

CLASSICS TO GO

**ROCKET SUMMER
AND TWO MORE STORIES**

RAY BRADBURY

Rocket Summer

And two more stories

Ray Bradbury

Content

1. [Rocket Summer](#)
2. [Jonah of the Jove-Run](#)
3. [Pillar of Fire](#)

Rocket Summer

The first great rocket flight into space, bearing intrepid pioneers to the Moon. The world's ecstasy flared into red mob-hate when President Stanley canceled the flight. How did he get that way?

The crowd gathered to make a curious noise this cold grey morning before the scheduled Birth. They arrived in gleaming scarlet tumble-bugs and yellow plastic beetles, yawning and singing and ready. The Birth was a big thing for them.

He stood alone up in his high office tower window, watching them with a sad impatience in his grey eyes. His name was William Stanley, president of the company that owned this building and all those other work-hangars down on the tarmac, and all that landing field stretching two miles off into the Jersey mists. William Stanley was thinking about the Birth.

The Birth of *what?* Stanley's large, finely sculptured head felt heavier, older. Science, with a scalpel of intense flame would slash wide the skulls of engineers, chemists, mechanics in a titanic Caesarian, and out would come the Rocket!

"Yezzir! Yezzir!" he heard the far-off, faint and raucous declarations of the vendors and hawkers. "Buy ya Rocket Toys! Buy ya Rocket Games! Rocket Pictures! Rocket soap! Rocket teethers for the tiny-tot! Rocket, Rocket, Rocket! Hey!"

Shutting the open glassite frame before him, his thin lips drew tight. Morning after morning America sent her pilgrims to this shrine. They peered in over the translucent restraint barrier as if the Rocket were a caged beast.

He saw one small girl drop her Rocket toy. It shattered, and was folded under by the moving crowd's feet.

"Mr. Stanley?"

"Uh? Oh, Captain Greenwald. Sorry. Forgot you were here." Stanley measured his slow, thoughtful steps to his clean-topped desk. "Captain," he sighed wearily, "you're looking at the unhappiest man alive." He looked at Greenwald across the desk. "That Rocket is the gift of a too-generous science to a civilization of adult-children who've fiddled with dynamite ever since Nobel invented it. They—"

He got no further. The office door burst inward. A tall, work-grimed man strode swiftly in—all oil, all heat, all sunburnt, wrinkled leather skin. Rocket flame burnt in his dark, glaring eyes. He stopped short at Stanley's desk, breathing heavily, leaning against it.

Stanley noticed the wrench in the man's fist. "Hello, Simpson."

Simpson swore bitterly. "What's all this guff about you stopping the Rocket tomorrow?" he demanded.

Stanley nodded. "This isn't a good time for it to go up."

Simpson snorted. "This isn't a good time," he mimicked. Then he swore again. "By George, it's like telling a woman her baby's been still-born!"

"I know it's hard to understand—"

"Hard, *hell!*" shouted the man. "I'm Head Mechanic! I've worked two years! The others have worked, too! And the Rocket'll travel tomorrow or we'll know why!"

Stanley crushed out his cigar, inside his fist. The room swayed imperceptibly in his vision. Sometimes, one wanted to use a gun—he shook away the thought. He kept his tongue.

Simpson raged on. "Mr. Stanley, you have until three this afternoon to change your mind. We'll pull strings and you'll be out of your job by the week-end! If not—" and he said the next words very slowly, "how would your wife look with her head bashed in, *Mister Stanley?*"

"You can't threaten me!"

The door slammed in Stanley's face. Simpson was gone.

Captain Greenwald put out a manicured hand. On one slender finger shone a diamond ring. His wrist was circled by an expensive watch. His shiny brown eyes were invisibly cupped by contact lenses. Greenwald was past fifty inside; outside he seemed barely thirty. "I advise you to forget it, Stanley. Man's waited a million years for tomorrow."

Stanley's hand shook, lighting a cigarette. "Look here, Captain, where *are* you going?"

"To the stars, of course."

Stanley snapped out the alcohol match. "In the name of heaven, stop the melodrama and inferior semantics. What kind of thing is this you're handing the people? What'll it do to races, morals, men and women?"

Greenwald laughed. "I'm only interested in reaching the Moon. Then I'll come back to earth, and retire, happily, and die."

Stanley stood there, tall and very grey. "Does the effect of the introduction of the crossbow to English and French history interest you?"

"Can't say I know much about it."

"Do you recall what gunpowder's invention did to civilization?"

"That's irrelevant!"

"You must admit if there'd been some subjective planning with the auto and airplane, millions of lives would've been saved, and many wars prevented. An ethical code should've been written for all such inventions and strictly observed, or else the invention forfeited."

Greenwald shook his head, grinning. "I'll let you handle that half of it. I'll do the traveling. I'm willing to abide by any such rules, if you'll draw them up and enforce them. All I want is to reach the Moon first. I've got to get downstairs now. We're still loading the ship, you know, in spite of your decree. We expect to get around you somehow. I'm sympathetic, of course, to your beliefs. I'll do anything you say except ground the Rocket. I won't get violent, but I can't vouch for Simpson. He's a tough man, with strong notions."

They walked from the office to the dropper. Compression slid them down to ground level, where they stepped out, Stanley still re-emphasizing his beliefs. "—for centuries science has given humanity play-toys, ships, machines, guns, cars, and now a Rocket, all with supreme disregard for man's needs."

"Science," announced Greenwald as they emerged onto the tarmac, "has produced, via private enterprise, greater amounts of goods than ever in history! Why, consider the medical developments!"

"Yes," said Stanley doggedly, "we cure man's cancer and preserve his greed in a special serum. They used to say 'Starve a cold, stuff a fever.' Today's fever is materialism. All the things science has produced only touch the *Body*. When Science invents something to touch the *Mind*, I'll give it its due. No.

"You cloak your voyage with romantic terminology. Outward to the stars! you cry! Words! What's the *fact*? Why, *why* this rocket? Greater production? We have *that*! Adventure? Poor excuse to uproot Earth. Exploration? It *could* wait a few years. Lebensraum? Hardly. *Why*, then, Captain?"

"Eh?" murmured Greenwald distractedly. "Ah. Here's the Rocket, now."

They walked in the incredible Rocket shadow. Stanley looked at the crowd beyond the barrier. "*Look* at them. Their sex still a mixture of Victorian voodoo and clabbered Freud. With education needing reorientation, with wars threatening, with religion and philosophy confused, you want to jump off into space!"

Stanley shook his head. "Oh, I don't doubt your sincerity, Captain. I just say your timing's poor. If we give them a Rocket toy to play with, do you honestly think they'll solve war, education, unity, thought? Why, they'd propel themselves away from it so quickly your head'd swim! Wars would be fought between worlds. But if we want more wars, let's have them *here*, where we can get at their sources, before we leap to the asteroids seeking our lost pride of race.

"What little unity we *do* have would be broken by countries and individuals clamoring and cut-throating for planets and satellites!"

Pausing, Stanley saw the mechanics standing in the Rocket shadow, hating him. Outside the barrier, the crowd recognized him; their murmur grew to a roar of disapproval.

Greenwald indicated them. "They're wondering why you waited so long before deciding to stop the Rocket."

"Tell them I thought there'd be laws controlling it. Tell them the corporations played along, smiling and bobbing to me, until the Rocket was completed. Then they threw off their

false faces and withdrew the legislation only this morning. Tell them that, Captain. And tell them the legislation I planned would've meant a slow, intelligent Rocket expansion over an era of three centuries. Then ask them if they think any business man could wait even five *minutes*."

Captain Greenwald scowled. "All I want to do is prove it can be done. After I come back down, if I can help in any way to control the Rocket, I'm your man, Stanley. After I *prove* it's possible, I don't care what in hell happens...."

Stanley slid into his 'copter, waved morosely at the captain. The crowd shouted, waved its fists at him over the barrier. He sat watching their distorted, sullen faces. They detested him. The Rocket balloon man, the Rocket soap man, the tourists detested him.

What was more, when his son Tommy found out, Tommy would hate him, too.

He took his time, heading home. He let the green hills slide under. He set the automatic pilot and sank back into the sponge-softness, suspended in a humming, blissful dream. Music played. Cigarettes and whiskey were in reach if he desired them. Soft music. He could lapse back into the dreaming tide, dissolve worry, smoke, drink, chortle, luxuriously, sleep, forget, pull a shell of synthetic, hypnotizing objects in about himself.

And wake ten years from today with his wife disintegrating swiftly in his arms. And one day see his son's skull shattered against a plastic wall.

And his own heart whirled and burst by some vast atom power of a starship passing Earth far out in space!

He dumped the whiskey over the side, followed it with the cigarettes. Finally, he clicked off the soft music.