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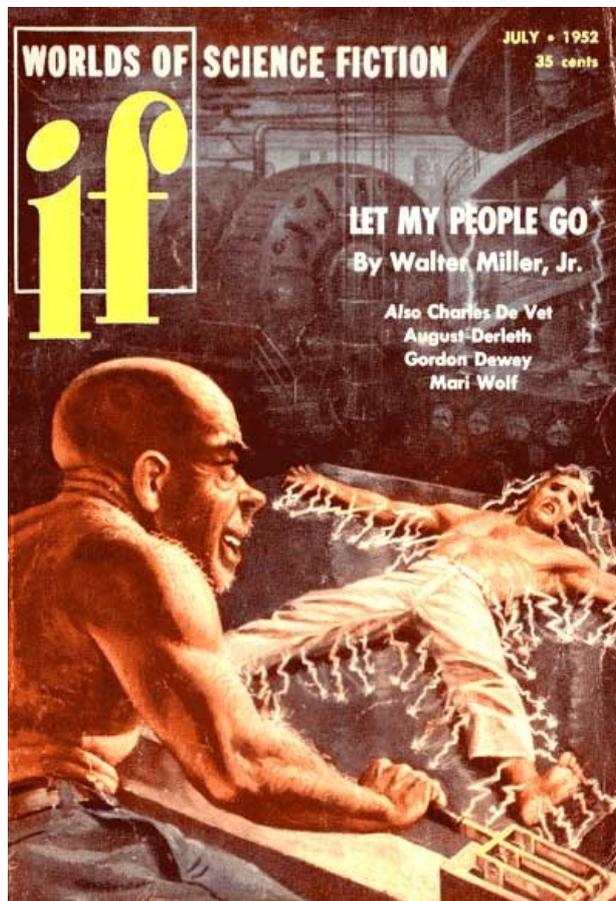
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Hoiman and the Solar Circuit

By Gordon Dewey

They lifted Hoiman's scratch, thus causing him to lose much smooth. So he grabbed his bum and hit the high orbit.

Pay day! I scrawled my Larry Maloney across the back of the check and handed it to Nick, the bartender. "Leave me something to operate on," I told him.

Nick turned it over. "Still with the *News*?"

The question was rhetorical. I let it pass without swinging at it. I was mentally estimating the total of the pile of tabs Nick pulled out of the cash register, like a fighter on percentage trying to count the house. I didn't like the figure it gave me.

Nick added them up, then added them again before he pulled some bills out of the money drawer and said, "Here's thirty skins. Your rent due?"

"This'll cover it. I'll do my drinking here."

I went over to a booth and sat down. I lit a cigarette. I smoked. And waited. Presently Sherry, tall, dark and delicious, decided I was making like a customer, and strolled over. "Would you like a menu, Mr. Maloney?" she trilled.

"Larry to you," I reminded her. "No menu. Bring me a steak. Big. Thick. Rare. And a plate of french fries. No salad. Bread and butter. Coffee."

She managed at last to pull her writing hand out of mine, and I had to repeat the order. Unless it could be turned into money, Sherry's memory was limited strictly to the present instant.

She put in the order, then brought me a set-up. I let my eyes go over her, real careful, for maybe the thousandth time. No doubt of it—the lassie had a classy chassis. If she just wouldn't yak so damn much.



It looked as though Hoiman's Bum would be remembered on Mars.

"Did you see the matches last night?" She didn't wait for my answer, just went on with the yat-a-ta. "I spent the whole evening just glued to my television set. I was simply enthralled. When the Horrible Hungarian got the Flying Hackensack on—"

"Standing Hackenschmidt, Sherry!"

"—poor little Billie McElroy I wanted to—to scratch his eyes out."

I pointed out that McElroy weighed in at two forty-one and had gone on to win the match. Sherry never heard me.

"And the way the Weeping Greek kept hitting the other fellow—the announcer said he was throwing Judo cutlets."

"*Cuts*, not cutlets."

"But aren't Judo cutlets illegitimate?" The barest hint of a puzzled frown tugged at her flawless brows as she poured ice water into my glass.

"The word," I repeated, "is *cuts*. And the blow is not illegal." I gave my eyes another treat. What a chassis. And *what* a mind. "Anything these days, so long as you don't kill your opponent, is legal in wrestling."

Suddenly we had company: a little man who made scarcely a sound as he slid into my booth and sat facing me. "Rassling, yet," he said, in bitter tones. "What a woid. Dun't be saying it." He helped himself to a cigarette from my pack lying on the table, and put the pack in his pocket. He lit the cigarette, using my lighter, which he held a moment longer than necessary before replacing it—regretfully—on the table.

He inhaled deeply. "Rassling!" he repeated. "Leave us not discuss it."

He was thin, haggard, unkempt, and his brown suit—in which the chalk stripes were beginning to blend with the background—was threadbare. He needed a shave, and his fingernails were dirty. He was vaguely familiar. The beady little eyes flicked up at me, and all uncertainty dissolved.

"Oh, no!" I said. "Not you. Not—"

He exhaled a great cloud of smoke. "Hoiman Katz," he said, in dejected tones. "It is me, again. The same as like always, only not so better." He sighed.

Sherry's tongue had been shifting from one foot to the other, waiting for an opening. "Are you a wrestler, Mr. Katz?" she asked brightly.

Hoiman half rose from his seat, and the cigarette dropped from his lax mouth. Then he slumped down again, spread his hands, shrugged, and said, "Now I esk you!"

Sherry said, "I guess not." Then, "Shall I bring you something?" Her eyes were on me as she asked. She hadn't worked on Vine Street for six years without learning the ropes—about people at least.

I nodded.

Katz was waiting for the nod. He licked his lips. "I'll have a—"

"Planet Punch?"

"No. I'll have a—"

"Solar Sling? Martian Mule?"

Hoiman's eyes squinted shut, and he winced eloquently. "Martian!" he groaned. "With rassling, too! Bring me a bottle of beer. Two bottles!" After a moment he peered cautiously through slitted lids. "Is she gone?" he whispered. "Such woids. Rassling. Martian. Better I should have stood in Hollywood."

I laughed. "What's the matter with wrestling, Hoiman? Last I heard you were managing a good boy—what was his name?"

"Killer Coogan? That bum!"

I had to do some thinking back. "Yeah," I said, "that's the boy. Started wrestling back in the fifties. Good crowd pleaser. Took the Junior Heavyweight Championship from Brickbuster Bates. Had a trick hold he called the pretzel bend—hard to apply, but good for a submission every time when he clamped it on. Right?"

"Okay, so he won some bouts with it. But that was twenty-five years ago. He's slower, can't use that holt any more. We ain't had no main events for a long time, and my bum is a big eater, see?"

"So?"

"So Hoiman Katz is not sleeping yet at the switch. He's got it up here." A grimy forefinger tapped his wrinkled brow. "I says, Hoiman, if we don't get it here, we gotta go where we *can* get it."

Sherry came back with Hoiman's two bottles of beer, and my steak and french fries. The steak was a dream, and the french fries were a crisp, rich golden brown that started my mouth watering.

Sherry wanted to talk. I waved her down, and she went away pouting. If there was a story in Hoiman I wanted to get it without interference.

He was pouring a second glass of beer. His beady eyes swivelled up to mine, then quickly away. "You want I should tell you about my bum?"

I mumbled something through a mouthful of good juicy steak.

Hoiman sighed, reminiscently, and a grimy paw swooped into my french fries. I moved them to the other side of my steak platter.

We woiked all up and down the Coast, (Hoiman said). My bum took all comers. Slasher Slade had his abominal stretch. Crusher Kane had his rolling rocking horse split; Manslaughter Murphy had his cobra holt—but none of those guys had anything like my Bum's pretzel bend. He trun 'em all, and they stayed trun.

That was fine. All through the fifties, and the sixties we made plenty scratch. Maybe it slowed down, but we was eating regular. In the seventies my bum was slowing up. I shoulda seen it when he started missing his holt. That leaves him wide open, see? And twict the other bum moiders him.

That was recent—they was just putting in regular passenger service on the space lines, so you could buy tickets to the Moon, or Venus or Mars. Depended on whether you was ducking a bill or some broad.

By this time my bum is getting pinned to the mat too regular, and we're slipping out of the big dough. I counts up our lettuce one day, and I says to my bum, I says, Ray, I says, you and me are going to the Moon.

So what if they didn't have a rassling circuit there yet, I tell him. Just leave it to your uncle Hoiman. We'll make our own circuit.

I figured that the ribbon clerks wouldn't be taking space rides for awhile, and if we went to the Moon we'd find some bums there who could give my bum a good bout, but not fast enough to toss him.

So we went there.

Hoiman's eyes, looking into the past, had lost their beadiness. He'd shifted his third glass of beer to his right hand, and his left, seemingly of its own volition, had found my plate of french fries. The pile had dwindled by half, and tell-tale potato crumbs were lodged in the whiskers on Hoiman's unshaven chin. Neither beer nor potatoes in his mouth seemed to matter—he went right on talking at the same rate.

It takes me two weeks, (Hoiman continued), to ballyhoo up a bout, line up another bum, fix up the ring and hall and everything. We was down to our last lettuce that night. I gets my bum by the ear, and I tells him, I says, make it a good show. But don't take no chances—this is winner take all, and we better not lose. Don't use your pretzel bend unless you have to.

This bum we rassle was a big miner, see?—hard as the rocks he juggles around in the daytime. He was stronger'n my bum, but he don't know nothing about rassling. My bum tried a step-over toehold on him, but he knows how to kick. My bum goes through the ropes. He don't try that no more.

They rassle around, and eight minutes later my bum takes first fall with a body press after flattening the miner with a hard knee lift. I told my bum to let him take the second fall, which he does. The big miner gets a head scissors on him and like to moiders him before he can submit.

Ray isn't liking it, and he takes the third one quick with a abominal stretch, which surprises the big guy and takes all the fight outa him. He didn't know they was holts like that, and he passes the word around that my bum has plenty moxie. So we get only one more bout on the Moon—but outa the two we get enough scratch to take us to Venus.

Hoiman paused, trying hard to pour more beer out of the empty second bottle. He licked his lips like they were real dry, and his beady eyes flicked a glance at me that came and went as fast as the tip of a swinging rapier. I signalled Sherry to bring two more bottles of beer. Hoiman relaxed, sighed, gazing almost affectionately at the new crop of french fries which had appeared suddenly in his clutching fist.

Sherry, still pouting, came with the beer, and ten seconds later Hoiman was talking again.

We did okay on Venus, (he said). Before long I have a regular little circuit woiked up in the three spaceports, and they is plenty bums there what think they can rassle. Some of them can—my bum

has to use his pretzel bend oftener and oftener. He's lucky, and he don't slip none clamping it on—at first.

I have ta tell you about them Venusians. Them dustlanders, I mean. They got big flat wide feet for padding through the dust, and their noses are like a big spongy thing all over their puss, to filter the dust out. So they got no expression on their pans. A guy like me, which has got a real expressive face, could get the willies just looking at them. And their eyes—round and flat, big as silver dollars.

Them dustlanders was nuts about rassling. They flock to the rassling shows and buy good seats. They don't do no hollering and waving like people do. Just sit there, staring out of them big flat eyes and making funny *chuffing* noises at each other when some bum would get a good hold on the other.

My bum didn't pay them no never mind at foist, but one day he tells me he keeps feeling them eyes on him while he's rasslin'. I give him the old razz—but that night he tries for his pretzel bend, and misses. The other bum is young and fast, and my bum gets trun, but good!

So this happens a few more times, and my bum says we gotta move on—he can't rassle no more with them dustlanders staring at him and *chuffing* about him.

Some of them ear benders on Venus are studying up on the side, anyhow, and the outlook for my bum ain't so good no more nohow. So we go to Mars.

I signalled Sherry for my coffee, as Hoiman ground to a stop while he refilled his glass. I swear my eyes weren't away from the table for more than a half second, but in that moment all the french fries left my plate. I yielded to Fate—it wasn't meant to be that I eat french fries this pay day.

Things are primitive like on Mars, (Hoiman was saying), on accounta the troubles they have with power there. We rassled under some funny set-ups, but that's okay with me as long as my bum tosses his man.

This time they ain't none of them screwy Venusians to put the whammy on him, and he's doing okay. Until—I gotta admit it—I get deluges of grandeur, or something.

I gotta tell ya about them Martians. They are about seven feet tall, not too heavy, but they got plenty moxie. And an extra pair of arms, so I get to thinking they oughta be terrific in the ring. Just so they ain't *too* terrific.

I ask my bum, I says to him, I says, could he, does he think, trun one of them Martians? He says iffen he has to he'll use his pretzel bend, and they ain't no Martian on six legs, or eight, what won't say uncle.

So I check with the Colony Administrator, and he says it's okay for a match perviding we don't interfere with any of their beliefs or customs or conventions. I ast him what were they, and he told me the Martians never talked about them, so we'd just have to be careful.

What the hell, I says to my bum. A bout's a bout. So I start promoting. First I find out do them Martians have a bum what wants to rassle my bum, winner take all—which is the way we like to rassle, when I know my bum can trun the other bum. Natch.

I don't mean we talk to the Martians—I don't savvy them squeaks they use on each other. We hire an interpreter—we have to take his word for it that everything is woiking out.

So the night of the match comes around and them Martians insist on having it in their own town, Meekweek it sounds like, near as I can say it in people talk. Remember I told you it was primitive? You never seen nothing like this. They don't live with people by the way. They live off by theirselves in their own town.

The ring and mat and ropes are okay—not regulation, but nothing to squawk about. Them lights was what get me. The Martians got no power, so they make a deal with some insecks. Cross my heart—'sa fack. You never see such insecks. Round, big as a dinner plate, flat on top, rounded off on the bottom. They stay up in the air by spinning like a wheel—just like them flying saucers the Rigellians was spying on us in the fifties. You wouldn't remember about that.

At night the bottom part of them insecks lights up like a big electric bulb, almost as bright, too. They was enough of them *zinging* around over the ring to make it look like it was floodlighted. My bum says they remind him of them dish-eyed Venusians, but I quick change the subjeck. That shoulda tipped me off—shoulda give me a freemonition that the party was gonna get rough. If I'da known how rough, we'da stood in town.

The Martian bum is a big mug, and those four arms of his look mighty plural. I quick tells my bum, I says to him, I says, watch out for arm locks and leg strangles. If that overgrewed spider ever gets one on you he'll double keylock it!

The two bums go in the ring, and get their instructions. Mostly the ref makes motions. The Martian nods his head like he understands fine. When the ref is telling them about trunnin' each other outen the ring, the Martian makes a motion like can he trun his man up in the rafters?

The ref shakes his head no, and that seems to satisfy the Martian. The timekeeper blows a whistle, and things start to moving. That Martian Mangler puts down his two middle limbs, uses them like legs, and is across the ring and swarming all over my bum while he is still taking his foist step.

Before you know it the ref is counting one, two, three, and my bum is trun for the foist fall. The Martian is using his middle limbs like arms, and he has a hammerlock and an arm strangle both on my bum—and both of them keylocked!

The ref gets them untangled, and I quick tell my bum we ain't hurt until we get trun twict. So I tell him how to get that next fall—to keep away from them four arms and keep circling until he gets a chance to clamp on the pretzel bend.

The whistle blows, and this time my bum uses my head. When the Martian Mangler gallops over to his corner, my bum has went through the ropes and quick runs around on the apron to the other side and comes at the Martian from behind before the goof knows what's happening.

He lets the Martian have a rabbit punch, then a forearm smash, then a knee to his stomach. The Martian leans over, kinda sick, maybe, and gets a knee lift to the smooch. This softens him up good, and my bum clamps the pretzel bend on him. That Martian squirms like an octopus, with arms and legs flying in all directions. And you coulda knocked me over with a subpoena when he got out of it!

Your guess is as good as mine, how he done it. But my bum is moving fast, and he gives him some more knee lifts and a drop kick or two, and then a hair mare, and he falls on him for a body press and gets the count.

Each bum has got a fall. You shoulda heard them Martians there squeaking this time—ten times as loud as when their bum won the foist fall. But they had no squawks. These flying chandeliers they had, they kinda bunched up to follow the action, and the light was good so the ref couldn't make no mistake about it.

That Martian squirming out of the pretzel bend don't look so good, so I tell my bum not to use it for the thoid fall. I tell him to give the Martian some more of them knee lifts—he don't get along with them at all. I tell him to folly that up with a airplane spin and a body slam.

My bum folls instructions to the alphabet, and that is just what happens. He bangs that Martian around with elbow smashes and knee lifts till he don't know is he on one leg or six. Then he goes in fast and grabs him by a coupla legs and arms, holds him up in the air, and spins him like a pinwheel.

Right away I knowed something was in the air besides that Martian Mangler. Oi! Did things happen all to onct!

My bum slams the Martian and falls on him for the count, and wins the thoid fall and the match. That part is okay. But while the Martian is still up in the air I notice that all the squeaking from the Martians has stopped all of a sudden.

So from the Martians we are getting nothing but silence, strictly wholesale. I think maybe that's natural when their bum gets trun.

And then—plop! plop! plop!—and them flying light bulbs all drop down flat on the mat and lay there just like the Martian bum, until they isn't enough light in the house to see to strike a match. And then the squeaking starts again, like a million hungry rats, and I can just barely see them Martians starting for the ring.

I gets my bum by the arm and tells him something tells me we better blow the joint. We blow, fast. Them Martians is mad about something which I ain't had time to figure out, yet. My bum steps on one of them animated light fixtures when he gets out of the ring and squashes it. A puddle of light squirts out, and natch he steps in it. We are scrambling through that crowd like mad, and we are in the clear. But we hear them squeaks behind us for a long time. They are follyin' the glowing footprints my bum is leaving to point the way.

He emptied the last bottle of beer, holding it upended for a long time waiting for the final laggard drop to detach itself. He stalled over his drink, waiting for me to ask him what happened, so I did. He put on his most wounded expression, and I knew then that he'd suffered a mortal blow—to his purse.

Yeah, we got away, I made my bum trun away his flashy shoes so they couldn't track us by them. We walked all the way back to Neopolis, the people city. All kinds of plain and fancy rumors beat us there, so the Colony Cops put us in protective custody until they got the straight story.

Nobody ever saw another Martian. It seems that they got some trick notions about themselves.

They are proud because they can walk on the ground and don't have to fly, so they got a hearty contempt for things that fly, like them insects which they used for house lights.

Now, them insects is dopes too and would give anything if they could walk like the Martians. And the Martians know the insects can think a little, and it makes them feel good to have the insects looking up to them. Lord knows nobody else does.

So when my bum lifted their bum up in the air and spun him around like a pinwheel it was a big insult to them. They took it that my bum was as much as telling them that he didn't think they was any better than them insects flying around over the ring. And the insects took it as a invite to come down and try the Martians racket so that's why they all flop into the ring and the lights go out. They was trying to walk.

That's more than the Martians can take. They swarm into the ring and kill all the insects. They'da killed us too, but I got smart brains and we didn't hang around asking for it.

And now they won't have nothing to do with no people from Earth on account of they have lost so much smooch, the way they look at it.

We got no take from that bout. And the Colony Administrator lifts all our scratch—said we'd gummed up Martian trade and he'da trun us in the clink too only he didn't want to see no more of us. He wouldn'ta even give us fare back to Earth except he said he didn't want us anywhere on Mars.

"So that," the little promoter concluded sadly, "is why I don't like Mars and rasslin' and Martian Mules and people who talk about such things." His beady eyes flicked a baleful glance at Sherry, who hovered nearby on the chance that he'd stop talking and give her an inning.

Hoiman stood up, carefully shook the bottles to be sure that they were empty, extracted a cigarette from the pack he'd stuck into his pocket, and used my lighter again. He hefted it carefully, reluctantly putting it back on the table. Then his little black eyes swivelled to the last piece of potato on my plate—the piece he'd spared in previous raids.

"What's the matter with them fries?" he asked.

It disappeared into his mouth and he went away, munching, a dingy little man padding along on silent, predatory feet.

He'd scarcely slipped out through the door when Sherry moved in.

"Is he really a wrestler, Larry?" she asked breathlessly.

"Him?" Even Sherry, vintage Vine Streeter that she was, should have got the pitch. "The only thing," I told her solemnly, "that Hoiman ever got a hammerlock on was a dollar bill!"

But Sherry wasn't listening, "Don't you just *love* wrestling?"

I let my eyes have a treat, taking their time as they went over that classy chassis. Then I said it. Fervently.

"Any time, Sherry! Any time."

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HOIMAN AND THE SOLAR CIRCUIT ***

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