaesthesia, I suppose?"

"There's not much risk?" Greg asked, his perspiring fingers slipping as he tried to unknot his tie. "Not much risk that you'll fail to make good ... a good transplantation?"

"I guarantee that part of it," Dr. Haskett said, opening a case and withdrawing instruments. "The only risk lies in the danger that it will grow too fast in six months."

"I won't give it a chance. My wife gets sent to Mars next week. I'm going to ask for a special check and get myself sent aboard the same ship with her. I know the right people."

Marta laughed openly. Dr. Haskett shot a glare in her direction, then looked calculatingly at Greg.

"You're talking like a child," he said. "If I implant cancerous tissue in your body, you can't submit to a check for at least six months. The examiners would find the scars of the operation. There are laws against what you want me to do for you."

Greg stared at the tie he had finally pulled loose. "But I can't wait six months," he said helplessly. "If Dora gets sent to Mars alone, you know what will happen as well as I do. Deported people are automatically divorced from their husbands and wives on Earth. They have to marry again as soon as possible on Mars. The women need someone to support them and their kids, the men need the women to run the houses up there...."

The woman straightened her face with an effort, took off the white robe, and tossed it on the floor. Then she unlocked the door and returned to her office. Dr. Haskett turned his back on Greg, saying, "I'm afraid there's nothing I can do for you, sir."



Greg drove from the rundown district faster than the law allowed. Did the ordinary man on the street submit calmly when this happened to his wife or did he have contacts that Greg had never known?

Still, it seemed unlikely that many persons could escape the law. Every nation on

Earth cooperated to send cancerous persons to Mars, not only to breed the disease out of Earth, but to relieve the tremendous pressure of a growing population. The effort was succeeding, even though it was taking much of Earth's resources to send the people and supplies to Mars, even though the project had delayed the opening of colonization on a real paradise planet, Venus.

Pulling into the apartment's parking cell, Greg rode the elevator to his floor.

The apartment was dark and silent. A single lamp glowed faintly on the living room desk, and then he saw the note beside the viewphone.

"I didn't exactly lie about the date of my passage," the note said, "but I misled you. The children and I went at noon today. It's the best way. We couldn't stand the torture of a week, so I asked for immediate passage. Try to smuggle through a message to the children and me later on, but don't try to do anything more dangerous. I pray that someday the laws will change and we'll see each other again." There were a few more lines of writing, but they had been carefully scratched out. Dora's signature, barely recognizable in its shakiness, was at the bottom of the paper....



The smoke in the tavern was too thick to permit easy breathing. But Greg had been choking somewhere deep inside before he had wandered into the place. He placed his glass carefully over the well in the counter, pressed the stud at the edge of the counter, and watched the mixed drink squirt up through the patent bottom of the glass. There was a slight click as the bottom tightened automatically, the price appeared on the inset beside the stud, and Greg drank. Then he put down the glass, aware that the man beside him was studying him intently.

"There comes a time," the man said carefully, "when the fingers refuse to clench the glass with sufficient resistance. At that point, you begin to pass out." The stranger raised his glass with only slight effort, and watched Greg apply time and thought to the same procedure.

"You remind me of the way some doctors talk," Greg said.

"I never forget a patient," the stranger said, peering intently at Greg, "and you aren't one of mine, even though you're not quite sober enough to look natural.



But people tell me that all doctors act somewhat alike, even when they aren't very good doctors." He drained his glass with one gulp.

"My wife was sent to Mars," Greg blurted the words out. He turned to the stranger.

"There must be some way I can bring her back!"

"Don't proposition me, fellow," the strange doctor said, blinking but keeping his eyes boring into Greg's face. "You're talking to the wrong person, if you want one of those little operations."

Greg shook his head. "I thought of that. I went to one doctor. He told me the scar wouldn't heal for six months.... She'll be married again by that time."

The stranger pursed his lips thoughtfully for a moment. Then he looked away from Greg and began to speak lowly, as if he were talking to himself.

"I've run across other people in your situation. Space freighters go close to Mars' surface and parachute equipment down. The passenger ships stay further away and send people down in little auxiliary ships. I've never heard of anyone smuggling himself to Mars, you understand, but if you tried to—"

"What I want is a freighter that actually will land on Mars."

"You won't find any," the doctor said. "It takes too much fuel to take off again. This way, they can carry twice as much load, by just circling the planet close to the surface." He stopped, looked at Greg quizzically. "Funny thing about cancer—you study it since you learned the bad news? No? Well, the cure is something like the disease these days. Cancer is caused by cells that are harmful to the other cells in the body and grow too fast. So we're deporting people who might be harmful to other people by propagating the disease. Then there's metastasis."

"What's that?"

"Metastasis—the migration of cancer cells. They move from one part of the body to the other."

"Like we're moving people to Mars?" Greg laughed tiredly and started to get up.

"Take it easy, bud." A hand was on Greg's shoulder, and the doctor's voice was in his ear. "We've all got troubles. Look up this guy, if you really want to do something about the wife and kids." A hand slipped a card into Greg's pocket.

---

"What can you do?" The recruiting officer eyed Greg suspiciously.

"Anything." Greg spoke slowly, his eyes on the officer. "A fellow gave me this card, and told me I could get work on a freighter at this address."

The man glanced at the card and shrugged. "Sign this." He shoved a dogeared form toward Greg. The table shook slightly as a spaceship blasted off. Greg signed, glancing over the form.

"This isn't a contract," he said, handing it back. "It's just a release for you in case something happens to a crew member."

"So we aren't running pleasure trips or slumming expeditions for rich guys. You were born yesterday if you don't know the freighters are a little dangerous. We don't know how much money we'll make out of a trip until we've made it. So we can't settle on any pay now."

"Get me onto the surface of the planet and you get my services free the whole trip out," Greg said. "Isn't that fair enough?"

"So you want to hop out before the return trip?" The agent's face darkened. "Just when you've started to learn something useful aboardship?" A man standing at the door started to move slowly toward them.

"I've changed my mind." Greg got up, turned, and suddenly an arm encircled his throat. He twisted fiercely, uselessly, while the recruiting officer pulled a cloth-covered tube from the desk drawer. The word *shanghai* flashed into Greg's mind, an instant before the lead pipe smashed down against his skull.

---

Someone was shaking Greg, trying to dislodge his consciousness from the black, cramped niche into which it was wedged. The hand at his shoulder gripped hard, shook roughly, and a voice was bellowing into Greg's ears. Greg moved a hand, experimentally. Instantly he was jerked upright.

"Time to get to work," the voice rumbled loudly. "Let's get this show on the road. My name's Moore. What's yours?"

Greg poked with stiff fingers at his eyes. Light blinded him. He was in a small room that might have been an overgrown closet. He sat on the lower half of a two-tier bunk. There was a webbing of ropes at the other side, and a couple of small lockers around the other sides. The hand that had been shaking him belonged to a giant blond fellow who might have been in his forties.

"Feel better?" The blond giant steadied Greg in a sitting position.

"What's this all about?" Greg felt for the lump on his head.

"Well, they haven't told me about you," the fellow grinned, "but I can guess. When someone starts to ask about a berth on a freighter, they figure that he's either a potential crew member or a spy. Either way, they figure they'd better take him aboard. I got took just the same way, ten years ago. I'm not sorry now. It's a pretty good life."

"Look, I've got some money." Greg struggled to his feet. "Who can I see to get out of here?"

"Too late," Moore said. "We've blasted off. You've been out cold for two days. Don't you feel the ship?"

Greg sat down again, and suddenly he felt better. After all wasn't he on his way to Mars, where he had wanted to go all along? He could worry about smuggling himself onto the planet later, when they started to toss out the cargo....

Moore introduced him to his duties in the hours that followed, and later joined him in their tiny cabin.

"You'll have to take the upper bunk as soon as you feel better," Moore warned. "I got seniority, you know."

"Maybe I won't be around long. How do you go about skipping ship at delivery point?"

"It can be done if you've got the money," Moore said. "They run these boats to make money and they aren't particular about where the money comes from. They never are sure what sort of a price they can get for the refrigeration equipment and dehumidifiers and stuff."

"Refrigeration—dehumidifiers?" Greg stared at Moore. "Are they crazy? Mars is the last place in the world to dispose of stuff like that!"

"Mars? Who said anything about Mars, bud?" Moore looked at him curiously. "They need that stuff on Venus, because it gets hot and damp there in the summer time. We're going to Venus, my friend!"

The words stunned Greg's mind. "But my wife and kids were sent to Mars, and if I'm heading for Venus it'll be too late—"

"But you ought to have known that these birds only go to Venus—" Moore began. Greg didn't give him a chance to finish, rising abruptly and running from the cabin.

All the fear, worry and despair that he had felt since Dora's check day transmuted magically into an alloy of anger and hatred against any authority.

He searched for the officers' quarters, his feet stamping loudly against the metal flooring, the noise thrusting new aches into his head, the aches in his head increasing his fury.

Hopelessly lost after a moment, he opened one door and caught a glimpse of inferno and the insulation-clad men who tended the propulsion units. Twice he blundered into the space between the outer and inner hulls on the wrong side of the ship. One panel in the wall that looked like a door proved to be the lid for a viewer that gave a fantastically beautiful image of the stars and planets outside the ship. He had wandered into a storeroom when a voice came from behind him:

"Getting thirsty again?"

"Where's the captain?" Greg yelled back. The man who had called to him straightened from behind a row of boxes.

"Last time I saw you, you were more interested in drinks than in the captain."



Greg looked hard at muscular fingers, and the ghost image of a bar back on Earth materialized for an instant in the stockroom around the man. It was the doctor who had given him instructions on how to find the freighter recruiting office!

"So you're the one who had me shanghaied to Venus!" Greg sprang at the man,

fists flying.

The doctor ducked. Greg sprawled clumsily at the opposite wall, thrown off balance by the slighter gravity maintained in the ship. He started to rise, then dropped to his knees as knife-like pain shot through his ankle. The doctor stood over him with that strange half-smile.

"You shouldn't be angry. You wanted transportation, didn't you?" He kneeled to look at Greg's ankle and the pain conquered Greg's impulse to smash a fist into his face.

"Exactly what I wanted," Greg answered bitterly. "Of course I wanted to get shanghaied on a freight headed for Venus while my family's on Mars!"

"I think it's just a sprain, not a break," the doctor said, running a finger over the swelling ankle. "But we'd better take a picture. Come on." He hoisted Greg to a standing position with unexpected strength, and walked him out of the storeroom to his cabin. Medical equipment lined the room.

"Did it ever occur to you that someday you're going to get the lawbooks thrown at you?" Greg asked, quietly but with hatred. "They stopped tolerating this sort of thing centuries ago."

The doctor laughed. "Fine talk from a man who tried to smuggle himself on Mars."

"You don't have any proof. I don't even know your name."

"It's Coleridge. You can put doctor in front of it, too. I really did study and get a diploma. Then I decided I could have more fun out in space than in some stuffy office back on Earth. Maybe you'd enjoy this sort of life, too, if you haven't congealed completely." He sat Greg before a small X-ray machine.

"I've always wanted to spend the rest of my life fighting dinosaurs on Venus while my family is on Mars and my career is on Earth." Greg said acidly.

"You know very well there aren't any dinosaurs on Venus," Coleridge replied mildly. "It's practically perfect as a planet, with a few gadgets to keep things dry and cool." He looked straight at Greg. "You know it's the most desirable planet in the system but they've discouraged emigration because they need the spaceships to handle the cancer colonies on Mars. It's only tramp freighters like this that can get away with trips to Venus." He pulled the film from its fixing

bath and squinted at it. "Not a sign of a fracture."



Greg began to wonder what Coleridge was leading up to. Everything he said appeared to be a case of diverting attention from Greg's problem by talking about Venus' merits. He decided to play along until he found out.

"You think I could find something to keep myself occupied on Venus?"

"Sure, they need smart men, and you can tell the employment agencies that your wife and kids are on the way."

Greg stared at him, feeling the torment return.

Coleridge grinned. "Haven't you ever put two and two together about the population figures?"

"You mean there's a chance for my family to get from Mars to Venus?"

"Look. You remember that they started to send people from Earth to Mars a century ago, because the population had overgrown Earth. Emigration has gone on all that time, millions of people have been sent to Mars, and once they get there they have children and raise families just as they would do on Earth. Now, if you weren't a lawyer, always splitting hairs and quibbling, you'd have guessed long ago what other intelligent people sooner or later realize. Mars is smaller than Earth, only part of it is warm enough for Earthmen—so Mars got overpopulated, too, a few years back.

"Remember what I told you in the bar about metastasis? I thought you'd catch on then, when I tried to draw an analogy about migrating cancer cells and migrating people.

"They've been afraid to tell people on Earth the real situation, because Venus has been held up for so long as the second Eden where we'll all live as soon as the cancer problem is licked. But actually, they've had to ship new arrivals on Mars off to Venus in recent years, because there's no more room on Mars. I suppose they'll break the news to Earth some of these days, formally. If you were closer to the grapevine, you probably would have heard the rumor long ago."

Greg sat there gaping at Coleridge. Finally he asked, in humbled tones: "If Venus

is such a paradise, how come you don't drop off there and stay there yourself?"

"Well," the doctor said, beginning to put away his equipment, "I've been thinking of it, but I wanted to save up some money first, and this seemed to be about the best way to do it. It's a little more humane than the way some doctors do, implanting cancer conditions into people who have to undergo operations to get themselves deported. Of course, it's a little more uncertain.

"For instance," he said, eyeing Greg sharply, "now that you have that bum ankle, I could probably tell the captain that you'll be no good as a crew member, and I could have you dumped overboard when we begin to circle Venus. That way you wouldn't have done a thing illegal and you'd have a clean slate to meet your family a few days later."

Greg rubbed the lump on his head, gingerly flexed his sore ankle, remembered the emotions of the past three or four days, and then reached for his check book.

"I think I'm beginning to understand," Greg smiled. "Got a pen?"

THE END

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