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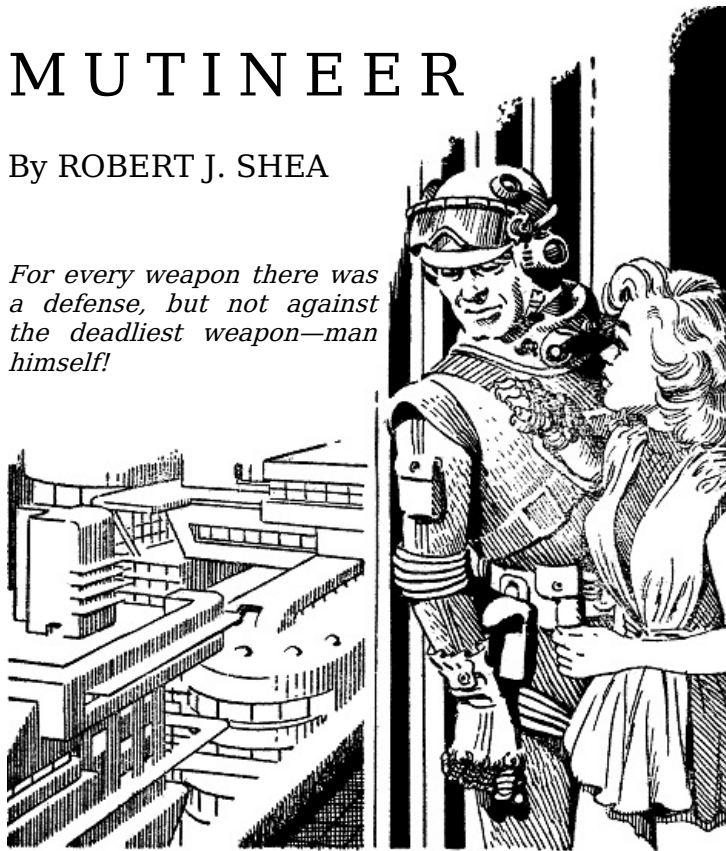
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MUTINEER ***

MUTINEER

By ROBERT J. SHEA

For every weapon there was a defense, but not against the deadliest weapon—man himself!



RAGING, Trooper Lane hovered three thousand feet above Tammany Square.

The cool cybrain surgically implanted in him was working on the problem. But Lane had no more patience. They'd sweat, he thought, hating the chill air-currents that threw his hovering body this way and that. He glared down at the three towers bordering on the Square. He spat, and watched the little white speck fall, fall. *Lock me up in barracks. All I wanted was a little time off. Did I fight in Chi for them? Damn right I did. Just a little time off, so I shouldn't blow my top. Now the lid's gone.*

He was going over all their heads. He'd bowled those city cops over like paper dolls, back at the Armory. The black dog was on Lane's back. Old Mayor himself was going to hear about it.

Why not? Ain't old Mayor the CinC of the Newyork Troopers?

The humming paragrav-paks embedded beneath his shoulder blades held him motionless above Newyork's three administrative towers. Tammany Hall. Mayor's Palace. Court House. Lane cursed his stupidity. He hadn't found out which one was which ahead of time. *They keep Troopers in the Armory and teach them how to fight. They don't teach them about their own city, that they'll be fighting for. There's no time. From seven years old up, Troopers have too much to learn about fighting.*

The Mayor was behind one of those thousands of windows.

Old cybrain, a gift from the Trooper surgeons, compliments of the city, would have to figure out which one. Blood churned in his veins, nerves shrieked with impatience. Lane waited for the electronic brain to come up with the answer.

Then his head jerked up, to a distant buzz. There were cops coming. Two black paragrav-boats whirred along the translucent underside of Newyork's anti-missile force-shield, the Shell.

Old cybrain better be fast. Damn fast!

The cybrain jolted an impulse through his spine. Lane somersaulted. Cybrain had taken charge of his motor nerves. Lane's own mind was just along for the ride.

HIS body snapped into a stiff dive position. He began to plummet down, picking up speed. His mailed hands glittered like arrowheads out in front. They pointed to a particular window in one of the towers. A predatory excitement rippled through him as he sailed down through the air. It was like going into battle again. A little red-white-and-green flag fluttered on a staff below the window. Whose flag? The city flag was orange and blue. He shrugged away the problem. Cybrain knew what it was doing.

The little finger of his right hand vibrated in its metal sheath. A pale vibray leaped from the lensed fingertip. Breakthrough! The glasstic pane dissolved. Lane streamed through the window.

The paragrav-paks cut off. Lane dropped lightly to the floor, inside the room, in battle-crouch. A 3V set was yammering. A girl screamed. Lane's hand shot out automatically. A finger vibrated. Out of the corner of his eye, Lane saw the girl fold to the floor. There was no one else in the room. Lane, still in a crouch, chewed his lip.

The Mayor?

His head swung around and he peered at the 3V set. He saw his own face.

"Lashing police with his vibray," said the announcer, "Lane broke through the cordon surrounding Manhattan Armory. Two policemen were killed, four others seriously injured. Tammany Hall has warned that this man is extremely dangerous. Citizens are cautioned to keep clear of him. Lane is an insane killer. He is armed with the latest military weapons. A built-in electronic brain controls his reflexes—"

"At ease with that jazz," said Lane, and a sheathed finger snapped out. There was a loud bang. The 3V screen dissolved into a puddle of glasstic.

The Mayor.

Lane strode to the window. The two police boats were hovering above the towers. Lane's mailed hand snapped open a pouch at his belt. He flipped a fist-sized cube to the floor.

The force-bomb "exploded"—swelled or inflated, really, but with the speed of a blast. Lane glanced out the window. A section of the energy globe bellied out from above. It shaded the view from his window and re-entered the tower wall just below.

Now the girl.

He turned back to the room. "Wake up, outa-towner." He gave the blonde girl a light dose of the vibray to slap her awake.

"Who are you?" she said, shakily.

Lane grinned. "Trooper Lane, of the Newyork Special Troops, is all." He threw her a mock salute. "You from outa-town, girlie. I ain't seen a Newyork girl with yellow hair in years. Orange or green is the action. Whatcha doing in the Mayor's room?"

THE girl pushed herself to her feet. Built, Lane saw. She was pretty and clean-looking, very out-of-town. She held herself straight and her blue-violet eyes snapped at him.

"What the devil do you think you're doing, soldier? I am a diplomat of the Grassroots Republic of Mars. This is an embassy, if you know what that means."

"I don't," said Lane, unconcerned.

"Well, you should have had brains enough to honor the flag outside this window. That's the Martian flag, soldier. If you've never heard of diplomatic immunity, you'll suffer for your ignorance." Her large, dark eyes narrowed. "Who sent you?"

"My cybrain sent me."

She went openmouthed. "You're *Lane*."

"I'm the guy they told you about on the 3V. Where's the Mayor? Ain't this his place?"

"No. No, you're in the wrong room. The wrong building. That's the Mayor's suite over there." She pointed. "See where the balcony is? This is the Embassy suite. If you want the Mayor you'll have to go over there."

"Whaddaya know," said Lane. "Cybrain didn't know, no more than me."

The girl noticed the dark swell of the force-globe. "What's that out there?"

"Force-screen. Nothing gets past, except maybe a full-size blaster-beam. Keeps cops out. Keeps you in. You anybody important?"

"I told you, I'm an ambassador. From Mars. I'm on a diplomatic mission."

"Yeah? Mars a big city?"

She stared at him, violet eyes wide. "The *planet* Mars."

"Planet? Oh, *that* Mars. Sure, I've heard of it—you gotta go by spaceship. What's your name?"

"Gerri Kin. Look, Lane, holding me is no good. It'll just get you in worse trouble. What are you trying to do?"

"I wanna see the Mayor. Me and my buddies, we just come back from fighting in Chi, Gerri. We won. They got a new Mayor out there in Chi. He takes orders from Newyork."

Gerri Kin said, "That's what the force-domes did. The perfect defense. But also the road to the return to city-states. Anarchy."

Lane said, "Yeah? Well, we done what they wanted us to do. We did the fighting for them. So we come back home to Newyork and they lock us up in the Armory. Won't pay us. Won't let us go nowhere. They had cops guarding us. City cops." Lane sneered. "I busted out. I wanna see the Mayor and find out why we can't have time off. I don't play games, Gerri. I go right to the top."

Lane broke off. There was a hum outside the window. He whirled and stared out. The rounded black hulls of the two police paragrav-boats were nosing toward the force-screen. Lane could read the white numbers painted on their bows.

A loudspeaker shouted into the room: "Come out of there, Lane, or we'll blast you out."

"You can't," Lane called. "This girl from Mars is here."

"I repeat, Lane—come out or we'll blast you out."

Lane turned to the girl. "I thought you were important."

SHE stood there with her hands together, calmly looking at him. "I am. But you are too, to them. Mars is millions of miles away, and you're right across the Square from the Mayor's suite."

"Yeah, but—" Lane shook his head and turned back to the window. "All right, look! Move them boats away and I'll let this girl out!"

"No deal, Lane. We're coming in." The police boats backed away slowly, then shot straight up, out of the line of vision.

Lane looked down at the Square. Far below, the long, gleaming barrel of a blaster cannon caught the dim light filtering down through Newyork's Shell. The cannon trundled into the Square on its olive-drab, box-shaped caterpillar mounting and took up a position equidistant from the bases of the three towers.

Now a rumble of many voices rose from below. Lane stared down to see a large crowd gathering in Tammany Square. Sound trucks were rolling to a stop around the edges of the crowd. The people were all looking up.

Lane looked across the Square. The windows of the tower opposite, the ones he could see clearly, were crowded with faces. There were white dot faces on the balcony that Gerri Kin had pointed out as the Mayor's suite.

The voice of a 3V newscaster rolled up from the Square, reechoing against the tower walls.

"Lane is holding the Martian Ambassador, Gerri Kin, hostage. You can see the Martian tricolor behind his force-globe. Police are bringing up blaster cannon. Lane's defense is a globe of energy similar to the one which protects Newyork from aerial attack."

Lane grinned back at Gerri Kin. "Whole town's down there." Then his grin faded. Nice-looking, nice-talking girl like this probably cared a lot more about dying than he did. Why the hell didn't they give him a chance to let her out? Maybe he could do it now.

Cybrain said no. It said the second he dropped his force-screen, they'd blast this room to hell. Poor girl from Mars, she didn't have a chance.

Gerri Kin put her hand to her forehead. "Why did you have to pick my room? Why did they send me to this crazy city? Private soldiers. Twenty million people living under a Shell like worms in a corpse. Earth is sick and it's going to kill me. What's going to happen?"

Lane looked sadly at her. Only two kinds of girls ever went near a Trooper—the crazy ones and the ones the city paid. Why did he have to be so near getting killed when he met one he liked?

Now that she was showing a little less fear and anger, she was talking straight to him. She was good, but she wasn't acting as if she was too good for him.

"They'll start shooting pretty quick," said Lane. "I'm sorry about you."

"I wish I could write a letter to my parents," she said.

"What?"

"Didn't you understand what I said?"

"What's a letter?"

"You don't know where Mars is. You don't know what a letter is. You probably can't even read and write!"

LANE shrugged. He carried on the conversation disinterestedly, professionally relaxed before battle. "What's these things I can't do? They important?"

"Yes. The more I see of this city and its people, the more important I realize they are. You know how to fight, don't you? I'll bet you're perfect with those weapons."

"Listen. They been training me to fight since I was a little kid. Why shouldn't I be a great little fighter?"

"Specialization," said the girl from Mars.

"What?"

"Specialization. Everyone I've met in this city is a specialist. SocioSpecs run the government. TechnoSpecs run the machinery. Troopers fight the wars. And ninety per cent of the people don't work at all because they're not trained to do anything."

"The Fans," said Lane. "They got it soft. That's them down there, come to watch the fight."

"You know why you were kept in the Armory, Lane? I heard them talking about it, at the dinner I went to last night."

"Why?"

"Because they're afraid of the Troopers. You men did too good a job out in Chi. You are the deadliest weapon that has ever been made. You. Single airborne infantrymen!"

Lane said, "They told us in Trooper Academy that it's the men that win the wars."

"Yes, but people had forgotten it until the SocioSpecs of Newyork came up with the Troopers. Before the Troopers, governments concentrated on the big weapons, the missiles, the bombs. And the cities, with the Shells, were safe from bombs. They learned to be self-sufficient under the Shells. They were so safe, so isolated, that national governments collapsed. But you Troopers wiped out that feeling of security, when you infiltrated Chi and conquered it."

"We scared them, huh?"

Gerri said, "You scared them so much that they were afraid to let you have a furlough in the city when you came back. Afraid you Troopers would realize that you could easily take over the city if you wanted to. You scared them so much that they'll let me be killed. They'll actually risk trouble with Mars just to kill you."

"I'm sorry about you. I mean it, I like—"

At that moment a titanic, ear-splitting explosion hurled him to the carpet, deafened and blinded him.

He recovered and saw Gerri a few feet away, dazed, groping on hands and knees.

Lane jumped to the window, looked quickly, sprang back. Cybrain pumped orders to his nervous system.

"Blaster cannon," he said. "But just one. Gotcha, cybrain. I can beat that."

He picked up the black box that generated his protective screen. Snapping it open with thumb-pressure, he turned a small dial. Then he waited.

Again an enormous, brain-shattering concussion.

Again Lane and Gerri were thrown to the floor. But this time there was a second explosion and a blinding flash from below.

Lane laughed boyishly and ran to the window.

"Look!" he called to Gerri.

THERE was a huge gap in the crowd below. The pavement was blackened and shattered to rubble. In and around the open space sprawled dozens of tiny black figures, not moving.

"Backfire," said Lane. "I set the screen to throw their blaster beam right back at them."

"And they knew you might—and yet they let a crowd congregate!"

Gerri reeled away from the window, sick.

Lane said, "I can do that a couple times more, but it burns out the force-globe. Then I'm dead."

He heard the 3V newscaster's amplified voice: "—approximately fifty killed. But Lane is through now. He has been able to outthink police with the help of his cybrain. Now police are feeding the problem to their giant analogue computer in the sub-basement of the Court House. The police analogue computer will be able to outthink Lane's cybrain, will predict Lane's moves in advance. Four more blaster cannon are coming down Broadway—"

"Why don't they clear those people out of the Square?" Gerri cried.

"What? Oh, the Fans—nobody clears them out." He paused. "I got one more chance to try." He raised a mailed glove to his mouth and pressed a small stud in the wrist. He said, "Trooper HQ, this is Lane."

A voice spoke in his helmet. "Lane, this is Trooper HQ. We figured you'd call."

"Get me Colonel Klett."

Thirty seconds passed. Lane could hear the clank of caterpillar treads as the mobile blaster cannon rolled into Tammany Square.

The voice of the commanding officer of the Troopers rasped into Lane's ear: "Meat-head! You broke out against my orders! *Now* look at you!"

"I knew you didn't mean them orders, sir."

"If you get out of there alive, I'll hang you for disobeying them!"

"Yes, sir. Sir, there's a girl here—somebody important—from Mars. You know, the planet. Sir, she told me we could take over the city if we got loose. That right, sir?"

There was a pause. "Your girl from Mars is right, Lane. But it's too late now. If we had moved first, captured the city government, we might have done it. But they're ready for us. They'd chop us down with blaster cannon."

"Sir, I'm asking for help. I know you're on my side."

"I am, Lane." The voice of Colonel Klett was lower. "I'd never admit it if you had a chance of getting out of there alive. You've had it, son. I'd only lose more men trying to rescue you. When they feed the data into that analogue computer, you're finished."

"Yes, sir."

"I'm sorry, Lane."

"Yes, sir. Over and out."

Lane pressed the stud on his gauntlet again. He turned to Gerri.

"You're okay. I wish I could let you out. Old cybrain says I can't. Says if I drop the force-globe for a second, they'll fire into the room, and then we'll both be dead."

GERRI stood with folded arms and looked at him. "Do what you have to do. As far as I can see, you're the only person in this city that has even a little bit of right on his side."

Lane laughed. "Any of them purple-haired broads I know would be crazy scared. You're different."

"When my grandparents landed on Mars, they found out that selfishness was a luxury. Martians can't afford it."

Lane frowned with the effort of thinking. "You said I had a little right on my side. That's a good feeling. Nobody ever told me to feel that way about myself before. It'll be better to die knowing that."

"I know," she said.

The amplified voice from below said, "The police analogue computer is now hooked directly to the controls of the blaster cannon battery. It will outguess Lane's cybrain and check his moves ahead of time."

Lane looked at Gerri. "How about giving me a kiss before they get us? Be nice if I kissed a girl like you just once in my life."

She smiled and walked forward. "You deserve it, Lane."

He kissed her and it filled him with longings for things he couldn't name. Then he stepped back and shook his head. "It ain't right you should get killed. If I take a dive out that window, they shoot at me, not in here."

"And kill you all the sooner."

"Better than getting burned up in this lousy little room. You also got right on your side. There's too many damn Troopers and not enough good persons like you. Old cybrain says stay here, but I don't guess I will. I'm gonna pay you back for that kiss."

"But you're safe in here!"

"Worry about yourself, not about me." Lane picked up the force-bomb and handed it to her. "When I say now, press this. Then take your hand off, real fast. It'll shut off the screen for a second."

He stepped up on to the window ledge. Automatically, the cybrain cut in his paragrav-paks. "So long, outa-towner. *Now!*"

He jumped. He was hurtling across the Square when the blaster cannons opened up. They weren't aimed at the window where the little red-white-and-green tricolor was flying. But they weren't aimed at Lane, either. They were shooting wild.

Which way now? Looks like I got a chance. Old cybrain says fly right for the cannons.

He saw the Mayor's balcony ahead. *Go to hell, old cybrain. I'm doing all right by myself. I come to see the Mayor, and I'm gonna see him.*

Lane plunged forward. He heard the shouts of frightened men.

He swooped over the balcony railing. A man was pointing a blaster pistol at him. There were five men on the balcony—emergency! Years of training and cybrain took over. Lane's hand shot out, fingers vibrating. As he dropped to the balcony floor in battle-crouch, the men slumped around him.

He had seen the man with the blaster pistol before. It was the Mayor of Newyork.

Lane stood for a moment in the midst of the sprawled men, the shrieks of the crowd floating up to him. Then he raised his glove to his lips. He made contact with Manhattan Armory.

"Colonel Klett, sir. You said if we captured the city government we might have a chance. Well, I captured the city government. What do we do with it now?"

LANE was uncomfortable in his dress uniform. First there had been a ceremony in Tammany Square inaugurating Newyork's new Military Protectorate, and honoring Trooper Lane. Now there was a formal dinner. Colonel Klett and Gerri Kin sat on either side of Lane.

Klett said, "Call me an opportunist if you like, Miss Kin, my government will be stable, and Mars can negotiate with it." He was a lean, sharp-featured man with deep grooves in his face, and gray hair.

Gerri shook her head. "Recognition for a new government takes time. I'm going back to Mars, and I think they'll send another ambassador next time. Nothing personal—I just don't like it here."

Lane said, "I'm going to Mars, too."

"Did she ask you to?" demanded Klett.

Lane shook his head. "She's got too much class for me. But I like what she told me about Mars. It's healthy, like."

Klett frowned. "If I thought there was a gram of talent involved in your capture of the Mayor, Lane, I'd never release you from duty. But I know better. You beat that analogue computer by sheer stupidity—by disregarding your cybrain."

Lane said, "It wasn't so stupid if it worked."

"That's what bothers me. It calls for a revision in our tactics. We've got a way of beating those big computers now, should anyone use them against us."

"I just didn't want her to be hurt."

"Exactly. The computer could outguess a machine, like your cybrain. But you introduced a totally unpredictable factor—human emotion. Which proves what I, as a military man, have always maintained—that the deadliest weapon in man's arsenal is still, and will always be, the individual soldier."

"What you just said there, sir," said Lane. "That's why I'm leaving Newyork."

"What do you mean?" asked Colonel Klett.

"I'm tired of being a weapon, sir. I want to be a human being."

**Work is the elimination of the traces
of work.**

—Michelangelo

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MUTINEER ***

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