

MAY 1957

# FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

MAY  
35c

## SCIENCE FICTION

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE



KING-SIZE  
PUBLICATION

### SHIELD AGAINST DEATH

A New Suspense Novel  
by J. T. McINTOSH

### PAWNS OF TOMORROW

A Novelet by NELSON BOND

35c

# FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

MAY, 1957  
Vol. 7, No. 5

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**the  
signals  
to  
mars**

*by...M. BOWER*

**Most people suspected he was a spaceman - even though his wife insisted he couldn't be!**

THE SO-CALLED signals are going out to Mars again, and the papers are reviving that story about me. But the simple truth is that I'm no more a Spaceman than you are.

Of course it was all my wife's fault. One day a couple of years ago, I came home, dragging my feet from a long day at the punch machine. I stopped on the front porch to stamp the snow off my shoes, and Shirley came running to the door.

"Don't take your over-shoes off," she ordered. "Old Mr Brown died this morning. I just went in their house to see what I could do, and poor old Mrs. Brown is just freezing to death, because she doesn't understand how to work the furnace. Run round there and help out, huh?" She took my lunch pail off me and shut the door in my face.

Well, a guy has to help out at a time like that. Old Mr. and Mrs. Brown had been good neighbours. So I walked around the corner, knocked at Mrs. Brown's door, and offered my services. The old girl didn't seem to be too cut

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*M. Bower—we've not told what the initial stands for—is a young Canadian writer, a recent recruit to Science Fiction, who has sold to Chatelaine and Saturday Night. Here is the true story, or so she assures us, of those recently reported signals sent to Mars from Ontario, Canada!*

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up about her husband, and she came down the cellar with me to watch me stoke up. She seemed to understand when I showed her how to operate the drafts, and I told her I would look in before I went to work in the morning and put some coal on for her. Then I went home for my supper.

When I got in, there was a big surprise waiting for me. In the twenty minutes it had taken me to help the old lady, Shirley had given the older kids their supper, and the twins were nearly through theirs. For once my wife and I were able to sit down and eat together. Shirley had even grabbed time to put some lipstick on, and it was sure a welcome change to eat a meal in peace and quiet.

I stoked up the furnace for the old lady the next morning, and that night I ran in again. Soon it was the accepted thing that I should go straight to Mrs. Brown's and fix her furnace before going home from work. Her paper was always on the step, and after a while I got in the habit of stoking up the fire, then sitting on an upturned box for about twenty minutes, reading and waiting for the fire to burn up. It got so that the half hour was the most restful part of my day. At home, the TV was always on, and the bigger kids were squawking over the programmes and howling for the

funnies in the papers before I had even glanced at the sporting page. But here in Mrs. Brown's cellar it was quiet and peaceful. I sat and had a quiet smoke, read any part of the paper I wanted, and sometimes, gazing at the flickering coals, I even thought about what I had read.

Shirley seemed to like it, too. It gave her a chance to feed the kids without having to worry about me, too, and then we had our own quiet little interval together. I began to think that fixing the old lady's furnace was the best thing I had ever done.

When summer came and Mrs. Brown let her furnace out, that was O.K. too, for we led a different life in the summer. But when the days started closing in again, and the air got cool, I found myself thinking longingly of the quiet minutes in Brown's cellar, and actually looking forward to the day the furnaces were started.

Well, it came—a day with a nip in the air, that grew colder and colder, and I dropped my lunch-pail home, and went off to Mrs. Brown's feeling like a kid on his way to the barn with an arm load of comic books. I gave my usual rattat on the side door, which was unlocked, as usual, and bounded down the cellar stairs. I turned to the furnace, and stood, as coldly disappointed as a cookie-hungry kid who finds the jar empty.

There, in the middle of the cellar floor, stood an elaborate piece of modern art—a brand new oil burning furnace!

Mrs. Brown had followed me down the cellar, and either my disappointment showed in my face, or she was a very understanding lady, for she lifted her grey-brown head, looked at me with her soft old blue eyes, and said, "I hope you'll still come—I like to know that somebody comes in regularly. Besides, this acts as a sort of humidifier, too, and I need some help in putting water in the thing."

It was a queer contraption, but Mrs. Brown seemed to understand it. All she wanted me to do was fill a couple of pails of water and carry them to the humidifier. She could easily have filled the thing herself with the hose from her washing machine, but I didn't say so, because I still wanted those twenty peaceful minutes. When I got home, I didn't say a word to Shirley about the oil burner. It would be hard to explain why I preferred an old box in Mrs. Brown's dark old cellar to a nice soft easy chair in my own comfortable home. I guess I might have told her about it, only just around that time the three old ladies coming home late from a Bingo game saw the flying saucer.

It was the size of an English car, and it landed on the

roof of Brown's garage, then slowly sank right through the roof into the garage itself.

Well, you know the type of old ladies who go to Bingo games. They didn't go running for a cruiser, or phoning their sons. They went right over and tried the door of the garage. It was locked, so the old girls knocked up Mrs. Brown, got the key, and while Mrs. Brown phoned the police, they opened the garage door. There was nothing there, for Mrs. Brown sold the car when the old man died. But they all agreed that the garage door came open with a queer sucking sound, and the garage floor looked "shimmering". When the old ladies felt it, it was hot.

The police cruiser didn't find a thing, and no one else had seen anything, so after a lot of interviews in the local paper, the whole thing died down. As a matter of fact, the old girls were sort of ashamed of what they had seen, as though it wasn't quite respectable, and quit talking about it themselves. I'd have thought the whole thing was a lot of hooey, anyway, if it hadn't been that one of the old ladies was my mother-in-law.

I know that if she agreed with the other two about what they had seen, they must have seen *something*, for the other two had both won at Bingo and she hadn't, and she would have

been in a mood to contradict Sherlock Holmes.

We talked it over amongst ourselves, and decided that they must have seen a meteor, which looked as if it fell on Brown's garage. The 'Queer look' and the 'warm floor' we ignored, as we did the old ladies' claim that there had been a Spaceman standing up in the Space ship. Even the papers were ashamed to print that bit, except in a light, mocking tone.

For a couple of weeks the papers played around with the story, half sensational, half kidding. And then there was another crisis in the near-east, and they dropped it. That was when there was, suddenly, an odd change in our neighbourhood. In a couple of weeks we had a new post-man, a new bread-man, a new milk-man. Our street was swept every night, our drains were cleared every week, and all the old, defective sidewalks were repaired. Even the bump in the road was fixed, and hydro and telephone wires were repaired. Everything we had been hollering about for years was attended to for us, and even the roof of a decrepit old apartment house was repaired. All this activity invited the inspection of the usual sidewalk superintendants, and all in all our neighbourhood saw many strangers and much traffic during those few weeks.

Then, suddenly, it all end-

ed as quickly as it began. For a day all was peaceful, and then they arrested me.

They took me as I was going into Mrs. Brown's that night, and nobody would tell me the charge. I was bundled into a conservative looking, 1951 model car, with a particularly sweet running engine. Wherever I was taken, it wasn't the old jail or the courthouse. It seemed to be a sort of private office, and when they told me the charge against me, I knew why.

It seems I was sending signals to Mars!

Sure, I laughed and told them to knock it off. But after a couple of hours I discovered it wasn't a gag. Somebody was sending signals to Mars. One of the hush hush stations in the far north had caught on to it. The Planetarium in New York, the observatory at Mt. Palomar, and some other place nobody knows is an observatory, had all caught them. To say nothing of scientists in other countries. There was no doubt about it—they were signals, and they were messages. And they were coming from our neighbourhood. The F.B.I., the R.C.M.P. and Scotland Yard had all proved it, and something I heard made me think that almost every other country in the world had been giving information. This thing, in fact, was bigger than all of us. So big, we were, maybe, at last One World.

They arrested me, because, after a month of intense spying, checking and testing, they found that I was the only suspicious character in the whole district. They'd found out from Shirley, (via the new bread-man) that I disappeared down Brown's cellar to stoke the furnace every night, and they found out, (via the new gas-man) that Mrs. Brown's furnace did not require stoking.

So for hours and hours they asked, in a variety of manners, "What do you do in Brown's cellar?" and for hours and hours they received the answer that they already knew—"I fill two pails of water and read the paper." The new, sure-fire lie detector never quivered.

The papers got hold of it, of course. The first Shirley knew of my whereabouts was when she picked up the paper and read, "Is this man a Spaceman?" The general idea seemed to be, "Yes, he is," even though Shirley cried over and over that I was in bed and asleep when the old ladies saw the Space ship, or whatever it was.

In the end they let me go. Not because they thought me innocent, but because—well—there isn't anything on the law books about charging a man with being from another planet and sending signals back home. By then, the signals had stopped, anyway. They tore Mrs. Brown's cel-

lar and furnace apart, found nothing, and had to put everything back together again. They tore the garage apart, found a strange reaction coming from the floor, but couldn't place it, trace it, or do a thing about it.

Somebody wanted to try me under some ancient, witchcraft laws, but the signals had been over quite awhile then, and the star-gazers and crime-chasers were beginning to feel a little ridiculous. Finally, it seemed that most of them felt, in their own minds, that it had all been some freak of nature, and all they wanted to do was forget the uproar as soon as possible.

I started going back to Mrs. Brown's cellar again. I never said a word to her about what had happened, except just once, that first day. I filled the pails with water for her, and carried them over to the humidifier part of the furnace.

"Quite a little show we had, huh?" I asked, as I lifted the pails for her.

"Yes," she said, looking at me with those faded blue eyes. "Do you know that there was an expert from Russia looking at my furnace when they took it apart? Queer how fear of the unknown can make the greatest enemies unite and work together. Strange if an imagined threat from a distant star should bring peace on this earth!"

That's all she ever said about it, and all I said. Shirley has never tried to stop me from going back to Mrs. Brown's. I guess her minutes of peace mean a lot, too. So that's how things are. Or were, until this middle-east crisis came last week.

The signals are going up again. The papers are going

wild, and the whole thing is starting once more. But I sit in Mrs. Brown's cellar, enjoying my twenty minutes of peace and quiet. Nobody bothers me, and I don't bother anybody. What Mrs. Brown does when she goes inside that furnace is none of my business. And anyway, I'll read about it in the papers.

---

### RESEARCH PROBLEM

I was beginning to wonder if anything had gone wrong.

I was in the right city and in the right year and—or so I'd thought—on the right day. I'd set the controls myself for the specific day and hour in May of 1857 when, according to DeSandras, Napoleon III had been attacked by an assassin while walking here in the garden. It'd suddenly become important to me that I see this man who'd come so close to killing the Emperor. I was doing my thesis on his early years, and on how the Carbonari had tried repeatedly to assassinate him. DeSandras, the only one to mention the attack, had glossed over the man's identity, and I'd been seized by the irrational obsession of the true researcher that I *must* see and perhaps identify him. We were under strict instructions, of course, not to tamper with history in these Timeliner researches. Our job was to observe and to analyze facts brought out by personal observation. And *not* interfere!

It was getting dark, and still no Emperor. It was starting to drizzle, and I caught myself wondering if you could catch a cold in one century—suddenly there were footsteps on the gravelled walk, nearer and nearer, and in front of me stood the familiar little bearded man, glittering eyes suspicious as he stared at my strange clothes and at the minitape at my feet. "Aha! What is this? A spy?", he growled, and rushed forward. They'd all been right—he'd had courage.

I could feel him tug at my coat—and then, in the same moment, there was the familiar blackness—the blazing light—and then the blackness again—and then the worried voice of Davis, the lab assistant. He was wondering how I felt. Then I realized he'd stopped, eyes wide with interest. "What's this? What did you do with your coat button?"