

**THE SECOND**  
**MACK REYNOLDS**  
**MEGAPACK**



**21**

**More Classic Tales**  
**of Science Fiction!**

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## A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

Welcome to *The Second Mack Reynolds Megapack*, continuing our Mack Reynolds reprint program. When Wildside Press purchased Mack Reynolds' literary estate from his son, Emil, in 2013, we were far more familiar with his novels than his short stories. That's undoubtedly because many of those short stories have been undeservedly locked away in dusty old magazines for generations. In fact, as far as we can tell, only one collection of Mack's shorter works was published in his lifetime—*The Best of Mack Reynolds*, in 1976 (Pocket Books). [And decidedly *not* to be confused with another, *unauthorized* collection of random public domain short stories published under the same title many years later and which we are trying to get renamed to avoid confusion among readers.)

Anyway, the Pocket Books edition was the source for most of this volume. I have kept Mack's original introductions, too, which I think add a lot to the stories. I removed several fantasy stories as well as stories which appeared in our first *Mack Reynolds Megapack* to avoid duplication and to focus this volume more on science fiction. (Don't worry, those fantasy stories will appear in other Megapacks. Wildside Press wastes no stories!)

And if after reading the first two *Mack Reynolds Megapacks* and want still more after reading *The Mack Reynolds Megapack* and *The Second Mack Reynolds Megapack*, I refer you to the latest issue of my fanzine, *Adventure Tales* #7, which is a Special Mack Reynolds issue and contains 6 more stories plus 2 essays by Mack (plus work by a lot of other great pulp writers). It should be in the same ebook store where you purchased this volume.

Enjoy!

—John Betancourt

Publisher, Wildside Press LLC  
www.wildsidepress.com

### **ABOUT THE MEGAPACKS**

Over the last few years, our “Megapack” series of ebook anthologies has grown to be among our most popular endeavors. (Maybe it helps that we sometimes offer them as premiums to our mailing list!) One question we keep getting asked is, “Who’s the editor?”

The Megapacks (except where specifically credited) are a group effort. Everyone at Wildside works on them. This includes John Bencourt (me), Carla Coupe, Steve Coupe, Bonner Menking, Colin Azariah-Kribbs, A.E. Warren, and many of Wildside’s authors... who often suggest stories to include (and not just their own!)

### **A NOTE FOR KINDLE READERS**

The Kindle versions of our Megapacks employ active tables of contents for easy navigation...please look for one before writing reviews on Amazon that complain about the lack! (They are sometimes at the ends of ebooks, depending on your reader.)

### **RECOMMEND A FAVORITE STORY?**

Do you know a great classic science fiction story, or have a favorite author whom you believe is perfect for the Megapack series? We’d love your suggestions! You can post them on our message board at <http://movies.ning.com/forum> (there is an area for Wildside Press comments).

Note: we only consider stories that have already been professionally published. This is not a market for new works.

### **TYPOS**

Unfortunately, as hard as we try, a few typos do slip through. We update our ebooks periodically, so make sure you have the current version (or download a fresh copy if it’s been sitting in your ebook reader for months.) It may have already been updated.

If you spot a new typo, please let us know. We'll fix it for everyone. You can email the publisher at [wildsidepress@yahoo.com](mailto:wildsidepress@yahoo.com) or use the message boards above.

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*\* Not available in the United States*

*\*\* Not available in the European Union*

*\*\*\*Out of print.*

## OTHER COLLECTIONS YOU MAY ENJOY

*The Great Book of Wonder, by Lord Dunsany* (it should have been called “The Lord Dunsany Megapack”)

*The Wildside Book of Fantasy*

*The Wildside Book of Science Fiction*

*Yondering: The First Borgo Press Book of Science Fiction Stories To the Stars—And Beyond! The Second Borgo Press Book of Science Fiction Stories*

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*X is for Xmas: Christmas Mysteries*

# COME IN, SPACEPORT

## AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

This is a type of story undreamed of a quarter of a century ago. It's a juvenile and written on order for a child's textbook, *GO: Reading in the Content Areas*, edited by Harold L. Herber of Syracuse University. Heavens to Betsy, who would have thought that science fiction would one day be turning up in children's textbooks? When I was a lad, we fans used to have to hide our magazines from our parents.

—Mack Reynolds

\* \* \* \*

Bruce Camaroon was on duty as repeat man for the monitoring computers when the first call came through. There was precious little to do. He just had to be there, in case something did come up. This job was going to go down the drain one of these days; the computers didn't really need him. He could have handled the duties, home in bed. All he'd have to do was have an alarm, so they could rouse him up, if anything developed.

Radio technician Dick MaGruder was sitting across the desk from him, chewing the rag, and Jill Farnsworth, the secretary, who was just about as useful as Bruce was, was on the other side of the control room, using her voco-typer. She was probably doing personal letters.

One of the computers had evidently picked up something out of the way. His screen clicked.

A rather high-pitched voice said: "Emergency, emergency. Please come in. This is Jimmy... uh, James Barry. In Lifeboat 2, of Space-ship *Promised Land*. There are two of us. My sister and me. She's

hurt. We're all that's left. They... they're all dead. Our parents... and everybody. Jane's burnt bad. Please have an ambulance at the spaceport. Please put me in contact with a doctor, right away. I have to ask him what to do."

Bruce Camaroon's eyes were bugging. "The *Promised Land*! It blew! There were no survivors!"

MaGruder snarled, "Shut up, listen!"

The voice went on. "I smeared all the ointments in the medicine chest on her and bandaged her all up. My father is... my father was, a doctor. I also stuck one, uh, Syrette of, I think, a sedative into her. It said on the tube, Pseudo-Morphine. I don't know if I should give her any more or not. She's asleep. She's not very big. Ten years old. I don't know if she should have been given a full Syrette or not. Or maybe she even needs another one. She's burnt pretty bad, all over, almost."

He took a deep, tear-choked breath, and went on. "Anyway, I'm following the space lifeboat instruction book as good as I can. I think I'm doing all right. I think we're heading for the Northern Hemisphere. The book says there are four spaceports there. So I'm calling New Denver Spaceport. Calling New Denver Spaceport, for landing instructions. Please come in, New Denver Spaceport. Uh, over and out."

"Holy smokes," Bruce yelled. "Jill! Get one of the pilots. I think Bill is on standby."

Jill was ahead of him. "He's on his way already," she snapped. Into her auto-secretary she was saying, "Locate Mr. Zimmerman, locate Mr. Barkley, locate Mr. Rykov. Instruct them to check in with control tower immediately."

Bruce said to Dick MaGruder, who lunged into the seat before the set on the space pick-up, "Try to get video on this and more amplification. He sounds pretty far out."

"Right."

Bruce went back to his own screen and said, "New Denver Spaceport, calling James Barry, Lifeboat 2, of *Promised Land*. Come in, Barry."

“Emergency, emergency. Space Lifeboat 2 of *Promised Land*, calling New Denver Spaceport. Require landing instructions. Require landing instructions.”

Bill Wellingham came bursting into the office. He slid into the pilot’s seat and took over.

“Okay. This is New Denver. We’re getting you fairly clear. Now listen. Right on your left is a small switch painted green and labeled Control Release. Pull it down. We’ll lock in on you.”

Dick MaGruder said, “Here’s your video, Bruce. Kind of faint.”

“Holy smokes,” Bruce Camaroon protested. The face and upper torso that had faded in was that of a thirteen or fourteen year old.

The youngster was saying, a bit desperately, “Calling New Denver Spaceport for landing instructions. Emergency. Emergency.”

Bill Wellingham said urgently, “Receiving you loud and clear, son.”

Jill said, “Tell him a doctor is on the way to give him instructions about his sister.”

Bill said, “A doctor is on the way to give you medical advice. Now listen, boy. Just to your left on that bank of buttons and dials and everything is a green switch. Right under it is a little sign saying Control Release. Now just push it down.”

The boy was peering into the screen before which he sat, listening anxiously. Finally, he shook his head and picked up a booklet from what must have been the radio table before him. He thumbed through it, licking what must have been dry lips.

He looked into the screen again and said, “Emergency. Emergency. Calling Dundee Spaceport. Calling Dundee Spaceport. Jimmy Barry, Lifeboat 2 of Spaceship *Promised Land*, calling for emergency landing instructions. Ten-year-old girl aboard, needing... must have... immediate medical attention. Calling Dundee Spaceport.”

The occupants of the control room at Spaceport New Denver slumped back into their chairs, aghast.

Jill said “What... what’s happened?”

Nobody answered her.

They could hear the Scottish spaceport answering. “Calling Jimmy Barry. Calling Jimmy Barry. We are receiving you clearly, Jimmy Barry. You are all right. You’ll be fine, lad. Now, here is what you must do, you know. Turn to your left. There on the bulkhead is a green lever. It is labeled Control Release. Simply press it down and we’ll take over, laddy. Don’t worry. Everything is all right.”

The thin voice came through again. “Calling Dundee Spaceport. Space Lifeboat 2, *Promised Land*. Please come in. I need landing instructions.”

Dick MaGruder said flatly, “He isn’t receiving.”

The boy peered anxiously into the screen. MaGruder had been able to get better amplification by now. The youngster’s face was quite clear.

After a time he took up his pamphlet again and thumbed through it. He muttered, quite audibly, “Maybe at this time of the day they’re on the far side of the planet. Maybe they can’t hear me.”

Bruce groaned. “We can hear you, kid. We can hear you.”

The boy looked up and said, obviously very carefully, and as clear as he could make his voice, “Calling Kiev Spaceport. Calling Kiev Spaceport. I do not speak Russian. Lifeboat 2, Spaceship *Promised Land*. Emergency. Emergency. Please send me landing instructions. Uh, over and out.”

The voice that responded was obviously foreign to the boy’s native language, heavy with accent. But it said, “Kiev Spaceport. We read you, we read you, young James Barry. You are coming in clearly. We can bring you down. The Soviet Complex has been most distressed by the terrible loss of the *Promised Land* and its refugees. We sorrow with you for the destruction of your parents and your comrades. However, now there is work at hand. What you must do is turn to your left. There on the board of control of your space lifeboat is a switch. It is green in color. You must drop it. Then we will be in control. Then we will bring you down. We have heard your other messages to America and to Great Britain. We will have an ambulance for your sad little sister. All will be well. Drop the switch.”

“Calling Kiev Spaceport. Calling Kiev Spaceport.”

Jill rolled her eyes upward in agony.

After a time. “Calling Peking Spaceport. Calling Peking Spaceport. Emergency. Calling Peking Spaceport.”

The voice that answered was in perfect English, and it answered immediately.

“Peking Spaceport calling Space Lifeboat 2, of the *Promised Land*. We are familiar with your problem, young Mr. Barry. We are afraid there is something wrong with your receiver. If you can receive us, immediately deflect the small green lever to your left which is labeled Control Release. You are in an American K-13 space lifecraft. We have the specifications, as do all nations which participate in space. We can bring you down quite safely. A China People’s Republic ambulance is awaiting with our most competent doctors specializing in burns for your so sorry little sister.”

There were perhaps fifteen minutes of silence, during which the boy was peering into the screen. Then he said, and there was a weary note in his voice:

“Mayday, Mayday. I think that’s what it’s called. Calling any Earth spaceport. Emergency, emergency. Space Lifeboat 2. Spaceship *Promised Land*. I have to have instructions for landing. I don’t know anything about this. There is nothing that makes any sense to me in the direction books. I have to have...I have to be told about coming down to land. I don’t know how to do it. My sister... I’m afraid my sister is dying. I have to have some doctor tell me what to do...I have to be told what to do...”

Jill said, sickly, “What’s involved? If he’s as old as he looks, he should be able to read the pamphlets.”

Bill Wellingham looked at her emptily. “You’ve been working here this long and you don’t know the answer to that? Spacecraft are landed from the ground up, not from space down. Sure, a pilot who has studied five years or so can land a specially designed spacecraft on some obscure satellite or something. But the average spacecraft, the liners, the cargo carriers, the lifecraft and all the rest are landed from the spaceports by competent pilots who know how to do it. It isn’t just that that kid up there is in his early teens. Even if he

was a gung-ho scientist with a background in space navigation, he couldn't land a lifeboat. I'd have my work cut out doing it, and I'm a pro."

The boy's voice was saying urgently, "Emergency, emergency. Calling any Earth Spaceport."

Bruce Camaroon wearily flicked on his screen and said, "New Denver Spaceport calling Jimmy Barry, Space Lifeboat 2. Come in, Jimmy Barry."

On the office space communications screen, which Dick had thrown on, they could hear the others.

"Dundee Spaceport calling Jimmy Barry..."

"Kiev Spaceport calling Space Lifeboat 2..."

"Peking Spaceport responding to James Barry. Come in, James Barry..."

There was despair on the boy's face. "Maybe I'm too far out," he muttered. "Nobody seems to hear me."

\* \* \* \*

Later, when the new shift took over, Bruce Camaroon, Dick MaGruder, Bill Wellingham and Jill Farnsworth sat at the administration building's canteen over coffee. Their expressions were all wan.

There was a group of fifteen or twenty at the far end of the room gathered about the commercial TV screen. The news commentator was replaying all that had thus far developed, with comments from space pilots, space authorities, and anyone else he could think of to call upon for opinions, including representatives of the foreign spaceports. Bruce Camaroon suspected that every other news commentator on the air, anywhere on Earth, was doing the same. Two women from landing control, watching the broadcast, were openly crying.

Will Breck came by briskly. He said over his shoulder to Bill, "We've got a fix on him. He's about two days out and coming in at maximum." He hurried on.

Bruce said to Bill Wellingham, “What’s maximum for a K-13 lifecraft?”

“About twenty thousand space knots.”

Jill bit her underlip. She said, “What will happen if he doesn’t throw that switch? Will he crash?”

Bill shook his head, bitterly. “If he hits the world, which is unlikely without us to bring him in, he’ll burn up in the atmosphere. At least that would be quick, probably less than a minute. If he misses the world, he’ll go on past and eventually be swallowed up in the sun. But their food and oxygen probably wouldn’t last that long.”

Mark Ellington went by. He called to them, “The Russian Orbiting Space Platform is trying to raise him. If they can, they could relay landing instructions.”

“Any luck?” Bruce said.

“Not so far.”

Dick MaGruder said wearily, “If they could raise him, so could we. Something’s wrong with his set.”

Jill said, “Perhaps he misread the directions. Maybe he’ll reread them and get it to work correctly.”

Dick shook his head. “They couldn’t be simpler. That set was designed with hysterical, injured, half-crazed victims of a space disaster in mind. The kid might be afraid—I assume he is—but he’s not hysterical and he’s obviously smart enough to have gotten this far. No, he’s read the directions all right. The set’s broken. Probably happened when the *Promised Land* blew.”

Bruce said to Bill, “No possible manner of getting a rescue craft up to him before he enters the atmosphere? Willy said he was still two days out.”

The space pilot was negative. “No. I’ve already thought of that. So probably has everybody else. But there’s no way of getting into that lifeboat in space. They’d have to decompress it and there’s no spacesuits in it. It would kill the kids. Besides, I doubt if we could get something up on such short notice.”

Dick MaGruder said sourly, “Maybe it’s best for the two of them anyway.”

They all stared at him.

“What do you mean?” Jill demanded indignantly.

Dick shrugged, his face still sour. “Look at the position they’re in. No parents. No resources. No country, even.”

“Why, why their parents must have been Americans.” Bruce knew what Dick was getting at. He said, “No. When the Mars Colony was formed about twenty years ago, there was a lot of bitterness. The colonists, to get publicity so they could raise funds, made a lot of dramatic statements about how they were fleeing Earth because of how badly it was being run by the various governments, because of how it had been polluted and its resources stripped by greedy men, because of hot wars, cold wars, bush wars, arms races and all the rest. They heaped scorn all over the place and then, finally, dramatically, they all renounced their citizenships in the countries to which they belonged. Jimmy and Jane Barry have no country. Dick’s right. They have no people, no resources, and no country. If they ever get down, maybe somebody, somewhere, will be kind enough to put them in some sort of charitable institution for orphans. I don’t know. There’s a lot of prejudice in the world against the Martian colonists. After spending all that money they collected, they finally had to give up and start back, their tails between their legs. A lot of people had invested with them, thinking that one day Martian mineral resources and so forth could be exploited. Well, it was all money down the drain. And, as it worked out, they didn’t even get back.”

Jill said, “I couldn’t possibly go to bed, or even eat. Let’s go back to the control room and see what’s going on.”

Bruce’s shift was back on duty by the time young Jimmy Barry came onto the radio waves again.

His face was drawn and it was obvious that he had given up most of his hope. He carefully called each spaceport in turn, using practically identical messages as before, and as before he drew a complete blank. For a time he fiddled with the set’s controls, sometimes fading himself out completely and then fading back in again. But nothing worked.

“I’ll wait a little while and then try again,” he muttered.

Leaving the set on, he came to his feet and they could see him retreat into the background. They were receiving him very clearly now and part of the interior of the space lifeboat as well. He approached a clumsily swathed little figure, stretched out on a bunk set into the bulkhead.

“Jane,” Jill Farnsworth said emptily.

The boy stared down at his sister and shook his head as though in despair. There was some kind of a kit sitting on a table next to the bunk. He reached into it and came up with some object they couldn’t make out.

“Probably another Syrette of Pseudo-Morphine,” Dick MaGruder said tightly. “What did the docs say?”

Bruce said, “It’s all right. The kind they put in the medical kits in those lifeboats are only one quarter grain. But, of course, Jimmy doesn’t know that. He’s afraid an overdose will kill her. He undoubtedly figures that with a body that small she can only take possibly half as much as a full-grown adult.”

The boy evidently came to a decision. The little figure beneath him had been twisting and turning on the bunk. He pressed home the needle of the Syrette and squeezed the narcotic into her.

He turned and went back to the radio table and stared at the screen gloomily.

Finally, he tried again. “Calling New Denver Spaceport. Calling New Denver Spaceport.”

“Oh, Lord,” Bill Wellingham blurted. “Just a little flick of that switch, Jimmy, son. Just a little flick.”

Bruce said into his screen, hopelessly, “Calling Jimmy Barry. New Denver Spaceport calling Jimmy Barry. Come in, Jimmy. Come in.”

The boy’s face fell and he shook his head. “Something’s wrong,” he said aloud. “Something with my set. Maybe I’m not even sending anything. But even if I am, I’m not receiving. All I can get on the screen is some silly TV comedy show.”

Bruce Camaroon lurched to his feet and all but glared at Dick MaGruder on space pick-up.

“What... did... he... say?”

They were all bug-eyeing the screen.

“WHAT... DID... HE... SAY?”

Dick MaGruder said, so softly as hardly to be heard, “He’s receiving some commercial program.”

Bruce spun on Jill Farnsworth. “What, comedy show is on TV at this hour?”

“I... I don’t know...”

“Find out!”

\* \* \* \*

The face of the comedian was very serious as he looked into the cameras.

“Folks out there, you’ve all been keeping track of the tragedy that has developed in space. After the complete destruction of the *Promised Land*, on its way back with its passenger list of refugees from the abandoned Mars Colony, only two children survived, badly injured Jane Barry and brave little Jimmy who managed to navigate his space lifeboat back to within what is now less than a day’s distance away. But then disaster struck again. Jimmy Barry’s radio is on the blink. He hasn’t been able to raise a spaceport on the regular space channels, so that a pilot could bring him in.

“But now, folks, for what we hope will be the good news. This show is going off the air and we are turning our facilities over to the New Denver Spaceport.

“Folks, little Jimmy Barry is picking up this program! Instructions for his landing will be relayed through us. I now solemnly request that all of you who are listening hold a moment of silence for Jimmy and Jane Barry up there alone in deep space. Goodbye all. If you can hear me, Jimmy, good luck!”

His face faded.

Space Pilot Bill Wellingham faded in, his expression urgent.

“Jimmy! Jimmy, can you hear me?”

On the screen in the control room of the spaceport, Jimmy Barry’s youthful face registered shock.

“Uh... uh, yes. Yes sir, I can hear you.”

“All right, Jimmy. Now listen, the first thing you do is reach over to your left. Do you see a little green switch there?”

“The one that says Control Release?”

“That’s right. Good boy. Push it down.”

“Yes, sir.” Then, “I did it.”

“All right. Now that’s all you have to do for a while. I’m switching you over to the Mayo Clinic. Some doctors there are going to send you instructions about your sister. They’ll want to know such things as just what your medical kit contains and so forth.”

“Yes, sir. I’ll go get it.”

Bill Wellington turned back to Bruce Camaroon. “That’s it. We’re locked in on Space Lifeboat 2. Activate the computers. I won’t have to brake for another couple of hours.” There was a sheen of sweat on his face. “A couple of hours more and they would have begun to enter the atmosphere. Curtains.”

\* \* \* \*

Later, after the clanging ambulance had left with the Barry children, after the crowds of thousands who had swarmed out to the spaceport to see the landing of the space lifeboat had dispersed, Bruce Camaroon and Dick MaGruder stood there alongside the vessel.

“Sharp little kid,” Bruce said.

“Yeah,” Dick said. “I suspect he’ll get by.”

“Suspect? That boy’s the biggest thing since Lindbergh. I doubt if there’s a person in the world, who has a TV or radio set, that doesn’t know who Jimmy and Jane Barry are. Before tomorrow is out, can you visualize the donations, the scholarships, the offers that will pour in on those two?”

“Yeah,” Dick said sourly. “No parents, no resources, no country, eh? They won’t need a country. The world is their country. Come on into this spacecraft. I can’t figure out what could have happened to that radio.”

They entered the small vessel and looked around.

“I’m glad I didn’t have to come almost a quarter of the way from Mars in this,” Bruce grunted. “Sure is confined.”

Dick sat down before the radio and fiddled with it. He looked up, after a time, his face strange.

“What’s the matter?” Bruce said.

Dick MaGruder was on the wide-eyed side. He said, “There’s nothing wrong with this set.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s working perfectly.”

Bruce Camaroon’s face went blank.

Dick said slowly, “He was receiving us all the time. Us and the spaceports at Dundee, Kiev and Peking as well.”

“But...but...”

“Don’t you see?” Dick said in disgust. “We’re the victims of the biggest publicity hoax the world has ever seen. When the Spaceship *Promised Land* blew, those two kids had no people, no resources, not even a country, as we both pointed out. Now they’re the darlings of all Earth. You know, I’ll bet that girl isn’t even badly burned. He didn’t really need a doctor’s advice. It was all a put-on. If he had really needed a doctor, for his sister’s care, he wouldn’t have pulled the trick.”

“But suppose we reveal that it was a hoax, that the radio was okay all the time?”

Dick looked at him and grunted sour amusement. “Who’d believe you? People love heroes and now they’ve got one. They’d think we repaired the set and were trying to give the kid a hard time. You might wind up getting yourself lynched.”

Bruce said, a certain element of respect in his voice, “Why, that little brat!”

# COMPOUNDED INTEREST

## AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

This is one of my favorite stories. In the science-fiction field we have various themes that are a challenge. One of them is the “time travel” yarn. It’s something like the “murder taking place in a sealed room” theme in the detective-story genre. This has been done by just about every longtime detective-story writer since Edgar Allan Poe wrote *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. It would seem practically impossible to get a new departure. So, challenged, they try to come up with a new device. Thus it is with time travel for a science-fiction writer. You simply *have* to dream up some never-before-used plot on time travel. Obviously, it’s a corker. “If time travel was possible, suppose you went back and killed your own grandfather. Then you would never have been born! So you couldn’t go back and kill your grandfather!”

And so it goes. This story was first bought by Tony Boucher, possibly the best-loved science-fiction editor ever, for the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. It was picked up by Judith Merrill for her second issue of *The Year’s Best SF*. Then, a decade later, she put it in her *Best of the Best*, in which she included what she thought were the ranking stories of her ten years of anthologies. It has been reprinted and translated many times.

—Mack Reynolds

\* \* \* \*

The stranger said in miserable Italian, “I wish to see Sior Marin Goldini on business.”

The concierge's manner was suspicious. Through the wicket he ran his eyes over the newcomer's clothing. "On business, Sior?" He hesitated. "Possibly, Sior, you could inform me as to the nature of your business, so that I might inform his *Zelenza's* secretary, Vico Letta..." He let his sentence dribble away.

The stranger thought about that. "It pertains," he said finally, "to gold." He brought a hand from his pocket and opened it to disclose a half dozen yellow coins.

"A moment, *Lustrissimo*," the servant blurted quickly. "Forgive me. Your costume, *Lustrissimo*..." He let his sentence dribble away again and was gone.

A few moments later he returned to swing the door open wide. "If you please, *Lustrissimo*, his *Zelenza* awaits you."

He led the way down a vaulted hall to the central court, to the left past a fountain well to a heavy outer staircase supported by Gothic arches and sided by a carved parapet. They mounted, turned through a dark doorway and into a poorly lit corridor. The servant stopped and drummed carefully on a thick wooden door. A voice murmured from within and the servant held the door open and then retreated.

Two men were at a rough-hewn oak table. The older was heavy-set, tight of face and cold, and the other tall and thin and ever at ease. The latter bowed gently. He gestured and said, "His *Zelenza*, the Sior Marin Goldini."

The stranger attempted a clumsy bow in return, said awkwardly, "My name is... Mister Smith."

There was a moment of silence which Goldini broke finally by saying, "And this is my secretary, Vico Letta. The servant mentioned gold, Sior, and business."

The stranger dug into a pocket, came forth with ten coins which he placed on the table before him. Vico Letta picked one up in mild interest and examined it. "I am not familiar with the coinage," he said.

His master twisted his cold face without humor. "Which amazes me, my good Vico." He turned to the newcomer. "And what is your

wish with these coins, Sior Mister Smith? I confess, this is confusing.”

“I want,” Mister Smith said, “to have you invest the sum for me.”

Vico Letta had idly weighed one of the coins in question on a small scale. He cast his eyes up briefly as he estimated. “The ten would come to approximately forty-nine zecchini, *Zelenza*,” he murmured.

Marin Goldini said impatiently, “Sior, the amount is hardly sufficient for my house to bother with. The bookkeeping alone—”

The stranger broke in. “Don’t misunderstand. I realize the sum is small. However, I would ask but ten per cent, and would not call for an accounting for... for one hundred years.”

The two Venetians raised puzzled eyebrows. “A hundred years, Sior? Perhaps your command of our language...” Goldini said politely.

“One hundred years,” the stranger said.

“But surely,” the head of the house of Goldini protested, “it is unlikely that any of us three will be alive. If God wants, possibly even the house of Goldini will be a memory only.”

Vico Letta, intrigued, had been calculating rapidly. Now he said, “In one hundred years, at ten per cent compounded annually, your gold would be worth better than 700,000 zecchini.”

“Quite a bit more,” the stranger said firmly.

“A comfortable sum,” Goldini nodded, beginning to feel some of the interest of his secretary. “And during this period, all decisions pertaining to the investment of the amount would be in the hands of my house?”

“Exactly.” The stranger took a sheet of paper from his pocket, tore it in two, and handed one half to the Venetians. “When my half of this is presented to your descendants, one hundred years from today, the bearer will be due the full amount.”

“Done, Sior Mister Smith!” Goldini said. “An amazing transaction, but done. Ten percent in this day is small indeed to ask.”

“It is enough. And now may I make some suggestions? You are perhaps familiar with the Polo family?”