

MASTON: (*excited, encouraging*) True! So we'll just keep our expectations realistic.

PENROSE: Yes! Think of it as... (*shooting a glance at MASTON's calculations on the chalkboard*) a calculated risk!

MASTON: (*sweetly*) I don't mind the odds, if you don't.

(*PENROSE smiles and takes his arm. THEY exit, sneaking glances at each other. Lights shift. MASTON enters again quickly and the room is reset by BARBICANE, PENROSE, and the CLUB MEMBERS. Lights return as before, indicating the start of a new day.*)

MASTON: (*to audience*) October 13th. The planning continues.

BARBICANE: Now then, let us turn to the question of the cannon. General Morgan, I believe you can enlighten us?

MORGAN: Thank you. I was on the Experiment Committee during the war, and can confirm that the highest velocity cannon shot was achieved by our own Captain Barbicane at the Union testing fields outside of New York City two years ago. Twenty-four hundred feet per second, I believe!

MASTON: However, the Columbiad I designed last year would have bested that by twenty percent, if it hadn't burst... (*HE gingerly feels his head plate.*)

BARBICANE: (*assuaging*) Yes, but it did burst. In any case, we need to achieve an escape velocity of fifteenfold my record.

BLOOMSBURY: What if we scaled up Maston's design?

MASTON: We'd need to make the cannon half a mile long!

MORGAN: Come Maston, you're going too far.

MASTON: An artilleryman is like a cannonball: he can never go too far!

BARBICANE: No, J.T.'s figures are correct-

MASTON: Ha!

BARBICANE: *If* we were trying to go to war with the Moon. However, we merely need our cannonball to make it there, not obliterate its surface.

MASTON: In that case (*grumpily calculating*) a 900-foot Columbiad-style cannon would suffice. But it won't have the same panache!

BILSBY: Given our expensive projectile, I suppose the cannon will be made of platinum?

MASTON: Don't be ridiculous. *(smiling at the thought of his favorite material)* Cast iron!

BLOOMSBURY: But how will it be cast?

BARBICANE: We'll cast it in the earth, of course! Sink it into the ground, pointed straight at the Moon!

PENROSE: Is that safe?

(ALL turn and look at PENROSE. A beat of uncomfortable silence.)

PENROSE: I mean... couldn't it burst or cause some kind of damage?

BARBICANE: *(chuckling)* Sounds like you've been reading too much from Captain Nicholl.

PENROSE: Well, it *is* a concern, isn't it?

BARBICANE: Not if we make the walls six feet thick... and use the appropriate propellant!

BILSBY & BLOOMSBURY: Our favorite part!

BLOOMSBURY: My sister and I have just the thing. A little side project of our own-

BILSBY: We've been saving it for a suitable occasion-

MORGAN: Well?

BLOOMSBURY: Peroxylated nitrocellulose!

PENROSE: *(Beat. A little self-consciously.)* Which is...?

BILSBY: An enhanced form of guncotton.

BLOOMSBURY: We'll need *(consulting notes)* around four hundred thousand pounds of cotton-

BILSBY: Which would fill a 200-foot stack within the bore of the cannon.

MASTON: Seems a little short...

BARBICANE: For the last time, Maston, we're not trying to *destroy* the Moon!

MASTON: *(waving HIM back, placating)* Yes, alright...

MORGAN: *(to BILSBY and BLOOMSBURY)* Any drawbacks?

BILSBY: As always, expense.