

Marlowe Stephen

World Beyond Pluto



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Johnny Mayhem, one of the most popular series characters ever to appear in Amazing, has been absent too long. So here's good news for Mayhem fans; another great adventure of the Man of Many Bodies

They loaded the over-age spaceship at night because Triton's one spaceport was too busy with the oreships from Neptune during the day to handle it.

"Symphonies!" Pitchblend Hardesty groaned. Pitchblend Hardesty was the stevedore foreman and he had supervised upwards of a thousand loadings on Triton's crowded blastways, everything from the standard mining equipment to the innards of a new tavern for Triton City's so-called Street of Sin to special anti-riot weapons for the Interstellar Penitentiary not 54 miles from Triton City, but never a symphony orchestra. And most assuredly never, never an all-girl symphony orchestra.

"Symphonies!" Pitchblend Hardesty groaned again as several stevedores came out on the blastway lugging a harp, a base fiddle and a kettle drum.

"Come off it, Pitchblend," one of the stevedores said with a grin. "I didn't see you staying away from the music hall."

That was true enough, Pitchblend Hardesty had to admit. He was a small, wiry man with amazing strength in his slim body and the lore of a solar system which had been bypassed by thirtieth century civilization for the lures of interstellar exploration in his brain. While the symphony – the all-girl symphony – had been playing its engagement at Triton's make-shift music hall, Hardesty had visited the place three times.

"Well, it wasn't the music, sure as heck," he told his critic now. "Who ever saw a hundred girls in one place at one time on Triton?"

The stevedore rolled his eyes and offered Pitchblend a suggestive whistle. Hardesty booted him in the rump, and the stevedore had all he could do to stop from falling into the kettle drum.

Just then a loud bell set up a lonely tolling and Pitchblend Hardesty exclaimed: "Prison break!"

The bell could be heard all over the two-hundred square miles of inhabitable Triton, under the glassite dome which enclosed the small city, the spaceport, the immigration station for nearby Neptune and the Interstellar Penitentiary. The bell hadn't tolled for ten years; the last time it had tolled, Pitchblend Hardesty had been a newcomer on Neptune's big moon. That wasn't surprising, for Interstellar Penitentiary was as close to escape-proof as a prison could be.

"All right, all right," Pitchblend snapped. "Hurry up and get her loaded."

"What's the rush?" one of the stevedores asked. "The gals ain't even arrived from the hotel yet."

"I'll tell you what the rush is," Pitchblend declared as the bell tolled again. "If you were an escaped prisoner on Triton, just where would you head?"

"Why, I don't know for sure, Pitchblend."

"Then I'll tell you where. You'd head for the spaceport, fast as your legs could carry you. You'd head for an out-going spaceship, because it would be your only hope. And how many out-going spaceships are there tonight?"

"Why, just two or three."

"Because all our business is in the daytime. So if the convict was smart enough to get out, he'll be smart enough to come here."

"We got no weapons," the stevedore said. "We ain't even got a pea-shooter."

"Weapons on Triton? You kidding? A frontier moon like this, the place would be blasted apart every night. Interstelpen couldn't hold all the disturbers of the peace if we had us some guns."

"But the convict – "

"Yeah," Pitchblend said grimly. "He'll be armed, all right."

Pitchblend rushed back to the manifest shed as the bell tolled a third time. He got on the phone and called the desk of the Hotel Triton.

"Hardesty over at the spaceport," he said. "Loading foreman."

"Loading foreman?" The mild, antiseptic voice at the other end of the connection said it as you would say talking dinosaur.

"Yeah, loading foreman. At night I'm in charge here. Listen, you the manager?"

"The manager – " haughtily – "is asleep. I am the night clerk."

"O.K., then. You tell those hundred girls of yours to hurry. Don't scare them, but have you heard about the prison break?"

"Heard about it? It's all I've been hearing. They – they want to stay and see what happens."

"Don't let 'em!" roared Pitchblend. "Use any excuse you have to. Tell 'em we got centrifugal-
upigal and perihelion-peritonitus over here at the spaceport, or any darn thing. Tell 'em if they want to blast off tonight, they'll have to get down here quick. You got it?"

"Yes, but – "

"Then do it." Pitchblend hung up.

The escape bell tolled a fourth time.

His name was House Bartock, he had killed two guards in his escape, and he was as desperate as a man could be. He had been sentenced to Interstelpen for killing a man on Mars in this enlightened age when capital punishment had been abolished. Recapture thus wouldn't mean death, but the prison authorities at Interstelpen could make their own interpretations of what life-in-prison meant. If House Bartock allowed himself to be retaken, he would probably spend the remaining years of his life in solitary confinement.

He walked quickly now, but he did not run. He had had an impulse to run when the first escape bell had tolled, but that would have been foolish. Already he was on the outskirts of Triton City because they had not discovered his escape for two precious hours. He could hole up in the city, lose himself somewhere. But that would only be temporary.

They would find him eventually.

Or, he could make his way to the spaceport. He had money in his pocket – the dead guard's. He had a guardsman's uniform on, but stripped of its insignia it looked like the jumper and top-boots of any spaceman. He had false identification papers, if needed, which he had worked on for two years in the prison printshop where the prison newspaper was published. He had...

Suddenly he flattened himself on the ground to one side of the road, hugging the gravel and hardly daring to breathe. He'd heard a vehicle coming from the direction of Interstelpen. It roared up, making the ground vibrate; its lights flashed; it streaked by trailing a jet of fire.

House Bartock didn't move until the afterglow had faded. Then he got up and walked steadily along the road which led from Interstelpen to Triton City.

"Girls! Hurry with your packing! Girls!"

Sighing, Matilda Moriarity subsided. The girls, obviously, were in no hurry. That would have been out of character.

Matilda Moriarity sighed again. She was short, stocky, fifty-two years old and the widow of a fabulously wealthy interstellar investment broker. She had a passion for classical music and, now that her husband had been dead three years, she had decided to exercise that passion. But for Matilda Moriarity, a very out-going fifty-two, exercising it had meant passing it on. The outworlds, Matilda had told her friends, lacked culture. The highest form of culture, for Matilda, was classical music. Very well. She would bring culture to the outworlds.

Triton was her first try and even now sometimes she had to pinch herself so she'd know the initial attempt had been a smashing success. She didn't delude herself completely. It had been a

brainstorm selecting only girls – and pretty young things, at that – for the Interstellar Symphony. On a world like Triton, a world which played host to very few women and then usually to the hard types who turned up on any frontier in any century, a symphony of a hundred pretty girls was bound to be a success.

But the music, Matilda Moriarity told herself. They had listened to the music. If they wanted to see the girls in their latest Earth-style evening gowns, they had to listen to the music. And they had listened quietly, earnestly, apparently enjoying it. The symphony had remained on Triton longer than planned, playing every night to a full house. Matilda had had the devil's own time chaperoning her girls, but that was to be expected. It was their first taste of the outworlds; it was the outworlds' first taste of them. The widow Moriarity had had her hands full, all right. But secretly, she had enjoyed every minute of it.

"They say the bell means a prison break!" First Violin squealed excitedly. First Violin was twenty-two, an Earth girl named Jane Cummings and a student at the conservatory on Sirtus Major on Mars, but to the widow Moriarity she was, and would remain, First Violin. That way, calling the girls after their instruments, the widow Moriarity could convince herself that her symphonic music had been of prime importance on Triton, and her lovely young charges of secondary importance.

"How many times do I have to tell you to hurry?"

"But these gowns – "

"Will need a pressing when you return to Mars anyway."

"And a prison break. I never saw a prison break before. It's so exciting."

"You're not going to see it. You're just going to hear about it. Come on, come on, all of you."

At that moment the room phone rang.

"Hello?" the widow Moriarity said.

"This is Jenkins, ma'am, desk. The spaceport called a few minutes ago. I'm not supposed to frighten you, but, well, they're rather worried about the prison break. The escaped convict, they figure, will head for the spaceport. Disguised, he could – "

"Let him try masquerading as a member of *my* group!" the widow Moriarity said with a smile.

"All the same, if you could hurry – "

"We are hurrying, young man."

"Yes, ma'am."

The widow Moriarity hung up. "Gi-irls!"

The girls squealed and laughed and dawdled.

House Bartock felt like laughing.

He'd just had his first big break, and it might turn out to be the only one he needed. On an impulse, he had decided to strike out directly for the spaceport. He had done so, and now stood on the dark tarmac between the manifest shed and the pilot-barracks. And, not ten minutes after he had reached the spacefield a cordon of guards rushed there from Interstelpen had been stationed around the field. Had Bartock arrived just a few minutes later, he would have been too late, his capture only a matter of time. As it was now, though, he had a very good chance of getting away. Circumstances were in his favor.

He could get so far away that they would never find him.

It was simple. Get off Triton on a spaceship. Go anyplace that had a big spaceport, and manage to tranship out in secret. Then all the police would have to search would be a few quadrillion square miles of space!

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