

JOURNALIST 2: *Boston Herald*, ma'am. What about water?

ARDAN: Have you heard of the Italian astronomer Schiaparelli's recent discoveries of the *canali* on Mars? I think it's reasonable to assume something similar holds on the Moon.

PUBLIC 1: (*in awe*) Do you believe the Moon to be inhabited?

ARDAN: What better way to find out than to go there and see?

(*The CROWD, especially the PUBLIC, applauds with glee.*)

JOURNALIST 3: *Engineering Weekly*. I'll leave the practicalities of life on the Moon to you and your astronomical colleagues. My question's for the Gun Club. What of the trip itself?

MASTON: (*standing, somewhat snappishly*) What of it?

JOURNALIST 3: (*slightly taken aback*) W- well, how will you actually land on the Moon?

MASTON: (*pointedly to BARBICANE*) Another *excellent* question...

BARBICANE: Well... we could make use of small thrusters mounted into the side of the capsule, and after reaching the first Lagrange point, begin the counterthrust-

ARDAN: Impey, you're putting the poor man to sleep.

BARBICANE: More poetically, I guess you could say that after launching the projectile from a massive cannon, Ms. Ardan might slow the projectile by firing miniature cannons mounted into the sides of the shell.

MASTON: Further questions?

CROWD: (*bursting with questions, ad lib.*) Can it all be done in time? Is it true you designed the new projectile yourself? What do you think the Moon will be like?

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NICHOLL: (*cutting through the feverish din*) You fools!

(*The CROWD grows restless. ALL look around in confusion, trying to identify the speaker. After a beat, NICHOLL continues and rises from his chair dramatically. HE wears a hat and dark glasses, obscuring his identity.*)

NICHOLL: (*continuing, commanding the room's attention*) This woman will not survive the first second of the journey! If the capsule doesn't melt, explode, misfire, or fail in any one of a thousand ways, the force of the cannon shot itself will prove fatal.

(*The rumble of the concerned CROWD swells again.*)

ARDAN: *(over the CROWD, gaining control again)* If my gracious questioner will permit, I will defer to these very capable engineers, who I am sure can find a solution to the problem of the initial thrust.

NICHOLL: *(getting angrier)* By all means. It is not on you that I lay the blame for your senseless death that will neither serve science nor advance mankind.

ARDAN: *(getting angry also)* Monsieur-

NICHOLL: *(his voice rising)* That responsibility lies with another.

ARDAN: *(thunderously)* Who?

NICHOLL: The man who organized this whole absurd, impossible project! Who has deluded the country, nay, the world! Who even now sits before us, too proud to admit his imminent failure!

BARBICANE: *(rising from his seat, stern, but deadly in his measured politeness)* Who is it that addresses me? Identify yourself.

NICHOLL: *(getting hysterical)* You know precisely who I am! *(HE removes his hat and dark glasses.)* Captain Nicholl!

*(ALL gasp.)*

NICHOLL: *(continuing, spitting his words out)* And I denounce you, Barbicane! You and your cursed project.

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*(The CROWD grows frenzied.)*

BARBICANE: *(quieting the CROWD)* Order! *(to NICHOLL, calm outwardly, but burning)* I see. Let us talk later and we can discuss our differences. I will find you. *(walking off the dais, barely keeping it together)* Maston, handle any other questions.

CROWD: *(exploding with questions, ad lib.)* Do you have a response? What's going to happen? Is what Nicholl's saying true? What will Barbicane do now?

*(MASTON and ARDAN are unsure what just happened, MASTON struggling to retain his composure in the face of the onslaught.)*

PENROSE: Will Barbicane offer a rebuttal?

MASTON: No comment.

JOURNALIST 1: What kind of powder are you using?

MASTON: That's classified.