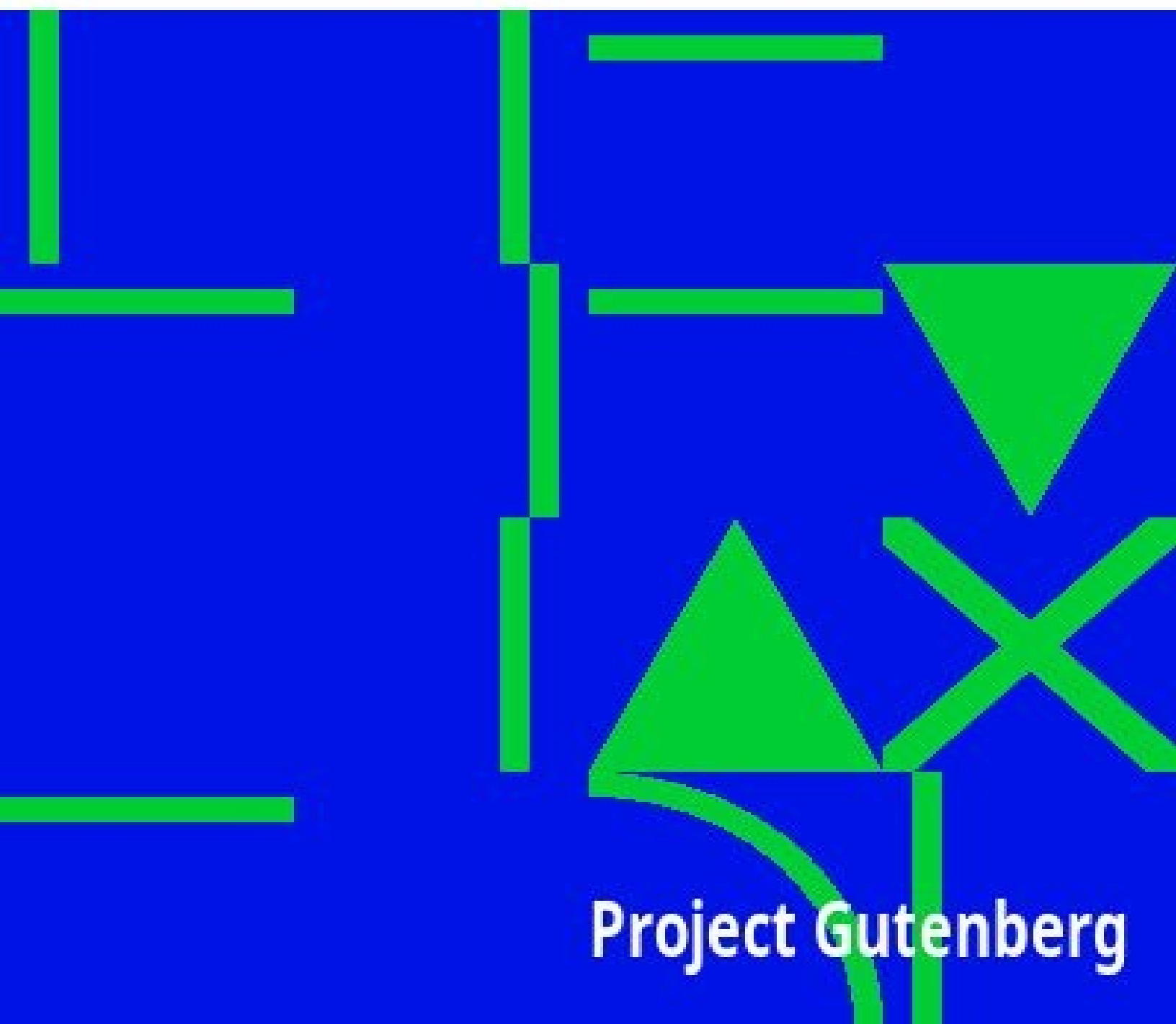


The Eyes Have It

James McKimmey



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Daylight sometimes hides secrets that darkness will reveal—the Martian's glowing eyes, for instance. But darkness has other dangers....

THE EYES HAVE IT

By James McKimmeY, Jr.

Illustrated by Paul Orban

JOSEPH HEIDEL looked slowly around the dinner table at the five men, hiding his examination by a thin screen of smoke from his cigar. He was a large man with thick blond-gray hair cut close to his head. In three more months he would be fifty-two, but his face and body had the vital look of a man fifteen years younger. He was the President of the Superior Council, and he had been in that post—the highest post on the occupied planet of Mars—four of the six years he had lived here. As his eyes flicked from one face to another his fingers unconsciously tapped the table, making a sound like a miniature drum roll.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Five top officials, selected, tested, screened on Earth to form the nucleus of governmental rule on Mars.

Heidel's bright narrow eyes flicked, his fingers drummed. Which one? Who was the imposter, the ringer? Who was the Martian?

Sadler's dry voice cut through the silence: "This is not just an ordinary meeting then, Mr. President?"

Heidel's cigar came up and was clamped between his teeth. He stared into Sadler's eyes. "No, Sadler, it isn't. This is a very special meeting." He grinned around the cigar. "This is where we take the clothes off the sheep and find the wolf."

Heidel watched the five faces. Sadler, Meehan, Locke, Forbes, Clarke. One of them. Which one?

"I'm a little thick tonight," said Harry Locke. "I didn't follow what you meant."

"No, no, of course not," Heidel said, still grinning. "I'll explain it." He could feel himself alive at that moment, every nerve singing, every muscle toned. His brain was quick and his tongue rolled the words out smoothly. This was the kind of situation Heidel handled best. A tense, dramatic situation, full of atmosphere and suspense.

"Here it is," Heidel continued, "simply and briefly." He touched the cigar against an ash tray, watching with slitted shining eyes while the ashes spilled away from the glowing tip. He bent forward suddenly. "We have an imposter among us, gentlemen. A spy."

He waited, holding himself tense against the table, letting the sting of his words have their effect. Then he leaned back, carefully. "And tonight I am going to expose this imposter. Right here, at this table." He searched the faces again, looking for a tell-tale twitch of a muscle, a movement of a hand, a shading in the look of an eye.

There were only Sadler, Meehan, Locke, Forbes, Clarke, looking like themselves, quizzical, polite, respecting.

"One of us, you say," Clarke said noncommittally, his phrase neither a question nor a positive statement.

"That is true," said Heidel.

"Bit of a situation at that," said Forbes, letting a faint smile touch his lips.

"Understatement, Forbes," Heidel said. "Understatement."

"Didn't mean to sound capricious," Forbes said, his smile gone.

"Of course not," Heidel said.

Edward Clarke cleared his throat. "May I ask, sir, how this was discovered and how it was narrowed down to the Superior Council?"

"Surely," Heidel said crisply. "No need to go into the troubles we've been having. You know all about that. But how these troubles originated is the important thing. Do you remember the missionary affair?"

"When we were going to convert the Eastern industrial section?"

"That's right," Heidel said, remembering. "Horrible massacre."

"Bloody," agreed John Meehan.

"Sixty-seven missionaries lost," Heidel said.

"I remember the Martian note of apology," Forbes said. "'We have worshipped our own God for two-hundred thousand years. We would prefer to continue. Thank you.' Blinking nerve, eh?"

"Neither here nor there," Heidel said abruptly. "The point is that no one *knew* those sixty-seven men were missionaries except myself and you five men."

HEIDEL WATCHED the faces in front of him. "One case," he said. "Here's another. Do you recall when we outlawed the free selection system?"

"Another bloody one," said Sadler.

"Forty-eight victims in that case," Heidel said. "Forty-eight honorable colonists, sanctioned by us to legally marry any couple on the planet, and sent out over the country to abolish the horrible free-love

situation."

"Forty-eight justices of the peace dead as pickerels," Forbes said.

"Do you happen to remember *that* note of apology?" Heidel asked, a slight edge in his voice. He examined Forbes' eyes.

"Matter of fact, yes," said Forbes, returning Heidel's stare steadily. "'You love your way, we'll love ours.' Terribly caustic, what?"

"Terribly," said Heidel. "Although that too is neither here nor there. The point again, no one except the six of us right here knew what those forty-eight men were sent out to do."

Heidel straightened in his chair. The slow grating voice of Forbes had taken some of the sharpness out of the situation. He wanted to hold their attention minutely, so that when he was ready, the dramatics of his action would be tense and telling.

"There is no use," he said, "in going into the details of the other incidents. You remember them. When we tried to install a free press, the Sensible Art galleries, I-Am-A-Martian Day, wrestling, and all the rest."

"I remember the wrestling business awfully well," said Forbes. "Martians drove a wrestler through the street in a yellow jetmobile. Had flowers around his neck and a crown on his head. He was dead, of course. Stuffed, I think...."

"All right," snapped Heidel. "Each one of our efforts to offer these people a chance to benefit from our culture was snapped off at the bud. And only a leak in the Superior Council could have caused it. It is a simple matter of deduction. There is one of us, here tonight, who is responsible. And I am going to expose him." Heidel's voice was a low vibrant sound that echoed in the large dining room.

The five men waited. Forbes, his long arms crossed. Sadler, his eyes on his fingernails. Meehan, blinking placidly. Clarke, twirling his thumbs. Locke, examining his cigarette.

"Kessit!" Heidel called.

A gray-haired man in a black butler's coat appeared.

"We'll have our wine now," Heidel said. There was a slight quirk in his mouth, so that his teeth showed between his lips. The butler moved methodically from place to place, pouring wine from a silver decanter.

"Now then, Kessit," Heidel said, when the butler had finished, "would you be kind enough to fetch me that little pistol from the mantel over there?" He smiled outwardly this time. The situation was right again; he was handling things, inch by inch, without interruption.

He took the gun from the old man's hands. "One thing more, Kessit. Would you please light the candles on the table and turn out the rest of the lights in the room. I've always been a romanticist," Heidel said, smiling around the table. "Candlelight with my wine."

"Oh, excellent," said Locke soberly.

"Quite," said Forbes.

Heidel nodded and waited while the butler lit the candles and snapped off the overhead lights. The yellow flames wavered on the table as the door closed gently behind the butler.

"Now, then," Heidel said, feeling the tingling in his nerves. "This, gentlemen, is a replica of an antique of the twentieth century. A working replica, I might add. It was called a P-38, if my memory serves me." He held the pistol up so that the candlelight reflected against the glistening black handle and the blue barrel.

There was a polite murmur as the five men stretched forward to look at the gun in Heidel's hands.

"Crude," Sadler said.

"But devilish-looking," Forbes added.

"My hobby," Heidel said. "I would like to add that not only do I collect these small arms, but I am very adept at using them. Something I will demonstrate to you very shortly," he added, grinning.

"Say now," nodded Meehan.

"That should be jolly," Forbes said, laughing courteously.

"I believe it will at that," Heidel said. "Now if you will notice, gentlemen," he said touching the clip ejector of the pistol and watching the black magazine slip out into his other hand. "I have but five cartridges in the clip. Just five. You see?"

They all bent forward, blinking.

"Good," said Heidel, shoving the clip back into the grip of the gun. He couldn't keep his lips from curling in his excitement, but his hands were as steady as though his nerves had turned to ice.

The five men leaned back in their chairs.

"Now then, Meehan," he said to the man at the opposite end of the table. "Would you mind moving over to your left, so that the end of the table is clear?"

"Oh?" said Meehan. "Yes, of course." He grinned at the others, and there was a ripple of amusement as Meehan slid his chair to the left.

"Yes," said Heidel. "All pretty foolish-looking, perhaps. But it won't be in a few minutes when I discover the bastard of a Martian who's in

this group, I'll tell you that!" His voice rose and rang in the room, and he brought the glistening pistol down with a crack against the table.

THERE WAS dead silence and Heidel found his smile again. "All right, now I'll explain a bit further. Before Dr. Kingly, the head of our laboratory, died a few days ago, he made a very peculiar discovery. As you know, there has been no evidence to indicate that the Martian is any different, physically, from the Earthman. Not until Dr. Kingly made his discovery, that is."

Heidel looked from face to face. "This is how it happened," he went on. "Dr. Kingly ..."

He paused and glanced about in false surprise. "I beg your pardon, gentlemen. We might as well be enjoying our wine. Excellent port. Very old, I believe. Shall we?" he asked, raising his glass.

Five other glasses shimmered in the candlelight.

"Let us, ah, toast success to the unveiling of the rotten Martian who sits among us, shall we?" Heidel's smile glinted and he drank a quarter of his glass.

The five glasses tipped and were returned to the table. Again there was silence as the men waited.

"To get back," Heidel said, listening with excitement to his own voice. "Dr. Kingly, in the process of an autopsy on a derelict Martian, made a rather startling discovery ..."

"I beg your pardon," Forbes said. "Did you say autopsy?"

"Yes," said Heidel. "We've done this frequently. Not according to base orders, you understand." He winked. "But a little infraction now and then is necessary."

"I see," said Forbes. "I just didn't know about that."

"No, you didn't, did you?" said Heidel, looking at Forbes closely. "At any rate, Dr. Kingly had developed in his work a preserving solution which he used in such instances, thereby prolonging the time for examination of the cadaver, without experiencing deterioration of the tissues. This solution was merely injected into the blood stream, and ..."

"Sorry again, sir," Forbes said. "But you said blood stream?"

"Yes," Heidel nodded. "This had to be done before the cadaver was a cadaver, you see?"

"I think so, yes," said Forbes, leaning back again. "Murdered the bastard for an autopsy, what?"

Heidel's fingers closed around the pistol. "I don't like that, Forbes."

"Terribly sorry, sir."

"To get on," Heidel said finally, his voice a cutting sound. "Dr. Kingly had injected his solution and then ... Well, at any rate, when he returned to his laboratory, it was night. His laboratory was black as pitch—I'm trying to paint the picture for you, gentlemen—and the cadaver was stretched out on a table, you see. And before Dr. Kingly switched on the lights, he saw the eyes of this dead Martian glowing in the dark like a pair of hot coals."

"Weird," said Sadler, unblinking.

"Ghostly," said Clarke.

"The important thing," Heidel said curtly, "is that Dr. Kingly discovered the difference, then, between the Martian and the Earthman. The difference is the eyes. The solution, you see, had reacted chemically to the membranes of the eyeballs, so that as it happened they lit up like electric lights. I won't go into what Dr. Kingly found further, when he dissected the eyeballs. Let it suffice to say, the Martian eyeball is a physical element entirely different from our own—at least from those of five of us, I should say."

His grin gleamed. He was working this precisely and carefully, and it was effective. "Now, however," he continued, "it is this *sixth* man who is at issue right now. The fly in the soup, shall we say. And in just a few seconds I am going to exterminate that fly."

He picked up the pistol from the table. "As I told you, gentlemen, I am quite versatile with this weapon. I am a dead shot, in other words. And I am going to demonstrate it to you." He glanced from face to face.

"You will notice that since Mr. Meehan has moved, I have a clear field across the table. I don't believe a little lead in the woodwork will mar the room too much, would you say, Forbes?"

Forbes sat very still. "No, I shouldn't think so, sir."

"Good. Because I am going to snuff out each of the four candles in the center of this table by shooting the wick away. You follow me, gentlemen? Locke? Meehan? Sadler?"

Heads nodded.

"Then perhaps you are already ahead of me. When the last candle is extinguished, we will have darkness, you see. And then I think we'll find our Martian rat. Because, as a matter of fact," Heidel lolled his words, "I have taken the privilege of adding to the wine we have been drinking Dr. Kingly's preserving solution. Non-tasteful, non-harmful.

Except, that is, to one man in this room."

Heidel motioned his gun. "And God rest the bastard's soul, because if you will remember, I have five bullets in the chamber of this pistol. Four for the candles and one for the brain of the sonofabitch whose eyes light up when the last candle goes out."

THERE WAS a steady deadly silence while the flames of the candles licked at the still air.

"I think, however," Heidel said, savoring the moment, "that we should have one final toast before we proceed." He lifted his glass. "May the receiver of the fifth bullet go straight to hell. I phrase that literally, gentlemen," he said, laughing. "Drink up!"

The glasses were drained and placed again on the table.

"Watch carefully," Heidel said and lifted the pistol. He aimed at the first candle. The trigger was taut against his finger, the explosion loud in the room.

"One," said Heidel.

He aimed again. The explosion.

"Two," he said. "Rather good, eh?"

"Oh, yes," Sadler said.

"Quite," said Forbes.

"Again," said Heidel. A third shot echoed.

"Now," he said, pointing the muzzle at the last candle. "I would say this is it, wouldn't you, gentlemen? And as soon as this one goes, I'm afraid one of us is going to find a bullet right between his goddam sparkling eyes. Are you ready?"

He squinted one eye and looked down the sights. He squeezed the trigger, the room echoed and there was blackness. Heidel held his pistol poised over the table.

Silence.

"Well," said Forbes finally. "There you have it. Surprise, what?"

Heidel balanced the pistol, feeling his palm go suddenly moist against the black grip, and he looked around at the five pairs of glowing eyes.

"Bit of a shock, I should imagine," Forbes said. "Discovering all of us, as it were."

Heidel licked his lips. "How? *How* could you do this?"

Forbes remained motionless. "Simple as one, you know. Put men on rockets going back to Earth in place of returning colonists. Study. Observe. Learn. Shift a record here and there. Forge, change pictures, all that sort of thing. Poor contact between here and Earth, you know. Not too difficult."

"I'll get one of you," Heidel said, still balancing his pistol tightly.

"Well, possibly," Forbes said. "But no more than one. You have three guns pointed at you. We can see you perfectly, you know, as though it were broad daylight. One shiver of that pistol, and you're dead."

"Why have you done this?" Heidel said suddenly. "*Why?* Everything that was done was for the Martian. We tried to give you freedom and culture, the benefit of our knowledge...."

"We didn't like your wrestlers," Forbes said.

Heidel's nostrils twitched, and suddenly he swung the pistol. There was a crashing explosion and then silence.

"Good," said Forbes. "I don't think he got the last one fired."

"You're all right then?" asked Meehan, putting his gun on the table.

"Oh, quite! Rather dramatic altogether, eh?"

"Nerve tingling," Locke agreed.

Forbes turned in his chair and called, "Oh, Kessit!"

The butler opened the door to the darkened room, hesitated, and reached for the light switch.

"No, no," Forbes said, smiling. "Never mind that. Come over here, will you please?"

The butler crossed the room slowly.

"It's all right," Forbes said. "The president will notice nothing whatever, Kessit. Would you mind pouring us all another glass of wine? I'm frightfully crazy about that port, eh?"

There was a murmur of agreeing voices. The butler lifted the silver decanter and filled glasses, moving easily and surely in the darkness.

"Cheers," said Forbes.

"Cheers," said the others, over the clink of glasses.

THE END

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