

# MEN OF HONOR

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## Even a Light-Year Away, Earthmen Find That All Is Not Gold That Glitters!

INSIDE the steel-hulled craft, Red Carson flicked a rocket control. The *Wanderer's* speed through space braked to six thousand miles an hour.

Beside him, slender, dark-visaged Emil Dent looked thoughtfully through the meteor-proof window. Dent turned away after a while, bent over a sheaf of astro-maps.

"Planet two hours ahead," he announced to his companion.

"Charted?" big Red Carson asked.



*The City of Gold*

"Yep, charted—but not explored," Dent said. "Slow down to cruising speed."

Carson blasted a row of nose-jets. The ship slowed to coasting velocity.

Both men stared through the observation port-holes as night-side of the unexplored planet came into view.

"This is a big one," Dent exclaimed. "Almost as large as Earth!"

Carson reached for the electro-telescope.

"Wonder if this planet is inhabited?"

The red-headed spaceman adjusted the dials of the telescope. The large planet blossomed swiftly into focus. Eagerly, the two men studied the image-screen. Highlighted mountain ranges, black oceans, shadowy deserts, stood out in minute detail.

"Nothing here," Carson said flatly. "It looks barren. Let's try the day-side."

The *Wanderer* sped ahead, half-circled the planet. Presently the topography of the day-side flashed on the image-screen. Rivers, forests, jungles, rushed by kaleidoscopically.

Then the two men saw it—The Golden City!

Carson gaped at the image-screen.

"It can't be," Dent whispered hoarsely. "A city of gold!"

"It's not real gold," Carson replied. "It's probably brass!"

Carson slowed the ship, and both men studied the image-screen carefully. On its surface, a majestic golden city gleamed in the light of a binary sun with indescribable radiance. Towering minarets rose above the city. The whole city was cradled in a valley. On both sides were mountains.

"If we'd been going half a G faster we'd have missed it!" Dent said.

But Carson was not listening. Trembling with excitement, he was already preparing the spectroscope. In another minute he would know whether those buildings were gold or not!

"It's gold, all right," he shouted suddenly. "A whole city of it. We'd be chumps if we didn't fill the ship with it!"

The golden spires and buildings meant a civilization far superior to that of the Earthmen. The people of the Golden City would certainly defend their precious possessions.

There was only one safe way to get that gold—steal it. They would land on the night-side, glide across the planet to the rim of the valley. Then they would descend and grab all the gold they could.

Furtively, the *Wanderer* landed near the Golden City. As the two men slunk across the cultivated fields, they had to hide in tall grain until the agricultural workers passed by, carrying strange cutting implements that looked more like saws than scythes. "Some civilization here!" Dent

said admiringly. The very sidewalks and thoroughfares were paved with gold . . . gold, used as generously as bricks on Earth!

"I wish we could take this whole sidewalk with us," Carson said wistfully. "We could spend the rest of our lives vacationing on Eros."

"Or that wall there," Dent added in awe, pointing to the solid gold front of a magnificent house. "That place must belong to some big shot here. See the diamonds all over the joint?"

"Where is everybody?" Carson asked.

"Must be sleeping," Dent said softly. "Say, we've got to work fast. What'll we take?"

The two men dashed greedily about the city. Dent wanted to settle for a golden statue. Carson held out for the wall of a clothing store. He had his Silo-gun drawn ready to atom-blast the golden wall when Dent clutched his arm.

"How are we going to carry it if you do get it?"

"It's simple," Carson said quickly. "We'll pack all the gold we can get into this golden car and wheel it to the ship. Then we'll take off before they wake up here. And it's Eros for us!"

Dent nodded. "Right, pal. But let's hurry up. Dawn's breaking."

Carson trained the muzzle at the golden wall of the store. He worked carefully and silently, cutting along the edges of the wall as though prying open a sardine can.

Meanwhile, Dent walked through the streets, collecting golden ashcans, pitchers, signposts. Much as the movable objects tempted him, the solidly set jewels tempted him even more.

The two Earthmen were like schoolboys stranded on a desert island with barrels of ice cream and cases of candy. They didn't know what to take first.

Carson was working on the last few feet of the wall when Dent returned. He was just in time, for the city was coming to life. All around them they could hear the noise and bustle of a populace getting ready for the business of the day. Dent even fancied he could hear a golden alarm clock ringing.

Dent and Carson had no sooner lifted the segmented wall into their golden car and sneaked into a side street when a group of the city's inhabitants passed by.

They weren't very strange-looking. High-

browed, olive-skinned, they reminded Carson of Earth's age-old race, the Aztecs. They wore loose-fitting, silk-like robes.

"Come on, let's beat it!" Dent said. "If we stay here they'll catch us."

Arduously, but happily, the two men pulled their golden cargo. They found a road at the outskirts of the city that led in the direction of their ship.

"Did you notice that group that passed us wasn't talking? Telepathy, I bet!" Dent said.

An hour later, the two men were in sight of their space craft.

"Hurry up," Carson said, gleefully. "We'll be away from here in ten minutes."

The men approached the *Wanderer*. Suddenly their eyes dilated in horror. Something was wrong, fearfully wrong!

The *Wanderer*—had wandered! The engines, the control room, the observatory were completely exposed. The steel hull of the ship had vanished!

No, not vanished. For to their right the two Earthmen saw the hull of their ship. It was neatly cut up into squares, piled a dozen feet high. Busily engaged weighing the steel hull was the group of inhabitants who had passed them on their way to the city.

"They've ruined our ship!" yelled Carson. "They've stolen the steel hull! What do they want with steel . . . the least expensive metal in the ship! We'll never be able to return to Earth!"

The olive-skinned inhabitants gazed silently at the two explorers.

"Men from the faraway world," a thought beat at their consciousness. "This metal, steel, may be worthless to you. But"—the foremost pointed at the cart loaded with gold and jewels—"the metal you seem so anxious to possess is as valueless to us as steel is to you. Steel, you see, is our medium of exchange, because of its rarity."

"But you've stolen our ship!" Dent shouted in outrage.

The leader of the natives pointed silently to a mountainous heap of glistening yellow metal and gleaming gems.

"We have not stolen your ship," the mental voice denied. "We are men of honor. In return for the steel we have taken, we are giving you this pile of gold and jewels—weight for weight."