

# fantastic

## ADVENTURES

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

VOL. 3  
NO. 6

# Contents for August, 1941

## STORIES

- THE RETURN OF CIRCE (Novel) . . . . . by Nat Schachner . . . . . 8  
One by one Miss Kirke's admirers disappeared; and day by day her magnificent dog pack grew larger.
- PROBLEM ON MARS (Contest Short) . . . . . by Duncan H. Farnsworth . . . . . 64  
A plague would overwhelm Earth and the last Martian would die—unless a simple question was answered.
- MR. MURCHISON'S GHOST (Short) . . . . . by Robert Moore Williams . . . . . 74  
Mrs. Murchison was flying in the face of more than her husband's wrath when she bought this antique!
- SECRET LEAGUE OF SIX (Short) . . . . . by Don Wilcox . . . . . 86  
Why was Frank Hammond singled out to be honored as one of six mental supermen when he really wasn't?
- EBBTIDE JONES' ATOM  
CONSTRUCTOR (Novelet) . . . . . by Miles Shelton . . . . . 100  
The machine swallowed large objects and compressed them into thin disks, for convenient filing . . .
- PETER FERENY'S DEATH CELL (Short) . . . . . by William P. McGivern . . . . . 124  
Fereny thought he was stir-crazy when he heard voices in his cell. But what they said wasn't crazy.
- MAN, AN UNNECESSARY EVIL (Article) . . . . . by Jep Powell . . . . . 129  
For MEN only! When you've read this article, burn the magazine. Don't let HER get any ideas!

## FEATURES

- The Editor's Notebook . . . . . 5    Fantastic Playground . . . . . 131
- Thrilling Story Contest—  
Win \$50! . . . . . 7    Introducing the Author . . . . . 132
- More About the Sun . . . . . 85    Fantastic Forecast . . . . . 133
- Fantastic Oddities . . . . . 122    Quiz Page . . . . . 134
- Romance of the Elements . . . . . 123    Reader's Page . . . . . 135
- Correspondence Corner . . . . . 144

Front cover painting by Rod Ruth illustrating a scene from "The Return of Circé."  
Illustrations by Julian S. Krupa; Magarian; Robert Fuqua; Rod Ruth.  
Cartoons by H. Wofford, Jr.; Guy Gifford.

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FANTASTIC  
ADVENTURES  
AUGUST, 1941

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is published monthly by ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY at 608 South Dearborn Street, Chicago, Ill. New York office 270 Madison Avenue. Entered as second class matter April 16, 1940, at the Post Office, Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3rd, 1879. Subscription \$2.40 a year (12 issues); Canada, \$2.90; Foreign, \$3.40. Subscribers should allow at least two weeks for change of address. All communications about subscriptions should be addressed to the Director of Circulation, 608 South Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.

VOLUME 3  
NUMBER 6

# Peter Fereny's DEATH CELL

By WILLIAM P. MCGIVERN

THE mighty cathedral chimes tolled out the hour, mournfully, majestically, and their reverberations spread over the sleeping city like a soft blanket of sound before blending into the silent darkness of the night.

—nine—ten—eleven!

Peter Fereny could see his whitening knuckles on the dark, smooth bars and could feel the hysteria that was mounting in his breast. Eleven o'clock! In another hour the guards would be coming for him and he would join them in that long last walk from which he would never return. Strapped to the chair like a wild beast to await the blasting bolt that would shatter forever the protoplasm that was Peter Fereny.

He choked back a sob and jerked his hands from the bars and jammed them viciously into the pockets of his regulation gray trousers. His teeth bit painfully into his lower lip and he increased the pressure until the agony drove away his terror. Then he slumped to his bunk, tasting the salty blood in his mouth. He wouldn't let himself go, he vowed fiercely. He'd go out on his own two feet and he'd go out smiling.

He'd never give them the satisfaction of seeing him funk out.

He smiled then, smiled at his tightly clenched fists, his ruthless determination. For Peter Fereny was not the ruthless type. He wasn't a hard-eyed gangster or killer, but merely a middle-aged man who'd been convicted of a murder. The fact that he hadn't committed the murder, the fact that he'd been deliberately framed, he thought wearily, had little bearing on the case. Law and Justice, he had discovered, were two separate abstractions with little in common.

He shook his head and tried to distract his thoughts for the old raging bitterness was welling within him. Framed by his wife and his best friend! That

**Fereny was doomed to die in the electric chair. But in his cell he heard a weird voice—and found the key to a doorway to another world**

was the thing that had nearly driven him wild. They wanted him out of the way so that they could continue legally and openly the affair that they had been carry-

ing on behind his back.

It wasn't so much that he was going to die—it was the thought of their deceit, their greed, their dishonesty that filled him with the wild, horribly impotent feeling of injustice.

He sighed then. It was not only their betrayal that affected him, it was the realization that the world itself, with its breadlines, its wars, its hunger and poverty and lying and greed was reflected in their actions.

Funny—he hadn't noticed it before—but now it was all too clear. He rose from his bunk and began pacing the narrow cell nervously. How much longer? Forty-five minutes—thirty? Instinctively his right hand clenched, drew back and then pounded into his left palm. Automatically, he repeated the gesture but this time his fist *thudded against a solid, hard substance!*

A CRY of pain escaped him as he rubbed his aching, stinging knuckles. He swallowed nervously and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Cautiously he extended his hand in the direction his fist had been traveling and this time he felt a hard surface with his fingers. His eyes widened incredulously. His fingers were apparently touching nothing but air, but under them he could feel a hard, strangely foreign, invisible surface. He touched it with his other hand, struggling to discount the evidence of his eyes and to believe the evidence of his sense of touch.

Yes, there was something there! An object of some sort, about eight inches square, suspended by some means in the middle of his cell. But what was it? How had it gotten there? What was the secret of its invisibility?

He staggered backward and collapsed on his bunk, his reason frantically attempting to answer the questions his mind had raised.

Was he going crazy? Had—

*"Oh, thank you very much for helping us!"*

Fereny scrambled to his feet, glaring wildly about him. Someone—some-

thing had whispered to him! Thanked him! And the voice came from within his cell!

"Oh, God," he groaned. "I'm going mad, I'm—"

*"Don't be alarmed."* The tiny whispering voice caressed his ears. *"You can't see us, but we're right here with you."*

Fereny clapped his hands over his ears. He sank onto the bunk, a thin stream of saliva drooling from his lips. He could feel his mind tottering on the brink of madness.

"Go away," he moaned. "Leave me alone. You're not there, nothing's there, but go away."

Fereny heard a laugh then, a tinkling, silvery little laugh.

*"We're very sorry if we've frightened you, but there's really nothing to be frightened about."*

Fereny pressed his hands tighter into his ears but he could hear the voice as if it were *inside* his head.

*"You've helped us so very much that we'd feel terrible if we thought you were afraid of us. We've tried so long and so often to come through that we'd just about given up hope. As a matter of fact we're not really through yet. But we're very close and if you'll just give us one more little shove we can make it."*

Fereny straightened his eyes traveling helplessly about the cell.

"Who are you?" he asked dazedly.

*"Why, I'm surprised at you,"* the merry little voice continued, *"I thought you'd figure that out. But since you can't I'll have to tell you. We're from the fourth dimension."*

"THE fourth dimension?" Fereny breathed incredulously. "Why—why you can't be."

The tinkling laugh sounded again.

*"Why can't we?"*

"Because — because —" Fereny's voice died away. He *was* going mad! Talking to himself. The next thing—

"*We realize it's quite a shock,*" the tiny voice rambled on gaily, "*but you might just as well get used to it now as later. We've tried for years to get through to the third dimension and we're more determined now than ever. We built a relative dimensional corridor and you opened the door for us. Not all the way but you opened it a crack. We can't quite squeeze through but a few more inches and we'll be able to. You will help us won't you?*"

"I don't know," Fereny said desperately, "I don't know whether I'm sane or not."

"*Oh you're sane enough,*" the little voice said encouragingly "*but you're just a little hard to convince. If you'll just open the door all the way we can step right out and you can see for yourself. We're only about half as big as you but we're easy enough to see.*"

Fereny's skepticism and distrust began to vanish.

"What makes you think I'll help you?" he asked.

Again he heard the tinkling, tiny laugh.

"*You're fooling now. You've got to help us.*"

"Why?" Fereny asked.

"*Because we like you,*" the little voice said gaily, "*and when you like someone they can't refuse your requests. That's the rule here.*"

"What if you don't like somebody?" Fereny asked.

Again the laugh, tinkling in his ears.

"*Silly,*" the little voice chortled, "*everybody likes everybody here. That's the rule too.*"

"I may not be able to help you," Fereny said dubiously, "I'm in jail, y'know."

"*Where's that?*" the voice asked.

"It's a place where we put bad people," Fereny found himself blushing as he explained.

"*Bad?*" the little voice was puzzled.

"You know," Fereny went on. "People who steal something that doesn't belong to them, or people who—who kill someone—things like that."

"*But why should people do things like that?*" the little voice seemed saddened. "*Don't the people there like each other?*"

"Not always," Fereny said. "You see the people here are a little different than you. They fight and they steal and sometimes one man will gain a great amount of power and then he'll force people to act and believe and think as he wants them to and if they don't he'll kill them. Then we have other things. Breadlines, hunger, poverty, unemployment—"

"*What are they?*" the little voice interrupted.

FERENY paused and then he said slowly.

"They are the things that result when people stop liking each other." It seemed very simple at that moment.

"*But our system is so much simpler,*" the perplexed little voice said. "*We just like each other and we never have any trouble. I'm sure we'll be able to show you people how to be a lot happier and save yourselves a lot of trouble.*"

"That's been tried before," Fereny said cynically.

"*Why are you in jail?*" the little voice asked suddenly, "*you're kind. You couldn't have hurt anyone.*"

"I didn't," Fereny smiled. "But I'm going to die in a few minutes."

"*And you didn't do anything?*" the little voice was indignant.

"No," Fereny said. "I didn't hurt a soul. But things work out that way here sometimes."

*"Now listen," the little voice was excited, "let us in and we'll help you. It isn't right that you should suffer for something you didn't do. It's terrible. There are many of us and we'll help you. We'll help you with all our might. We have to because we like you."*

Fereny looked up suddenly. Shadows were moving slowly along the corridor toward his cell. Two shadows topped with sharp visored caps and one shadow with a tri-cornered hat. Fereny knew they were coming. The guards and the priest.

"You can't help me," he said quietly, "but I appreciate your offer just the same. You know I believe I like you too."

*"It isn't right," the little voice was anguished, "that you should be sacrificed for something you didn't do. Now listen closely. We can save you by bringing you into the fourth dimension. The door to our world is in the middle of your cell. It's the block you touched a minute ago. When you raise it the doorway will be opened and you can save yourself."*

FOR an instant Fereny was too stunned to act and then he sprang to his feet and clutched the invisible block. It was wild and impossible, but it was sufficient to fan the embers of hope to a fiery, raging holocaust. His fingers trembled as they clutched the invisible door.

"What do I do?" he begged. "Please tell me."

*"Just lift it up," the little voice instructed him, "and it will destroy forever the veil that has existed between the two dimensions. Careful not to push the cube down for that would close*

*the door forever."*

Fereny heard the slow, measured steps approaching. He peered up for an instant and he saw, silhouetted against the end wall of the corridor, the heavy, ominous shadow of the chair.

It symbolized in a flash the cruel, vicious, greedy world from which he was escaping. Suddenly Fereny paused, realizing what he was about to do. He was going to establish a contact between this world of the electric chair and a world of such simplicity and kindness and sympathy as he had never believed existed.

What would happen to the creatures of such a world when they were brought into a contact with the grasping greed of the third dimension? Suddenly Fereny smiled thinking of their simple beautiful philosophy. To have that destroyed would be far too dear a price to pay for his own escape.

"Good bye," he whispered. Then he pressed down with all his strength on the invisible object beneath his fingers. For an instant there was a pressure under his hands and then—nothing. And Fereny knew the doorway had been closed forever!

LATER AS THE lights dimmed and flickered for the third time, a bulky guard turned to his companion.

"Funny, ain't it?" he whispered, "he didn't seem to mind. He was smiling and beaming all the time I was strapping him into the chair. Like he was just going to meet his best friend. That's the way those guys get, though, stir crazy. Take him—for the last hour in his cell he don't do nothin' but sit there and talk to himself. Now would a guy in his right mind act like that?"

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#### NEXT MONTH

"THE LIVING DEAD" ANOTHER CARSON OF VENUS STORY

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS