

JAN.  
25¢



STRANGE ADVENTURES ON OTHER WORLDS—

# PLANET

## stories

A.M.C.

3- Strange World Stories  
1- DORNEY'S quest  
with the  
**BRYAN BERRY**  
4- 26 PANGLOSSVS. MAD  
2- GARDLING  
3- 20- FINAL VICTORY

Madness - gurgurgh madness - struck  
Mary when the radiant EMILEY landed...  
**OH MESMERIST FROM MIMAS!**  
A Unique Novel by **ROGER DEE**

**\* A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook \***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

*Title:* The Imaginative Man

*Date of first publication:* 1953

*Author:* Bryan Berry (1930-1966)

*Date first posted:* Apr. 26, 2021

*Date last updated:* Apr. 26, 2021

Faded Page eBook #20210471

This eBook was produced by: Greg Weeks, Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>



# THE IMAGINATIVE MAN

By  
BRYAN BERRY

First published *Planet Stories*, January 1953

*Of the two survivors who crash-landed on Venus only Clarke, the sensitive-minded one, could see those miraculous inhabitants . . . those mythological weirdies. Gear-gaited Bainbridge, the fool, was acting like a normal homo.*

Down from the blackness of space, through the grayness of the Venusian sky, the rocket cut its path, speeding.

It fed on the sky, gobbling clouds and spreading them out behind in a raw red pencil of burning. And as it came down the rocket screamed and bellowed at the planet in anger and defiance. Then, perhaps because of someone's carelessness, because of some small fault that nobody had noticed, because of a fragment of grit lodged in some delicate mechanism, because of one of a million possibilities—the sleek rocket crashed.

There was silence on the planet Venus.

The rocket lay on its side on the mountain slope like a stranded porpoise, buckled and broken.

Within the rocket a hand stretched out, felt about, searching. There was blood on the hand. Then, with a series of small groans, the owner of the hand picked himself up, holding his head. He straightened and looked at the mangled interior of the rocket and at the four red, wet splotches that had been members of the crew, their heads like whipped cream and crushed strawberries on the metal plates of the rocket wall.

Behind him a voice said, "Oh, God," feebly.

The first man turned, bent down and pulled the figure out from beneath the tangle of cables that had spilled out of the shattered wall like metal spaghetti when the crash had come.

"You're all right, Clarke. Let me see that hand." Bandages and antiseptics flashed in expert fingers. "There. Better?"

"Thanks." Clarke sat up, looking about him. When he saw the splotches he looked away quickly, retching. "Just the two of us left, then?" he asked.

"'Fraid so," said Bainbridge.

Clarke stood up. "Hey, that's blood on your fingers."

"Just a small cut, nothing to worry over. Come on, we'd better get outside."

"The first men on Venus. Phew!" said Clarke, looking at his bandaged hand.

"Not such a happy landing as it might have been," said Bainbridge. "Let's hope the second rocket doesn't go the same way—it's due here shortly after us."

Clarke pointed to the splotches. "What are we going to do about them?"

"We'll take them out and bury them when we've had a good look round. Come on, let's find out what Venus is like." He walked unsteadily across the floor of the rocket to the airlock.

The two men stepped out onto the rocky mountainside. Behind them the rocket was a black egg against the whiteness of the cliff, and the sky was a pale gray sheet covering it all. On the slope of the mountain there were a lot of trees.

“Well, here we are,” said Clarke, breathing deeply, “Venus.”

The silence of the planet made a wall around the two men. There was neither murmur of stream nor cry of bird, only silence.

“Quiet, isn’t it?” said Clarke.

Bainbridge smiled and nodded. “Did you know you were whispering?” he asked.

Clarke laughed, stirring his feet in the rich black soil. “Was I? This place makes you want to speak softly. Somehow it seems wrong to do otherwise.”

They looked around for a few minutes more and then they started the task they dreaded—burying the bodies of their companions.

---

Within an hour and twenty minutes there were four wooden crosses in a neat row beside the rocket, and there was sweat on the two men’s brows.

“Poor old Markham. He wanted to reach Venus more than any of us. His whole life centered round it.” Clarke shook his head sadly.

Bainbridge nodded. “Let’s get the tents and make a camp here. We’re somewhere in the Twilight Zone and it’s getting dark. A good night’s sleep will do us good. We can look round more thoroughly in the morning.”

They set up the aluminium fabric tents and made a small fire. Clarke managed to get at the canned food supplies within the rocket and they sat in the firelight eating and drinking fine hot coffee.

The land was still all about them. There was no sign of movement, no sound to tell them that there might be any other form of active life on the planet.

“I can’t help thinking that there must be something here besides us,” said Clarke. “This place is obviously capable of supporting life. The trees, for example, deciduous, same as on Earth. If there’s anything in Parbright’s theory of parallel evolutionary trends then it stands to reason that there must be some form of animal life here.” He took a long swallow of coffee, letting the hot liquid settle on his tongue, tasting the flavor appreciatively. “I wonder what they will think of us,” he said, “when and if we find them.”

Silence crept between the two men once more. They finished their coffee and sat watching the fire die down. Twenty minutes passed, perhaps more.

“You know,” started Clarke.

“What—?”

“I’ve got a feeling I was right about there being life here on Venus. I’ve got the impression that there’s something very close to us right now.”

Bainbridge laughed. “Imagination,” he said. “We’ll have a good look round the place in the morning. Right now I feel like some sleep.” He walked over to the far tent. “Good-night,” he said.

“Good-night,” replied Clarke, staring across the dying fire at the deep and ominous darkness.

He sat there for some time thinking. And he let the stillness of Venus settle about him like a web spun by a thousand black and silent spiders. “What is it that is watching me?” he thought. “There is something watching, I know.”

An hour went by. The fire died with a final protesting spluttering.

Clarke started to shiver. It felt as though a small cold hand was creeping about on the back of his neck. It was the feeling he had had when they had blasted off back on Earth, and again over Venus when the stabilizers had started acting up. It was fear.

He pulled a torch from his belt and clicked it on.

The thing stood in the pool of light and looked at Clarke. It had furry legs and its face was small and brown and wizened.

Cloven hoofs clicked as it walked forward.

“So you’ve reached us at last, have you?” it said.

Clarke opened his mouth and then closed it. At last he said: “But you’re a faun.”

The faun nodded, brightly.

“But—” started Clarke.

“But nothing,” said the faun. “I’m a faun and that’s all there is to it. Where are the other men?”

“One’s sleeping, the others—” Clarke pointed to the crosses with his torch.

The faun nodded silently.

“But what are you?” Clarke exploded. “You say you’re a faun, but that can’t be so. For a start we’re on Venus, and secondly there aren’t such things as fauns anyway.” Clarke thought about what he had just said and realized how stupid it sounded. Here he was talking to something that looked as if it had stepped out of a book on Greek mythology, and telling it that it couldn’t exist. It was too absurd.

“If I’m not a faun then what am I?”

“You’re—you’re a Venusian.”

“Correct. Hasn’t it struck you that the Venusians might be fauns? Or centaurs, even, or dragons, or griffins? All of those things?”

“You mean all the things that men don’t believe in?”

“All the things that most men don’t believe in, yes.”

“Most men?”

“Well, you see me, so deep down you must believe in me.”

“Nonsense, ridiculous,” said Clarke, too loudly.

From the far tent came a sleep-filled voice. “Calling me?”

---

For some reason Clarke did not want Bainbridge to come out. “It’s all right,” he called. “I went to sleep by the fire and must have called out in my sleep.”

No answer. Clarke waited for the other man to come out of the tent but he did not do so. Presumably he had gone back to sleep.

“You were saying it was nonsense and ridiculous, I think,” said the faun, sitting down in the darkness near Clarke and stirring the soil with cloven hoofs.

“I was, yes. And nonsense and ridiculous it is, you talking to me like this. You aren’t really there at all, or if you are then you are a Venusian endowed with the power of altering its atomic structure so as to appear as something else. The only other explanation is that you read my mind, found out what a faun looks—is supposed to look like, and then hypnotized me into seeing you as one. You’re probably a fifty-tentacled monstrosity!”

“I am not,” said the faun, piqued. “I’m a faun, simply that.”

“Well, I don’t believe it,” replied Clarke, feeling at his belt for his blaster and then stopping for a reason he could not quite understand. “Supposing you are a faun,” he said after a pause, “how is it that we have fauns recorded in our mythology back on Earth? How is it that you’re here on Venus, and what did you mean when you said ‘So you’ve reached us at last’? Answer those.”

The faun smiled an ancient Grecian smile. "First: you have fauns in your mythology because we were all on Earth at one time; fauns and centaurs, sirens and nymphs and everything. Second: we're here on Venus because belief in us died out on Earth and people couldn't see us any more. Third: we knew that man would eventually conquer space with some sort of machine and it was evident that he would reach us one day. Does that answer you?"

Clarke put his head in his hands. "Unthinkable," he said.

"Unbelievable, perhaps," said the faun, "but by no means unthinkable. You're starting to believe it, anyway. I can tell. You're one of the few men who can see us."

Clarke looked up. "You said that no one could see you nowadays, didn't you? You told me just now that that was the reason you left Earth to come here."

"Well, what I meant was that the general belief in our existence died out. There were still some who saw us and believed; the poets, artists, writers, musicians and so on. The sensitive people saw us but not the masses. You must be sensitive."

Clarke propped the torch up on its tripod legs so that the light fell on the faun. "You haven't convinced me yet," he said. "How did you reach Venus, anyway?"

The faun wagged a lean brown finger. "Magic," it said, "or what you would call teleportation, you with your long and scientific names for things."

"Prove it," said Clarke, sneering.

"Pardon?" said the faun from inside the first aluminium tent.

Clark swiveled the torch on its tripod. "How—?" he started.

"Magic," said the faun, "or teleportation; whichever word you care to use." Then the faun stepped daintily out of the tent and walked over to where Clarke was standing with his mouth open. "Now do you believe?"

There was nothing Clarke could do but nod.

"Good," said the faun, disappearing.

Clarke stared at the space where the faun had been. Then he picked up the torch and flashed it here and there, this way and that, feverishly.

But the faun had gone and there was nothing but silence and darkness about the camp. Clarke turned the torch on the ground. There were distinct marks of cloven hoofprints in the soft sod. "Hypnosis, imagination, dream or fact—which was it?" wondered Clarke as he walked into his tent.

At dawn he was still awake, still thinking. Bainbridge's voice roused him from the depths of Greek mythology.

"You still asleep?"

"No. Had a bad night. Dreams."

"Let's have a wash and then look the place over."

Washing in a small rubber bowl Clarke decided that he would not tell Bainbridge anything about the faun. If the thing existed then they were bound to come across it again, or it them. If it had been illusion then it would be better for Bainbridge to remain in ignorance of the fact that he shared the planet with a man who had hallucinations.

"I slept like a top," said Bainbridge, his face toweled to the color of a bright red apple. "Thought I heard you call out once."

"Yes, I went to sleep by the fire and had a dream."

"Well," said Bainbridge, buckling his belt, "are we ready?"

---

They set off into the trees that stretched down the slope of the mountain, and after walking for a while Bainbridge said, “You were right, this really is extraordinary. The similarity of the vegetation. We might be on Earth, almost. The trees are bigger and the grass is thicker and so on, but on the whole the scenery is very much the same.”

“Uh-huh.”

“You’re not very talkative.”

“Tired out. Didn’t sleep much last night,” said Clarke, yawning hugely. But tiredness was not the only reason for his silence. He was keeping his eyes open for the faun, for he was becoming more and more convinced that it had not been imagination or dreams. The hoofprints had been there in the soil when he had been washing earlier, but Bainbridge had not seen them.

They came out of the green silence of the trees into a glade that stretched for about a hundred yards. Clarke stopped in his tracks. “Did you see that?” he asked, softly.

“See what?”

“*That*,” said Clarke, pointing.

“I see nothing. Just trees and grass. Why?”

The faun reappeared from behind a tree. “It’s no good,” he said, “Your friend can’t see me.”

Clarke’s face was a white sheet and his eyes were black holes in it, staring. “Didn’t you hear anything or see anything?” he asked Bainbridge, still staring at the faun.

“No. What are you talking about, anyway?”

Clarke pointed at the faun again, raising his arm slowly. “Can’t you see it over there—standing beside that big tree?”

“See what? Have you lost your senses, Clarke? Snap out of it.”

“What did I tell you?” called the faun.

Clarke took a deep breath. “Over there,” he said, “is a faun. You can’t see it because you’re not sensitive. I can see it and hear it. I saw it last night, too. That was when you thought you heard me calling to you. I was talking to the faun. It told me that all the mythological creatures really do exist—all the fauns and nymphs and harpies and so on. They left Earth for Venus when the world started to change and people didn’t believe in them any more and stopped seeing them.”

Bainbridge nodded. “Go on,” he said, helpfully, his hand going down slowly towards where his blaster rested on his hip.

“It told me that since I was sensitive I could see it. And—and I *can* see it. All the creatures are teleports, apparently. That’s how they came here to Venus. The faun demonstrated teleportation to me last night.”

Across the glade the faun gave a small skipping dance about a tree and then sat down to watch the two men, smiling a small brown smile in its gnome-like face.

“Perhaps we’d better go back to the rocket for a while, hey?” suggested Bainbridge.

“You think I’m crazy, don’t you?”

“Crazy? Oh, Good Lord, no, I wouldn’t say that!” Bainbridge kept his hand on his blaster and shook his head in astonishment at the idea.

Then the faun materialized between the two men.

Clarke watched it, fascinated. The faun was smiling and it was then that Clarke saw the first glow of evil in its eyes. Yes, it was there all right, the age-old evil, a small and brilliant sparkling deep within.



“I tell you what,” said Bainbridge. “We’ll go back to the rocket and talk it over there. The second rocket will be here pretty soon and if there are any fauns about then that crew can take care of them, O.K.?”

“That faun is right here beside us now, Bainbridge.”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Bainbridge, keep your hand away from that blaster!”

Bainbridge was a fraction too slow. Clarke’s own blaster was out and leveled. “Don’t try it, Bainbridge. Put your hands in the air.”

“Now look here, Clarke . . .”

“In the air.”

“What are you going to do with him?” queried the faun.

“I want you to lead us to where the rest of you live. Perhaps he’ll be sensitive to some of the others, even though he doesn’t seem to see you.”

Bainbridge gazed at the empty space Clarke was addressing and his eyes rolled like steel blue colored marbles in his head, disbelieving. “You *are* crazy, Clarke,” he said.

“Start walking,” snapped Clarke. “No, not up there, *that* way!” he prodded Bainbridge with the blaster. “Remember, don’t try any tricks.”

---

The faun skipped along in front with the two men following behind. And they wound their way through the forests of Venus which were bigger, richer and more luxuriant than those of Earth. They passed great trees like mighty columns of elephant hide, gray and wrinkled. And there were flowers that were sudden bursts of fire and blue frost, exploding in kaleidoscopes of color and then withering even as the men watched, the petals drifting away in clouds of sequins and snowflakes in the morning air.

They walked through grasses that were strong and soft and green; pulpy grasses that were like the emerald tendrils of Terrestrial sea-anemones. And here and there the men saw trees that were tall and white and beautiful. And there were some trees that Clarke looked at especially hard.

The hamadryad waved her arms at Clarke and her voice floated like a soft kiss through the leaves. “Hullo, man,” she said, laughing. Clarke bit his lip and prodded Bainbridge. “Did you see anything that time?” he asked. “Or hear anything?”

Bainbridge sneered. “What should I have seen, the giant Atlas?”

“No, a tree-nymph.”

In front of them the faun turned. “Most of us live about here,” he said.

“Can you call them together?” queried Clarke, still holding his blaster against Bainbridge’s back.

“Well, I can do,” said the faun. “But it won’t do any good. He won’t see any of them, I can tell you that now. He isn’t sensitive the way you are. It was people like him that drove us from Earth. The scientific-minded ones, the machine men, the men who turned their backs on the woods and the creatures of the woods and wanted only things they could get their hands on, real things, realities. His sort of people.” A brown finger stabbed at Bainbridge. “Now you’re different,” the faun’s persuasive voice went on. “You’re more like the old people. You can see us and understand us. Look over there for example.”

Clarke looked but kept the blaster steady. A centaur stood in the shadow of a giant tree, watching them. His four strong brown horse’s legs were quivering and his fine back tail swished to and fro.

“You can see him,” the faun went on. “Men like your companion couldn’t see him if they lived to be a thousand. They have nothing in their souls at all. They simply lust for power and material things. Like the Huns and the Goths. No poetry. None.”

Clarke watched the forest and saw the beings emerging, while the faun, worked up by his own thoughts and words, glowered at Bainbridge.

There was Pan, picking his way through the trees, playing on his pipes a tune that had in it all of youth and the joys of youth yet was as old as time itself. Here were more tree-nymphs, half hidden in the trees that formed their lives, their hair billowing in shimmers of pale leaves about their heads, their slim bodies melting into the rich brown bark of the trees. Now came a drumming of hoofs. More centaurs; their glossy horses’ bodies rippling and glowing. And then, coiling from the black pit of its lair came the serpent that once had guarded the golden apples of the Hesperides, a monster of coils and convulsions, of scaled head and flashing, forking tongue, of sequin-studded lengths of threshing and heaving serpentine strength.

Oh, they all came, then. The satyrs, brown and ugly with a thousand evils and a thousand lusts grinning in their sunken eyes; the swift wet rising of water nymphs from their silver pools; the shrieking and whistling of monstrous wings as the harpies and the furies weaved in and out amongst the trees. And thus the wood became alive with a thousand rustlings, a million stampings of cloven hoofs, an infinity of whispers and of sighings.

---

Clarke watched them and he saw the menace in their faces, the menace and the evil. This was their world and men were enemies, invaders. Whether they were sensitive or otherwise, whether they *saw* or did not see, men were not wanted on Venus. And Clarke’s hand tightened on the blaster as he watched Bainbridge, the faun and all the myriad others.

“You see,” said the faun quickly, noticing the change in Clarke’s expression, “*he* doesn’t see them. He’s one of the stolid sort. You could stay here with us and we would accept you. But *him!*” The faun spat.

Yes, thought Clarke, the blaster loose in his grasp now. Yes, you want me to kill him, don’t you? You can’t touch him because you don’t exist so far as he is concerned. But you’re doing your best to influence me against him so that I kill him, aren’t you? And then you’ll destroy me.

“All right, Bainbridge. You can put down your hands. I had everything all wrong. These creatures are trying to get rid of us both.”

Bainbridge turned round. Clarke handed him the blaster. “You take it,” he said.

Bainbridge took the blaster. Clarke watched the faun’s face changing, watched the deep and terrible evil crawling over it. “You were right, Bainbridge,” he said, speaking quickly. “We’d better get back to the rocket. They can’t touch you but they can get me. We must try and get the radio working and contact the second rocket, warn them about the Venusians.”

Bainbridge nodded. “That’s right, old man,” he said. “We’ll have to warn them.” Then he pressed the trigger on the blaster.

There were tears in the eyes of William Roderick Bainbridge as he put up the little wooden cross beside the others. He straightened up. Poor old Clarke, he thought. Too bad about him. But there had been nothing else he could have done. He couldn’t have kept him prisoner and he was too dangerous to have loose when the second rocket came down. He might have done anything. Anything at all. But it was too bad just the same.

He felt amazed at himself for having been able to shoot him so calmly. But he had done his duty. The spacecode laid down rules for emergencies like that and he had followed the

rules, however unpleasant it had been. Under normal circumstances, he mused, Clarke had been a decent enough fellow. But that sudden madness showed that he should never have been picked for this business. Far too imaginative. Fauns and tree-nymphs! Teleportation! Bainbridge smiled a little sadly as he looked at the fifth cross.

Oh, well, better make some coffee.

And he walked towards the tent, stepping without a thought, without the slightest hesitation, through the body of one of the fauns who squatted there glaring at him with red and hate-filled eyes.

[The end of *The Imaginative Man* by Bryan Berry]