

# They'd Rather Be Right

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# The Forever Machine

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## Part I. Crazy Joey

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Joey pulled the covers up over his head, trying to shut out the whispers which filled the room. But even with the pillow over his head, their shrill buzz entered up through the roof of his mouth, tasting acrid and bitter, spinning around in his brain. Fingers in his ears simply made the words emerge from a sensation of cutting little lights into words.

It worries me, Madge, more and more, the way that boy carries on. I was hoping he'd outgrow it, but he don't."

His father's voice was deep and petulant, sounding from the pillow on his side of the bed there in the other room. "Hanging back, all the time. Not playing with the other kids, staying out of school, claiming the teachers don't like him. It ain't natural, Madge. I don't like it."

"Now you're working yourself up again, Bob." His mother's patient voice from her side of the bed cut across the deeper tones. "What good is it going to do you?"

"Did some good when I thrashed him." His father spoke sharply, and a little louder. Joey could hear the buzz of the voice itself coming through the walls. "Stopped him talking about whispers. I tell you, ain't gonna have a kid of mine acting crazy. I passed a bunch of the little brats on the way home tonight. 'There goes Crazy Joey's father,' I heard one of them say. I won't stand for it. Either Joe learns to stand up and be a real boy, or—"

"Or what, Bob?" His mother's voice had both defiance and fear in it.

"Or ... oh, I don't know what—" His father's voice trailed off in disgust. "Let's go to sleep, Madge. I'm tired."

Joey felt his mother's lift of hope. Perhaps she could keep awake a little longer, waiting for his deep breathing to assure her he was asleep, so she could move from her extreme edge of the bed and be more comfortable—without touching him.

The deep, rasping sensation of his father's weary hopelessness; desire, but not for her. Drab and uninteresting. He was still young enough, still a man; tied down tight to this drab.

The lighter, more delicate thought of his mother. She was still young enough, still hungered for romance. The vision of a green slope of hill, starred with white daisies, the wind blowing through her flowing hair, a young man striding on firm brown legs up the hill toward her, his sloping shoulder swinging with his stride. Tied to this *coarse* hulk *beside* her, instead.

The heavier rasp of thought demanded *attention*. Those girls flouncing down the hallway of the school; looking out of the corners of their eyes at the boys; conscious only of the returning speculative stares; unconscious of the old janitor who was carrying baskets of wastepaper down the hall behind them.

Joey buried his head deeper into the bed beneath his pillow. The visions were worse than the whispers. He did not fully understand them, but was overwhelmed by them, by a deep sense of shame that he had participated in them.

He tried to will his mind to leave the visions, and there leaped, with startling clarity, the vision of his father holding him down on the bed, a terrible rage in his face, shouting at him.

"How come you know how I looked at those two girls in the hall at school? You spying little sneak!" The blows. The horror. The utter confusion.

And the imaginings were worse than the visions. So clear, so intricately clear, they became memories. Memories as sharp and clear as any other reality. Eight-year-old Joey could not yet know the reasoned verbalization: an imaginary experience can have as profound an effect upon personal development as a real one. He knew only that it was so.

But he must never tell about this beating, must never tell anyone. Others wouldn't have any such memory and they would say he was crazy. He must store it away, with all the other things he had

stored away. It was hard to keep remembering which were the ones others could remember, and which were his alone. Each was as real as the other, and that was the only distinction.

Sometimes he forgot, and talked about the wrong things. Then they called him a little liar. To keep away from that he always had to go into their minds first, and that was sometimes a terrible and frightening thing; their memories were not the same as his, and often hard to recognize.

Then it was morning. The whispers were all about him again. In half-awake reverie, he shuddered over the imagined beating he had received. He twisted and turned under the covers, trying to escape the *also twisting* threads of thought between his father and mother in the kitchen. The threads became ropes; gray-green and alive; affection turned resentment coiling and threatening; held back from striking only by hopelessness. *He stared into the gray morning light seeping in* around the shade at his window. He tried to trace the designs on the wallpaper, but they, too, became twisting worms of despair. And transferred again into the memory of the beating. Involuntarily, a sob escaped his throat aloud.

“Madge!” This was no whisper, but his father shouting at his mother. “That kid is in there sniveling again. I’ll give him something to bawl about.” The sudden terrible rage was a dead black smothering blanket.

“Bob!” The sharp fear in his mother’s voice stopped the tread of feet across the kitchen floor, changing the rage back to hopelessness.

He felt his father go away from his door, back to his place at the table. He felt the sudden surge of resolution in his father.

“Madge. I’m going to talk to Dr. Ames this morning. He gets in early. He’s the head of the psychology department. I’m going to talk to him about Joey.”

Joey could feel the shame of his father at such a revelation. The shame of saying, “Dr. Ames, do you think my son is crazy?”

“What good will that do?” His mother’s voice was resentful, fearful; afraid of what the doctor might say.

“I’ll tell him all about Joey. He gives loony tests, and I’m going to find out about—”

“Bob! Saying such a thing about your own son. It’s—it’s sinful!” His mother’s voice was high, and her chair creaked as she started to move from her side of the table.

“Take it easy, Madge,” his father warned her. “I’m not saying he’s crazy, mind you. I just want to get to the bottom of it. I want to know. I want a normal boy.” Then, desperately: “Madge, I just want a boy!” The frustration, the disappointment welled over Joey as if it were his own.

“I’ll talk to the doctor,” his father was continuing, reasoning with her. “I’ll try to get him to see Joey. I’m janitor of his building, and he shouldn’t charge me anything. Maybe he’ll see you and Joey this afternoon. I’ll call you on the phone if he will. You be ready to take Joey up there if I should call.” The voice was stern, unbending.

“Yes, Bob.” His mother recognized the inflexibility of the decision.

“Where’s my lunch pail, then?” his father asked. “I’ll get to work early, so I can have a talk with Dr. Ames before class time.”

“On the sink, Bob. Where it always is,” his mother answered patiently.

The sudden rage again. Always is. Always is. That’s the trouble, Madge. Everything always is. Just like *yesterday*, and *the day before*. That’s why it’s all so hopeless. *But the bitterness* switched suddenly to pity.

“Don’t worry so, Madge.” There was a tone of near affection in his father’s voice. Belated consideration. Joey felt his father move around the table, pat his mother awkwardly on the shoulder. But still the little yellow petals of affection were torn and consumed by the gray-green worms of resentment.

“Bob—” His mother spoke to the closing door. The footsteps, heavy, went on down the back steps of their house, each a soundless impact upon Joey’s chest.

Joey felt his mother start toward his room. Hastily he took the pillow from over his head, pulled the blanket up under his chin, dropped his chin and jaw, let his mouth open in the relaxation of deep sleep and breathed slowly. He hoped he could will away the welts of the belt blows before she would see them. With all his might he willed the welts away, and the angry blue bruises of his imagination. And the signs of the terrible consequences of what might have been.

He felt her warm tenderness as she opened his door. Now the lights were warm and shining, clear and beautiful, unmuddied by any resentments. He felt the tenderness flow outward from her, and wrapped it around him to clear away the bruises. He willed back the tears of relief, and lay in apparent deep sleep. He felt her kneel down by his bed, and heard the whispers in her mind.

“My poor little different boy. You’re *all I’ve got*. I don’t care what they say, Joey. I don’t care what they say.” Joey felt the throb of grief arise in her throat, choked back, the tremendous effort to smile at him, to make her voice light and carefree.

“Wake up, Joey,” she called, and shook his shoulder lightly. “It’s morning, darling.” There was a bright play in her voice, the gladness of morning itself. “Time all little fellows were up and doing.”

He opened his eyes, and her face was sweet and tender. No one but a Joey could have read the apprehension and dread which lay behind it.

“I sure slept sound,” he said boisterously. “I didn’t even dream.”

“Then you weren’t crying a while ago?” she asked in hesitant puzzlement.

“Me, Mom? Me?” he shouted indignantly. “What could there be to cry about?”

The campus of Steiffel University was familiar to Joey from the outside. He knew the winding paths, the stretches of lawn, the green trees, the white benches nestled in shaded nooks. The other kids loved to hide in the bushes at night and listen to the young men and women talking. They snickered about it on the school playground all the time. Joey had tried it once, but had refused to go back again. These were thoughts he did not want to see—tender, urgent thoughts so precious that they belonged to no one else except the people feeling them.

But now walking up the path, leading to the psychology building with his mother, he could feel only her stream of thought.

“Oh I pray, dear God, I pray that the doctor won’t find anything wrong with Joey. Dear God ... dear God ... don’t let them find anything wrong with

Joey. They might want to take him away, shut him up somewhere. I couldn’t bear it. I couldn’t live. Dear God ... oh dear God—”

Joey’s thought darted down another bypath of what might be, opened by his mother’s prayer. He willed away the constriction in his throat.

“This is interesting, Mom,” he exclaimed happily. “Pop is always talking about it. But I’ve never been inside the building of a college before. Have you?”

“No, son,” she said absently. Thank heaven he doesn’t know. “Joey—” she said suddenly, and faltered.

He could read the thought in her mind. Don’t let them find anything wrong with you. Try not to talk about whispers, or imagination, or

“What, Mom?” It was urgent to get her away from her fear again.

“Joey ... er ... are you afraid?”

“No, Mom,” he answered scornfully. “Course not. It’s just another school, that’s all. A school for big kids.”

He could feel his father watching them through a basement window, waiting for them to start up the steps of the building. Waiting to meet them in the front hall, to take them up to Dr. Ames's study. He could feel the efforts his father was making to be casual and normal about it all; Bob Carter, perhaps only a janitor, but a solid citizen, independently proud. Didn't everyone call him "Mr. Carter"? Recognize his dignity?

Joey's father, with his dignity upon him, met them at the doorway of the building; looked furtive and quickly at the rusty black clothing of his wife, inadvertently comparing the textiles of her old suit to the rich materials the coeds wore with such careless style.

"You look right nice, Madge," he said heavily, to reassure her, and took her arm gallantly. When they had reached the second floor, up the broad stairs, he turned to Joey.

"I've been telling the professors how bright you are, Joey. They want to talk to you." He chuckled agreeably.

Pop, don't laugh like that. I know you're ashamed. But don't lie to me. Pop, I know.

"Just answer all their questions, Joey," his father was saying. "Be truthful." He emphasized the word again, "Truthful, I said."

"Sure, Pop," Joey answered dutifully; knowing his father hoped he wouldn't be truthful—and that his mother might die if he were. He wondered if he might hear the whisperings from the professor's minds. What if he couldn't hear! How would he know how to answer them, if he couldn't hear the whispers! Maybe he couldn't hear, wouldn't know how to answer, and then his mother would die!

His face turned pale, and he felt as if he were numb; in a dull dead trance as they walked down the hall and into a study off one of the big classrooms.

"This here is my wife and my son, Dr. Martin," his father was saying. Then to Joey's mother: "Dr. Martin is Dr. Ames's assistant."

The boy is very frightened. The thought came clearly and distinctly to Joey from the doctor's mind.

"Not any more," Joey said, and didn't realize until it was done that he had exclaimed it aloud in his relief. He could hear!

"I beg your pardon, Joey?" Dr. Martin turned from greeting his mother and looked with quick penetration into Joey's eyes. His own sharp blue eyes had exclamation points in them, accented by his raised blond brows in a round face.

"*But of course he is* Dr. Ames's assistant," his father corrected him heartily, with an edge behind the words. *You little fool, you're starting in to demonstrate already.*

That isn't what the boy meant. Dr. Martin was racing the thought through his mind. I had the thought that the boy was frightened, and he immediately said he wasn't. All the pathologic symptoms of fright disappeared instantly, too. Yes. Put into the matrix of the telepath, all the things Bob Carter told us this morning about him would fit. I hadn't considered that. And I know that old fool Dr. Ames would never consider it.

If there ever was a closed mind against ESP, he's got it. Orthodox psychology?

"We will teach nothing here but orthodox psychology, Dr. Martin," Ames had said. "It is the duty of some of us to insist a theory be proved through time and tradition. *We will not rush down every side path, accepting theories as unsubstantial as the tobacco smoke which subsidizes them.*"

So much for ESP. Well, even Rhine says that the vast body of psychology, in spite of all the evidence, still will not accept the fact of ESP.

But if this kid were a telepath—a true telepath. If by any chance he were ... If his remark and the disappearance of the fear symptoms were not just coincidence!

But another Ames's admonition dampened his elation. "Our founder, Jacob Steiffel, was a wise man. He *believed in progress, Martin, as do I. But progress through conservative proof.* Let other

play the fool, our job is to preserve the bastions of scientific solidity!”

“Dr. Ames has not arrived yet,” he said suddenly to Joey’s parents .. “He’s been called to the office of the university president. But, in the meantime, leave the boy with me. There’s preliminary work to do, and I’m competent to do that.” He realized the implications of bitterness in his remark, and reassured himself that these people were not so subtle as to catch it.

“I got work to do anyhow,” Joey’s father said. His relief was apparent, that he would not be required to stand by, and he was using it to play the part of the ever faithful servant.

“Here’s a room where you may wait, Mrs. Carter,” Dr. Martin said to Joey’s mother. He opened the door and showed her in to a small waiting room. “There are magazines. Make yourself quite comfortable. This may take an hour or so,”

“Thank you, Doctor.” It was the first time she had spoken, and her voice contained the awe and respect she felt. A thread of resentment, too. It wasn’t fair; some had so many advantages to go to college. Others—But the resentment was drowned out in the awe and respect. These were not just ordinary doctors. They *taught* doctors!

She sat tentatively on the edge of a wooden chair; the hardest one in the room. The worn red feathers in her hat drooped, but her back remained straight.

Joey felt the doctor thinking, “Relax, woman! We’re not going to skin him alive!” But he merely closed the door. Joey could still see her sitting there, through the closed door; not relaxing, not reaching for a magazine. Her lips were pulled tight against her teeth to keep her prayer from showing. “Dear God, oh, dear God—”

Dr. Martin came back over from closing the door, and led Joey to a chair near the bookcase.

“Now, you just sit down there and relax, Joey. We’re not going to hurt you. We’re just going to visit a little, and ask you some questions.” But his mind was darting in and out around his desires. I should better start in on routine IQ tests, leave the Rorschach for Ames. Now that it’s standard, he’ll use it. Leave word association for him, too. That’s his speed. Maybe I should give the multiphasic; no, better leave that for Ames. He’ll discredit it, but it’ll make him feel very modern and up-to-date to use it. I mustn’t forget I’m just the errand boy around here. I wish / could run the Rhine ESP deck on the boy, but if Ames came in and caught me at it—”

The office phone rang, and Martin picked it up hurriedly. It was the president’s office calling.

“Dr. Ames asked me to tell you he will be tied up for almost an hour,” the operator said disinterestedly. “The patient will just have to wait.”

“Thank you,” Martin said slowly. Joey felt his lift of spirit. I can run a few samples of the Rhine cards. I just have to know. I wish I could get away from this place, into a school where there’s some latitude for research. I wish Marion weren’t so tied down here with her family and that little social group she lords it over. “My husband is assistant to the dean of psychology!” That’s much more important to her than any feeling I’ve got of frustration. If I quit here, and got into a place where I could work, really work, it would mean leaving this town. Marion wouldn’t go. She’s a big frog in a little puddle here. And still tied to her parents—and I’m tied to Marion. If anybody needs psych help, I can do. I wish I had the courage—”

Joey, as frequently with adults, could not comprehend all the words and sentences, but the somatic indecision and despair washed over him, making him gasp for breath.

Martin went over to a desk, with sudden resolution, and from far back in a drawer he pulled out a thin deck of cards.

“We’re going to play a little game first, Joey,” he said heartily, as he sat down at his desk and pulled a sheet of paper toward him. “There are twenty-five cards here. Five of them have a circle, five a star, a wavy line, a cross, a rectangle. Do you know what a rectangle is, Joey?”

Joey didn’t, but the vision of a square leaped into his mind.

“Yes, sir,” Joey said. “It’s a sort of square.”

“That’s right,” Martin said approvingly, making a mental note that the boy shouldn’t have known the word, and did. “Now I’m going to look at a card, one at a time, and then you guess what kind of an image there is on it. I’ll write down what the card really shows, and what you say it is, and then we’ll see how many you get right.”

Too short a time! Too short a time! But maybe long enough to be significant. If I should just get a trace. All right, suppose you do? The question was ironic in his mind. He picked up the first card and looked at it, holding it carefully so that Joey would have no chance to *see the face of it*.

A circle leaped with startling clarity into Joey’s mind. And the circle contained the image of Joey’s mother, sitting on the edge of her chair in the other room, praying over and over, “Don’t let them find anything wrong with him. Don’t let them find—”

“Square,” Joey said promptly. He felt the tinge of disappointment in Martin’s mind as he recorded the true and the false. Not a perfect telepath, anyway.

“All right, Joey,” Martin responded verbally. “Next card.”

“Did I get that one right?” Joey asked brightly.

“I’m not supposed to tell you,” Martin answered. “Not until the end of the game.” Well, the boy showed normal curiosity. Didn’t seem to show too much anxiety, which sometimes damped down the ESP factor. He picked up the next card. Joey saw it contained a cross.

“Star,” he said positively.

“Next card,” Martin said.

It was in the nineteenth card that Joey sensed a new thought in Martin’s mind. There was a rising excitement. Not one of them had been correct. Rhine says a negative result can be as revealing as a positive one. He should get every fifth card correctly. Five out of the twenty-five to hit the law of averages. Martin picked up the twentieth card and looked at it. It was a wavy line.

“Wavy line,” Joey answered. He felt the disappointment again in Martin’s mind, this time because he had broken the long run of incorrectness.

The twenty-first card was a star.

“Star,” Joey said.

And the next three were equally correct. Joey had called five out of the twenty-five correctly, as the law of averages required. The pattern was a bit strange. What would the laws of chance say to a pattern such as this? Try it again.

“Let’s try it again,” he suggested.

“You were supposed to tell me how I did at the end of the game,” Joey prompted.

“You were correct on five of them, Joey,” Martin said, noncommittally.

“Is that pretty good?” Joey asked anxiously.

“Average,” Martin said, and threw him a quick look. Wasn’t that eagerness to please just a bit overdone? “Just average. Let’s try it again.”

This time Joey did not make the mistake of waiting until the end of the deck before he called the correct cards. The doctor had said every fifth card should be called correctly. Joey did not understand statistical language. Dutifully, he called every fifth card correctly. Four wrong, one right. And again, the rising excitement near the twentieth card. Again, what are the laws of chance that the boy would call four wrong, one right, again and again, in perfect order?

Joey promptly called two of them right together. And felt Martin’s disappointment. The pattern had been broken again. And then a rise of excitement, carefully suppressed.

“Let’s run them again,” Martin said. And he whispered *strongly to himself*. “This time he must call every other one of them right, in order to pass as just an average boy.”



Joey was bewildered. There seemed to be a double thought in Martin's mind, a tenseness he could not understand. ~~He wavered, and then doubtfully, doubting he was doing the right thing, he began to~~ call every other card correctly.

Halfway through the deck Martin laid the cards down. Joey caught the flash of undisguised elation in his mind, and sank back into his own chair in despair. He had done it wrong.

"O.K., Joey," Martin said quietly. There was a smile of tender bitterness around his lips. "I don't know what the idea is. You've got your reasons, and they must be pretty terrible ones. Do you think you could talk to me? Tell me about it?"

"I don't know what you mean, Dr. Martin," Joey lied. Perhaps if he didn't admit anything

"In trying to avoid a pattern, Joey, you made one. Just as soon as I realized you were setting up an unusual pattern, you immediately changed it. Every time. But that, too, is a pattern." And then he asked, quite dryly, "Or am I talking over your head?"

"Yes, sir," Joey said. "I guess you are." But he had learned. The whole concept of patterned response as against random response leaped from Martin's mind into his. "Maybe if I tried it again," he asked hopefully. At all costs he must get the idea out of Martin's mind that there was anything exceptional about him. This time, and forever afterwards, he knew he could avoid any kind of pattern. Just one more chance.

"I don't blame you, Joey," Martin answered sadly. "If you've looked into my mind, well, I don't blame you. Here we are. You're a telepath and afraid to reveal it. I'm a psychologist, supposed to be, and I'm afraid to investigate it. A couple of fellows who caught the tiger by the tail, aren't we, Joey? Looks as if we'd better kind of protect one another, doesn't it?"

"Yes, sir," Joey answered and tried to hold back the tears of relief. "You won't even tell me about my mother? What about my father?" He already knew that Martin didn't dare tell Ames.

"I won't tell anybody, Joey," Martin answered sadly. "I've got to hang onto my job. And in this wise and mighty institution we believe only in orthodox psychology. What you have, Joey, simply doesn't exist. Dr. Ames says so, and Dr. Ames is always right. No, Joey," he sighed, "I'm not likely to tell anybody."

"Maybe he'll trick me like you did," Joey said doubtfully, but without resentment. "Maybe with that ink-blot thing, or that 'yes' and 'no' pile of little cards."

Martin glanced at him quickly.

"You're quite perfect at it, aren't you?" He framed it a question and made it a statement. "You go beyond the words to the actual thought image itself. No, Joey, in that case I don't think he will. I think you can keep ahead of him."

"I don't know," Joey said doubtfully. "It's all so new. So many new things to think about all at once."

"I'll try to be in the room with you and him,"

Martin promised. "I'll think of the normal answer each time. He won't look very deep. He never does. He already knows all the answers."

"Thank you, sir." Joey said, and then, "I won't tell on you, either."

"O.K., Joey. We'd better be finishing the IQ test when he comes in. He's about due now. I suppose you'd better grade around a hundred. And you'd better miss random questions, so as not to show any definite pattern, for him to grab onto. All right, here goes. Tell me what is wrong with this statement —"

The tests were over. Joey sat quietly in his chair watching Dr. Martin grade papers at his desk, watching him trying not to think about Joey. He watched his mother in the waiting room, still sitting on the edge of her chair, where she had been for the last two hours, without moving, her eyes close

her lips still drawn tight. He watched Dr. Ames, sitting in his own office, absently shuffling papers around, comparing the values of the notes he had taken on Joey's reaction.

But the nearer turmoil in Dr. Martin's mind all but drowned out the fear of his mother, the growing disgust of Dr. Ames.

"It's a choice between Joey and holding my job. No matter how secretly I worked, Ames would find out. Once you're fired from a school, it's almost impossible to get a comparable job. All this subversive business, this fear of investigating anything outside the physical sciences that isn't strictly orthodox. No matter what explanation was given out, they'd suspect me of subversion. Oh Marion! Marion! Why can't I count on you to stand beside me? Or am I just using you as an excuse? Would you have the courage even if there were no Marion?"

He rubbed his hand across his eyes, as if to shut out the vision of a world where there was no Marion. He replaced it with a world where constant fear of becoming grist for some politician's publicity ground all research to a halt. He had quite forgotten that Joey was sitting across the room and could follow at least the somatics of his thought.

Consciously he shoved the problem into the background, and made himself concentrate on the words of the student's paper before him. The words leaped into startling clarity, for they were a reflection of his own train of thought.

*"... it becomes apparent then that just as physical science varies its techniques from one material to the next to gain maximum result, psychology must obtain an equal willingness to become flexible. I suggest that objective physical science methodology will never permit us to know a man; that such methodology limits us merely to knowing about a man. I suggest that an entirely new science, perhaps through somatics and methodology derived therefrom, must be our approach."*

Dr. Martin shoved the paper away from him. Must warn that student. His entire train of thought was a violation of orthodox psychology. Ames would crucify the boy if he ever saw this paper. Did he dare warn the boy? Students show so little caution or ethics. He could hear him now down at the milkshake hangout.

"Martin told me to soft-pedal my thinking if I wanted to get a grade."

And the answering chorus from all around the room, the Tannenbaum chant:

"Oh, Steiffel U will stifle you,  
We all must think as granddads do!"

Best just to give the student a failing grade on the paper, and let him draw his own conclusion. Gotta be orthodox.

With his thumb and fingers he pulled the flesh of his forehead into a heavy crease, grinding between his fingers, taking pleasure that the pain of the flesh lessened the pain of his spirit. If only that kid had never shown up here!

His thought stream was interrupted in Joey's mind by the scene now taking place in the waiting room. Dr. Ames had taken a chair beside Joey's mother.

"Oh no, no, no, no, Mrs. Carter," he was saying consolingly. "Don't be so frightened. There's absolutely nothing wrong with your boy. Nothing at all—yet. I've never tested a more average boy."

Characteristically, he had overlooked the most vital point, a point also forgotten by Martin when he was thinking of the proper answers for Joey to give—that no boy can possibly be as average as Joey had graded. It never occurred to him that mean average is a statistical concept in psychology, never to be found in one individual.

"Notice I said 'yet,' Mrs. Carter," Ames said heavily. "He's an only child, isn't he?"

~~"Yes," Joey's mother barely breathed the word. Her fear had not abated. She knew that doctors sometimes did not tell all the truth. In the soap operas they always started out comfortingly, and only gradually let you know the terrible truth.~~

"I thought so," Ames said with finality. "And as with many one-child families, you've spoiled him. Spoiled him so dreadfully that now you must take stern measures. "

"He's all I've got, Doctor," she said hesitantly.

"All the more reason why you want him to grow up into a strong, solid man. A man such as your husband, for example. A child is a peculiar little entity, Mrs. Carter. The more attention you give him the more he wants."

He continued the development of his theme inexorably.

"Their bodies can be little, but their egos can be enormous. They learn little tricks for getting attention. And then they add to these with others. They're insatiable little monsters. They never get enough. Once they get you under their thumb, they'll ride you to death. They'll try anything, anything at all to get special attention, constant attention. That's what has happened to your Joey."

"I'm not sure I understand, Doctor."

"Well, Mrs. Carter, to put it bluntly, Joey has been pretending, telling lies, deliberately keeping you worried and fearful so that you will give him more attention. He hasn't been able to fool his father so well, so in line with Oedipus complex, he set about to win you away from his father, to come between you. Your husband is a fine man, a good worker; but your son wants to make you turn against your husband so he will get all of your attention."

He was enjoying the development of his logic, sparing no impact upon her.

"And it could be bad for the boy. Too much attention is like too much candy. It makes them sick. He pulled an ancient trick upon her, deliberately confusing her to impress her with the gravity, and his knowledge. "If this continues, the boy could easily become a catatonic schizophrenic!"

Joey's mother shrank back, her eyes opening wide. The horror of the unknown was worse than the reality might be.

"What is that, Doctor?"

The doctor, gratified by her reaction, pulled another ancient one.

"Well ... er ... without the proper background ... er ... well, in layman's language, Mrs. Carter, we might roughly define it as an incurable form of insanity."

"Oh, no, no! Not my Joey!"

The doctor leaned back in his chair. In this changing world of thought anarchy, it was good to see there were some who still retained the proper respect, placed the proper value upon the words of a man of science. These flip kids he got in his classes these days; this younger generation! Without respect that flip kid he'd had to get expelled.

"Just give us the facts, Doctor, and let us draw our own conclusions. Yours haven't worked so well."

Yes, it was gratifying to see there were still some who recognized a man of position.

"But you can prevent it, Mrs. Carter." He leaned forward again. "Joey is eight, now. No longer a baby. It is time he began to be a little man. He plays hooky from school, says the teachers don't like him. Why, Mrs. Carter, when I was eight, I got up before daylight, did my farm chores without complaint, and walked two miles through the snow for the wonderful privilege of going to school!"

"Now here is what you must do. You must regard this just as you would a medical prescription with full knowledge of the penalty if you do not use the prescription: You must stop mothering him. Stop catering to him. Pay no attention to his tricks. Let his father take over, Mrs. Carter. The bo

needs a strong man's hand.

~~“He must be forced to play with the other boys. A black eye never hurt a boy, now and then, a real boy. Your boy must get in there and scrap it out with the rest of them, gain his place among them, just as he will have to scrap later to gain his place in society.”~~

A sigh, almost a sob, escaped her. A doctor knows. And this doctor *teaches* doctors. Relief from tension, fear of the terrible words the doctor had said; and then a growing anger, anger at herself, anger at Joey. He had tricked her. Her son had lied to her, betrayed her love, pretended all sorts of terrible things just to worry her. She stood up suddenly, her face white with grief-rage.

“Thank you, Doctor. Thank you so much. I'm sorry we took up your time.” Her humiliation was complete.

“No thanks needed, Mrs. Carter. Glad to help.

We've caught it in time. If it had been allowed to go on a little longer—”

He left the phrase hanging in the air, ominously. He patted her arm in a fatherly fashion, and turned absently away, dismissing her.

Joey saw her open the door into the room where he was sitting.

“Come, Joey,” she said firmly.

Dr. Martin did not look up from the papers he was now grading with furious speed, furious intensity, slashing angrily with his blue pencil at any thought variant from the orthodox. But even while he checked, circled, questioned, the thought crept into his mind.

“I could write an anonymous letter to Dr. Billings of—yes, that's the thing to do. It's out of my hands then. If Billings chooses to ignore the follow-up, that's his business.”

Joey followed his mother out of the room and down the hall. She walked ahead of him, rapidly, her eyes blazing with anger and humiliation, not caring whether he followed her or not.

In one corner of the schoolyard, the boys were playing ball. Joey knew they saw him coming down the sidewalk, alone, but they pointedly paid no attention to him.

He did not try to join them. Even though they were not looking at him, he could hear the hateful refrain singing through their minds.

Crazy Joe  
Such a schmo!  
Hope he falls  
And breaks his toe!

It was simply their resentment because he was different. Their unconscious wish that he stumble and fall now and then, as they did. He realized that he must learn to do this. Then he shrugged. No, if he carried out his plan, it wouldn't matter.

He walked on down past the fence of the play yard. The boys were concentrating on their ball game.

Without a warning a warmth suffused him, singing sympathy, hope, joy. He stopped, looked about him, and saw no one. Yet the somatic feeling had been near—so very near.

Then he saw it. A dirty, lop-eared dog looking at him quizzically from under a shrub near the playground gate. He thought at the dog, and saw its head come up. They stood and looked at one another, each letting the warmth, the tenderness, affection wash over them. So lonely. Each of them had been so lonely.

Joey knelt down and began to whisper.

“My mother is mad at me right now. So I can't take you home.”

The dog cocked his head to one side and looked at him.

“But I'll get food for you,” Joey promised. “You can sleep under our back steps and nobody will

know if you just keep out of sight.”

The dog licked a pink tongue at his face. Joey nuzzled his face in the dirty hair of the dog’s neck.

“I was going to die,” he whispered. “I was going to die just as soon as my mother got over being mad at me. I was going to wait until then, because I didn’t want her to blame herself later. I can do what you know. I can stop my blood from moving, or my heart from beating; there’s a hundred ways. But maybe I won’t need to do it now. I won’t need to die until you do. And that will be a long time; a long long time. You see, if I can stop your heart from beating, I can keep it beating, too.”

The dog wagged his stumpy tail; and then stiffened in Joey’s arms.

“Yes,” Joey thought quickly at the dog. “Yes, I know the kids are watching us now. Pretend like—the thought hurt him, but he said it anyway. “Pretend you don’t like me, that you hate me.”

Slowly the dog backed away from Joey.

“Here, doggy, doggy!” Joey called.

The dog gave a wavering wag of his stump tail.

“No, no!” Joey thought desperately. “No, don’t let them know. They’ll want to hurt you if they find you out. They’re—People are like that.”

The dog backed away another step and lifted his lip in a snarl.

“Yah! Yah! Yah!” the kids called out. “Joey can’t even make friends with a dog!”

They were standing in a semicircle about him now. Joey stood up and faced them then for a moment. There was no anger or resentment in his face. There never would be now. One just shouldn’t get angry at blind and helpless things.

Without a word he started walking down the street, away from them. The dog crouched far back at the corner under the shrub.

“Yah! Yah! Crazy Joey!” the kids called out again.

Joey did not look back. They couldn’t see. They couldn’t hear. They couldn’t know. He felt a rush of pity.

The kids went back to their play, arguing loudly about who was at bat.

The dog waited until their attention was fully on the game again. Then he crept out from under the bush, and started ambling aimlessly down the street in the direction Joey had gone, trotting awkwardly on the bias as some dogs do.

He did not need to sniff for tracks. He knew.

Jonathan Billings, Dean of Psychosomatic Research at Hoxworth University, heard the knock on his study door, and looked up from his work at his desk. But before he could call out an invitation to enter, the door opened.

That would be Mr. Rogan, Resident Investigator. Anyone else would have waited.

Billings watched him without expression as he came through the door—a little man, a negative quantity, who wore heavy silver-rimmed glasses in the hope they would give character to his characterless face. The brief case he carried, too, was heavily decorated with silver, proclaiming its unusual importance. He needed these trappings, and more. He was the kind of man one forgot to introduce, and his whole bearing suggested his determination to command the attention he never quite received.

There was a portentous frown on his gray face, and without any preliminaries of greeting he bustled over and laid a new issue of the college paper on Billings' desk.

Billings looked down at the open page, and a cartoon of himself looked slyly back.

That was the trouble of having an old, old face with a thousand wrinkles. Even seventy years had been unkind in putting so many wrinkles there. In a cartoon, and he was often the subject of the cartoon throughout the country, those wrinkles could be slanted to make him appear fine and noble, or sly and scheming. It would depend upon which faction of the public the cartoonist wanted to please.

This time, in the cartoon, he was sly; and had his finger held up toward his lips in a cautioning and secretive gesture. There was a caption in bold print beneath the cartoon.

“You were quite wrong, Albert, about the nature of the universe!”

Billings looked up from the cartoon with a slight smile and met the accusing expression in Rogan's washed blue eyes.

“This is highly irregular, doctor,” Rogan said firmly, before Billings could comment. “I trust you have not been questioning indisputable facts! I trust you have not been planting disturbing doubts in the minds of our future citizens! I trust you know Congress approved those facts for school textbooks long ago! It would be most subversive, not to mention a waste of time and tax money, to question them now!”

Billings felt a flare of sudden irritation, an emotion he considered quite unworthy of the circumstances. He should be accustomed to this sort of thing by now. For the past thirty years there had been a Resident Investigator, some worse and some not any worse than Rogan; monitoring what the teachers said, the lines of thought they pursued. He remembered a long succession of them who had come through his door; some of them resentful that he was world famous and must be handled with especial care; others seeing in it a golden opportunity for personal publicity if they could catch him in some subversive remark.

Out of the montage of accusations and sly traps written in their collective expressions, one fact stood out clearly from all the rest. What was the remark the man had made? Oh, yes, he remembered now.

“I am completely impartial, Dr. Billings,” the man had said. “I merely see to it that you teachers say nothing which might threaten our freedom of speech!”

The memory of that incredible twist of semantics, so characteristic of the early days, cleared the irritation from his mind, and he looked back into Rogan's face with equal firmness. His answering tones were just far enough away from Rogan's speech that he could not be accused of Contempt For An Investigator.

“I trust you know, Mr. Rogan, that my subject is psychosomatics. I trust you are aware that I have no knowledge of approved astronomy courses, and would not feel qualified to comment upon it.”

Rogan slapped the cartoon on the desk with the back of his fingers imperatively. He had studied the

old films assiduously in an attempt to impart authority into his own attitudes and gestures.

“How do you account for this cartoon, then, doctor?” he asked with the triumphant expression having scored an irrefutable point. The characteristic puerility of it washed away the final residue irritation on Billings’ mind, and he smiled in genuine amusement.

“Why, I suspect young Tyler, its author, is just having a bit of fun,” he said slowly. “He’s quite mischief maker.”

Rogan’s eyes lighted up with delight at the possibility of a new scent.

“A student, eh?” he asked quickly. “One of these subversive cults probably. Trying to undermine our faith in our institutions.”

“The cartoonist is young Raymond Tyler, of Tyler Synthetics,” Billings said quietly. “An only son of the family, I believe.”

“Ah,” Rogan’s face smoothed of all suspicion instantly. “Just a boyhood prank then.” He was obsequious at the very name of such a powerful industry. “Boys will be boys, eh, doctor?”

“This one in particular,” Billings said with a heavy note of irony. “Was that all, Mr. Rogan?” There was a note of unmistakable dismissal in his voice. Even Rogan could not miss it. The little man flushed, and pointedly sat down in a chair as his answer.

“No, doctor, that was just a preliminary,” he said. “I have a commission for you from Washington. You are to head up a new line of research.”

“I haven’t completed my old line of research, Mr. Rogan,” Billings reminded him. “Inquiry into the reasons for Citizen Neurosis.”

“That’s canceled, doctor,” Rogan said firmly. “Washington is no longer interested in Civilian Fatigue.” He reached out for his ornate brief case, fondled it lovingly as he opened it, and drew from it a thick sheaf of papers in a blue binding.

Billings made an impatient gesture, as if to remonstrate that months of work should not be so easily discarded, and then realized the futility of it. He settled back into his chair again.

“Very well, Mr. Rogan,” he said in a resigned voice. “What does Washington instruct me to work on now?”

Even after thirty years of it, he was not yet accustomed to universities being operated on sound businesslike principles, with orders coming from the front office telling the boys in the lab what they should be thinking about today.

Or even more than thirty years. It was impossible to draw a hard line on just when it had happened. Perhaps it was the outgrowth of the practice when he had been a research student and young instructor. The local industry would come to the university with a problem. The university was eager to show its cooperation, its practical place in the industrial life of the nation. They got into the habit of delaying their own lines of research and working on those immediate ones required by industry. The habit grew into a custom. A few universities saw the danger and rebelled. Overnight, custom became a law. To rebel against a law, even a bad one, was subversion.

But he must not let his mind wander into the past. That was the mark of senility, they said. And what was Rogan saying now? And why didn’t the man just leave the folder with him? Why did the man have to read it to him, word for word?

The opening pages were filled with gobbledegook, replete with such phrases as “by order of,” and “under penalty of.” Why did these government agencies always feel they had to threaten citizens? He could not recall any government communication which did not carry a threat of what would happen to him if he failed to comply. Surely after seven thousand years of trying it, governments should have learned that threats and punishment were not the way to accomplish their aims.

His eyes wandered around the room, and scowled at the gray November sky outside the window.

The cold light made the dark paneled wood of his walls seem dingy and grimed. The shabby, old-fashioned furniture seemed even more shabby as the little man's voice droned on and on through the phrases.

. As revised ... authorized ... official ... top secret ..... Rogan apparently liked the sound of the governmental jargon, and gave each phase a full measure of expression.

Gradually the sense of the order became dimly apparent through all the legal phrasing. As Billings had feared, it was an old problem, just now coming to light.

That was significant, even though only a few men might recognize it. Not one new principle had come out of the universities in the past thirty years. Not one problem had arisen which hadn't been foreseen then. It was as if something geared to tremendous momentum had had powerful brakes applied. The forward movement seemed to continue satisfactorily; yet it was apparent to anyone who cared to look that it was grinding to a halt.

Odd how the human mind, once it became conscious of the unyielding pressure of limits and restrictions, refused to think constructively. There was a lot of loose talk about the indestructibility of the human will, how it strove onward and upward, overcoming all obstacles. But that was just talk, the most irresponsible kind. Actually the human will to progress was the most delicate mechanism imaginable, and refused to work at all if conditions were not precisely right.

In the half million years man had been on earth, there were only twenty occasions when he had been able to pull himself up beyond the primitive animal level. It was significant, too, that most of these generated their forward momentum in one spurt, and often within one lifetime. Momentum reached its point where rulers became satisfied and clamped down restrictions against any change in the *status quo*. Then began, over and over in each civilization, the slow retrogression and the long night.

In the typical fashion of governmental directives, the order said the same thing over and over, yet never succeeded in saying outright what it meant. Man's inventive techniques had outstripped his reaction time possibilities. A plane, hurtling into an unforeseen disaster, would strike it before the pilot could become aware of the danger and react to avert it.

To protect his own life, man had had to place a limit upon the speed of his vehicles. True, he tried to cope with the situation by inventing servomechanisms, but most of these merely registered the findings upon a dial. The cockpits of ships became a solid wall of dials. No human eye could read all their messages simultaneously and react as they directed.

And, too, the servomechanisms, intricate and marvelous though they might be, were blind and senseless things, capable of following only one design of action.

Only the human mind was sufficiently flexible to vary the patterns of behavior to meet the variation of possible circumstances. But the human mind was too slow, too inefficient, too easily distorted. It was—an understatement—undependable.

Billings watched the unfolding of the inexorable logic in the order with a growing dread which began to mount to the level of horror. For it was clear to him where the logic must lead. Since we do not have weapons, the order pursued its line of thinking, which could seek out a target, follow it, strike it, and destroy it; the work of Hoxworth University was quite simple, and should require little time or trouble.

The university was simply required to reverse the known mechanical principle and see that a plane, or an automobile, or other moving vehicle, struck nothing!

The order ended with its usual propaganda. Thus the citizens could see that, once again, out of war came great benefits to peace.

Rogan closed the stiff back page of the order and looked up at Billings with an expression



satisfaction at having delivered the government's instructions concisely and completely.

~~"In other words,"~~ Billings said slowly, ~~"they want a servomechanism designed which can foresee the future, and work out a pattern of mechanical operation which will cope with that future at the time it becomes present."~~ He realized his voice showed his incredulity, and that it would displease Rogan. It did.

"I believe the order is quite clear, doctor," Rogan said decisively. "And there is certainly nothing difficult about it, now that Washington has shown you the way to solve it. What a target-finder missile does, you simply have to do in reverse."

"But why did Washington select me, Mr. Rogan?" Billings asked carefully. "I am not a mechanical technician or engineer. I work with the human mind and body, their interaction. I wouldn't know anything about this project at all."

He was sorry he mentioned it, for it could be construed as Unwillingness to Cooperate, a fellow traveler act if not actually subversive. And it was a foolish question to ask, too, since government does not usually take capability into consideration in making an appointment—no more than the people do in electing government. Still, his question did bring him unexpected results.

Rogan hesitated, pulled at his lip, decided not to make anything out of the doctor's slip.

"Washington does not usually have to explain to a citizen," he said, "but I am instructed to answer you. This project is not a new one. It has been assigned before—several times."

"You mean the mechanical engineers have refused it?" Billings asked.

"Those who did are serving their sentences, of course," Rogan said, and his voice implied that Dr. Billings could join them without loss to the world. "But there was one thread of agreement at the trials. They all said that this would be duplicating the work of the human brain, and we'd better go to an expert on the human brain if we wanted to know how that worked.

"So," he finished simply, "here we are."

Billings had thought he was beyond further astonishment, but he had underestimated his own capacity for it.

"Mr. Rogan," he said slowly, trying not to show that he was aghast at the vacuity of such logic. "I do not question Washington's wisdom. But for the sake of the record, I know only a few of the secondary effects of mental action; I do not know how the mind works; I do not know of any human being who does."

He stopped short, for there flashed into his mind the possibility of one who might. Joe Carter, a student—a telepath.

The house where Joe lived was nearly a century old, and did not need the aid of the fog and twilight at dusk to give it an air of grimy neglect. The weather-stained sign which proclaimed light-housekeeping rooms for students seemed almost as old, but at least it did not misrepresent them as being cheery, bright or comfortable.

Billings hesitated briefly at the foot of the steps leading up to its front door, and mentally pictured with dread the two long flights of wooden stairs he must climb to reach Joe's room.

He could have summoned Joe to his office, of course, but tonight that would have been adding insult to injury. And, too, in his own room, the boy seemed to have a little less reserve than in the office or the classrooms.

He started the slow, careful climb up the steps, opened the front door which was never locked for long, was obvious that no one here could have anything worth taking, walked across the short hall, and started up the first flight of stairs. He glanced farther down the hall, saw the landlady's door closed abruptly, and smiled. It was the same, every time he came to see Joe.

He had known Joe Carter for twelve years. First there had been the letter from Martin at Steiff

University, telling him about an eight-year-old telepath whose parents thought him insane. He himself, had gone to the small college town and talked with the boy. He had arrived at a bad time. The story, as he got it from others, was that the boy had picked up a stray dog. The boy's parents had turned the dog over to the pound, and it had been destroyed. Joe had become silent, uncommunicative, unresponsive to any of Billings' attempts to draw him out.

Twelve years. From the sidelines he had watched Joe get through primary and secondary school. He had marveled at the continued, never-breaking concealment the boy practiced in covering his unique talent. But concealment breeds distrust. The boy grew up friendless and alone.

Every year Billings had reviewed the grades which Joe had made. They were uniformly monotonously, equivalent of C. He was determined to be neither sharp nor dull; determined that he would do nothing to make anyone notice him for any reason. As if his life, itself, depended upon remaining unnoticed.

Both his high school associates and Joe's parents were astonished when Hoxworth University offered him a scholarship. It wasn't much of a scholarship, true, for Joe's parents had no influence and Joe was not an athlete. Since there would be neither prestige nor financial return to the University, hadn't been easy, but Billings had managed it, and without revealing the reasons for it.

He paused and caught his breath in the hallway at the top of the first flight of stairs, and then resumed his upward climb. They could talk all they pleased about how hale and hearty he was at seventy, but two flights of stairs

Twelve years. That would make Joe about twenty now. The last three years had been at Hoxworth. And Joe had been as colorless in college as in high school.

Billings had tried, many times, to draw him out, make him flare into life. He had shown infinite patience; he had strived to radiate sympathy and understanding. Joe Carter had remained politely friendly, appreciative—and closed. Billings had tried to show community of spirit, transcending the fifty years gap in their ages—and Joe had remained respectful, considerate, and aware of the honor of a personal friendship from such a famous man. If Joe had known who wheedled a scholarship for him, he had never shown the knowledge.

Tonight Billings would try a different method. Tonight he would sink to the common level of the mean in spirit. He would demand acknowledgment and some repayment for his benefaction.

He hesitated in front of the wooden paneled door, almost withdrew back down the stairs in preference to portraying himself in such a petty light; and then before he could make up his mind to give it up, he knocked.

The door opened, almost immediately, as if Joe had been waiting for the knock. The boy's face was withdrawn and expressionless, as usual. Yet Billings felt there was a greater wariness than usual.

"Come in, doctor," Joe said. "I heard you coming up the stairs. I've just made some coffee."

Two chairs were placed at the pitiful little table; two heavy china cups wreathed vapor. A battered coffeepot sat on a gas plate. The housekeeping was light, indeed.

The two of them sat down in chairs, straight hard chairs and picked up the mugs of coffee.

"I'm in trouble, Joe," Billings began. "I need your help." Somehow he felt that an immediate opening, without preliminary fencing, would be more appreciated. And on this basis, he proceeded into the story of the newest order he had just received that afternoon from Rogan. He made no effort, either, to draw Joe out, to get the boy to acknowledge his talent of telepathy. Billings took it for granted, and became aware as he progressed that Joe was making no effort to deny it.

That, at least, was hopeful. He switched suddenly to a frontal approach, although he knew that young men usually resented it when an older man, particularly a successful one, did it.

"Have you given any thought, Joe, to what you intend to do with your life? Any way you can turn

your gift into constructive use?"

~~"A great deal, of course," Joe answered without hesitation. "In that, at least, I'm no different from the average fellow. You want me to work with you on this synthetic brain, don't you, doctor? You think I may have some understanding you lack? Is that it?"~~

~~"Yes, Joe."~~

~~"It could destroy the human race, you know," Joe said quietly.~~

~~Billings was brought up short. He felt a sudden chill, not entirely due to the bleak and heatless room in which they sat.~~

~~"You foresee that, Joe, definitely?" he asked. "Or are you merely speculating?"~~

~~"I'm an imperfect," Joe answered quietly. "I often see seconds or minutes ahead. Occasionally I see days or weeks but not accurately. The future isn't fixed. But I'm afraid of this thing. I'm afraid that if we make a machine which can think better than man, mankind wouldn't survive it."~~

~~"Do you think man is worth surviving, Joe? After the things he's done?"~~

~~Joe fell silent, looking down at the table. Seconds became minutes. The cheap clock on the dress table ticked away a quarter of an hour. The coffee in the cups grew cold. Billings shivered in the damp corner of the unheated room, contrasted it with the animal warren comfort of the dormitories, the luxury of the frat houses. He became suddenly afraid of Joe's answer. He had at least some conception of what it must be like to be alone, the only one of its kind, a man who could see in a world of total blindness without even a concept of sight. How much bitterness did Joe carry over from childhood?~~

~~"Do you believe that man has reached his evolutionary peak, doctor?" Joe asked at last, breaking the heavy silence.~~

~~"No-o," Billings answered slowly.~~

~~"Couldn't the whole psi area be something which is latent, just really beginning to develop as the photosensitive cells of primitive life in animals once did? I have the feeling," he paused, and changed his phrasing. "I know that everyone experiences psi phenomena on a subconscious level. Occasionally a freak comes along"—he used the term without bitterness—"who has no barrier to shut it out of the conscious. I ... I think we're trending toward the psi and not away from it.~~

~~"You think man should be given the chance to go on farther, then?" Billings asked.~~

~~"Yes," Joe said.~~

~~"And you think that if he finds out what the true nature of thought is, at the level he uses it, it would destroy him?"~~

~~"It might."~~

~~"Why?"~~

~~"He's proud, vain, superficial, egotistical, superstitious," Joe said without any emphasis. "The machine, to do what Washington wants, would have to use judgment, determine right from wrong, good from bad. Man has kept a monopoly on that—or thinks he has."~~

~~"What do you mean—thinks he has?" Billings asked, and felt he was nearing some door which might open on a new vista.~~

~~"Suppose we say that white is good and black is bad," Joe said quietly. "Any photoelectric cell can tell good from bad. Suppose we say a high number is right and a low number is wrong. Any self-respecting cybernetic machine then can tell right from wrong."~~

~~"But those are purely arbitrary values, Joe," Billings objected. "Set up for a specific expediency."~~

~~"You're something of a historian, doctor," Joe answered obliquely. "Aren't all of them?"~~

~~Billings started to argue along the lines of inherent human nature, instinct for good and right, basic moralities, the things man believed set him apart from the other animals. He realized that he would be talking to a telepath; that he had better stick to the facts.~~

~~"At least man has arbitrarily set his own values, Joe," he said. "The photoelectric cell or cybernetic"~~

machine can't do that." Yet he caught a glimpse of things beyond the opening door, and became suddenly silent.

"We must emphasize that fact, doctor," Joe said earnestly. "Man must go on, for a while, thinking that; in spite of the contrary evidence which this servomechanism will reveal. That shouldn't be too hard to maintain. Man generally believes what he prefers to believe. Most evidence can be twisted to filter through his screen mesh of prejudices and tensions, so that it confirms rather than confounds.

Billings felt a wave of apprehension. He almost wished that he had not come to Joe for help on the project. Yet he felt relief, too. Joe, by the plural pronoun, had indicated that he would work on the project. Relief, because he knew that he had no knowledge whereby the problem could be approached. And he believed Joe did.

The illusion of a door opening remained before his vision. There were dark stirrings beyond.

The work did not progress.

It was not due to lack of organization, or lack of cooperation. The scientists had long ago adapted the appointment of most anyone as head of a project, and they saw nothing unusual in a specialist in psychosomatics being assigned to make up a new servomechanism.

The lack of progress stemmed from the fact that their objective was not clearly defined. Through the days that followed, Billings was bothered, more than he cared to admit, by Joe's warning that the semantics of their objective must be kept away from any concept of duplicating the work of the human brain. Yet that was what they were trying to do.

He was helped none, either, by the several incidents, in meetings, when one or the other of the scientists on *the* project tried to tell him that was what they were trying to do.

"If you want a servomechanism," Gunther, the photoelectric man, said, "which will make the same decisions and take the same actions as a human plane pilot, then you must duplicate that pilot's mental processes."

"If we are trying to duplicate the processes of human thought, why have no psychologists, other than yourself, been assigned to this project?" asked Hoskins, the cybernetic man.

These questions were not easy to parry. Both of these men were first-rate scientists, and in the figurative underground, among friends who could be trusted, they asked questions to which they expected answers. The line which Joe had insisted he adopt did not satisfy them.

"We must not permit ourselves to get confused with arguing the processes of human thought," Billings had replied. "We will bog down in that area and get nowhere. This is simply a machine and must be approached from the mechanical."

Yes, it was unsatisfactory, for it was precisely the same kind of thought control which had blanketed the country. You must solve the problem, but you are not permitted to explore this and that, and this avenue in your search for the possible solution.

Joe, too, was a disappointment. Billings had succeeded in getting him appointed as project secretary. No one objected since the job required a great deal of paper work, carried little prestige, and the pay was not enticing. There would be other students assigned later to various phases of production. Billings made a mental note to assign young Tyler to something which sounded particularly impressive. The undercurrents of that cartoon could not go ignored. Joe's appointment, therefore, seemed natural enough, and brought him into the thick of activity.

But Joe did no more than the recording. Billings found himself in the frustrating position of having engineered the situation so that Joe would be there for question on how they should proceed, but Joe gave only vague and evasive answers. The progress reports, turned over to Rogan for forwarding on to Washington, contained a great deal of wordage and little else. That would keep Washington quiet for a while, since their tendency was to measure the worth of a report by its poundage; but it was all

dangerous in case anybody felt he was slipping out of the public eye, and began to cast about for some juicy publicity.

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One of Joe's typical answers brought typical results.

"We already know enough to build it," Joe had said firmly. "We've got all the basic principles. We can duplicate the action of the human brain, at its present level of thinking, any time we want to. Only if we realize that's what we're doing, we won't want to do it. So, on a mechanical level, we simply have to bring all the principles together and coordinate them."

That added up to nothing when Billings tried it. Suggestions from various departments, working piecemeal, ranged all the way from pinhead size transistors, to city block long banks of cybernetic machines. Even though they had the knowledge, if they did, to build a separate machine to take care of each possible pattern which might arise in the piloting of a plane, it would create an accumulation large enough to fill the old Empire State building.

In exasperation, Billings called Joe to account in his office. They were alone, and Billings minced no words about the way Joe was dragging his feet.

"Why do you want to build this machine, doctor?" Joe asked abruptly. "You're not afraid of the consequences if you fail?"

Billings had not expected this attack from Joe. As the weeks had passed, he had felt a growing urgency to succeed, but he had not tried to put his feelings into words. To answer Joe, he tried now.

"Every man, who thinks, wants there to be a meaning to his life," he said carefully, for he sensed that this was the critical point. "I've spent my life trying to know, to understand. Everything I've ever learned seems to come together in this one thing. Say I'm looking for a monument, that there should be an apex, a crowning achievement. Every man would like there to be something remaining after him, which says, 'This is the meaning of his life.'"

Joe was silent, and looked at him steadily. Billings realized he had expressed only a part of perhaps the most insignificant part. He picked up a cigarette, lit it, and took another approach.

"A civilization, too," he said. "Each one of them has produced some one great achievement, or specialty. There're not all the same and with the same goals. But each succeeding civilization seems to adopt what results it can use from past achievements. It synthesizes them into its own special achievement. Our specialty has been technological advance. Never mind that everything else is borrowed and doesn't fit us—we have achieved that. But what we have achieved could be meaningless to some future civilization unless we give it meaning now. Here, again, this thing would sum up and embody in one object the total of our technology.

"If man's advance is toward a broader intellect, it seems we should sum up his intellect to that point—if we can, and in our own language, that of technology. It's the only one we speak without an accent."

Still Joe sat in silence, and picked absently at a frayed thread in the drape which hung near his chair. Though he meant them to be constructive, Billings realized that to Joe such arguments were futile, hopeless, destructive. An old man may think with detachment about thousand-year periods of history, and view with little concern the infinitesimal part his own life plays out of all the trillions of people who may live. But a young man is impatient with such maundering. He wants the answers for his own life, the drive which will give purpose to his own acts. And the purpose was there, too, enough to satisfy even—a Joe.

"No man watches happily," Billings said, "while his civilization passes and sinks back into the Dark Ages. Every man has the tragic feeling that it need not happen; that if some eventual civilization is to endure, then why not his own? True, most civilizations had one spurt which made them shine for a while before they flickered out again. But some had several spurts. Some new thing entered the li

of the people. They found the energy to meet the new challenge and solve its problem.”

~~Joe's head came up at this, and he stopped pulling at the string on the curtain.~~

“According to you, Joe,” Billings said in final argument, “this thing may destroy man. It may all bump him up to the next step of evolution.”

“You’d be willing to face personal danger for that, doctor?” Joe asked suddenly.

The room grew very still. Billings did not answer lightly, for he suspected Joe saw farther beyond the door than he could.

“Yes,” he said firmly. “Of course.”

That was the turning point in Joe’s attitude toward the project, but it had no effect upon the various scientists, of course. They still operated on the basis of a separate machine for every requirement, and the list of requirements was endless.

Superficially, to anyone who had not thought it through, the problem seemed not too difficult, as Washington had stated. A self-aiming gun, a self-guided missile which fastened upon a distant object, plotted its course to intersect the object, and changed its course to compensate for the change in the fleeing object’s maneuvers—these should certainly show the way.

And back of that there had been pilotless radio-controlled planes. And back of that the catapult and the bow and arrow.

But whether it was a self-guided missile, or a spear, there was a human mind back of it which had already predicted, used judgment, set the forces in motion according to that judgment.

Human mind? What about the monkey who threw the coconut from the tree at its enemy? What about the skunk with its own version of the catapult? Well, mind of some kind.

Even the amoeba varied its actions to suit the circumstances. There couldn’t be much of a brain in one cell. Yet it did react, within its limits, through variable patterns. Any psychosomaticist knows that every cell has a sort of mind of its own. But certainly a cybernetic machine has capacity for various patterns, too, according to the circumstances. But preset, man, prechosen! But didn’t blind and a reasonless environment present and prechoose what an amoeba would do? Need it be a mind, as we think of mind?

Billings was not the only one whose thoughts went around and around in this vein, exploring the possible concepts; not the only one who found a yea for every nay. All the scientists, singly and in groups, inescapably followed the same train of reasoning; and came up against the same futility. In spite of Billings’ instructions to keep their concepts mechanical, if they were to duplicate the results of judgment between the best courses of action among the many courses of action a plane or an automobile might take, then they had to think about the processes of judging; and the nature of choosing.

Unfortunately, each of them had had courses in psychology, absorbed its strange conclusions, and allowed themselves to be influenced by its influence on man’s thinking. They arrived nowhere in their analyses. They made the mistake of judging it by the other sciences, assumed it had its foundations based in fact; and felt it must be their own fault when its results gave them nothing.

Yet Billings remembered that Joe had told him they knew enough to build the machine. Still, what was the use of the finest watch if one had no concept of the measurement of time? One might build an endless and complex speculation on the way its metal case flashed in the sun, or how it ticked with the life of its own against the ear, in the way that psychology and philosophy speculated endlessly and built complex structures of pointless word games about the nature of man.

Billings smiled with wry amusement at the position in which he found himself. He was like a student who has been given a knotty problem to solve, knows there must be a solution but can’t find it. For he did not doubt the conviction of Joe’s statement.

Like the bewildered student, he went to teacher. He was sincere enough and had sufficient status that he could disregard the disparity of their ages, positions, experience, credentials. He was not proud to accept knowledge, wherever he may find it.

“It’s inability to communicate with each other,” Joe answered his question. “It’s like the spokes of a wheel, without any bridging rim connecting them. The hub is basic scientific knowledge. Specialized sciences radiate out from that, and in moving outward they build up their own semantics.”

“I’ve heard the analogy before,” Billings objected. “It’s not a good one; because, if you think about it, you’ll see that none get very far out from the hub without the assistance of the others. The concept of one must be incorporated into the other before any of them can progress very far.”

“They use one another’s products, doctor,” Joe corrected without emphasis. “Whether those products be gadgets or ideas, they’re still the result of another’s specialized thinking. A mechanic engineer uses the product of the petroleum engineer without more than superficially knowing caring about how its molecules were tailored. Say the product doesn’t work. The mechanical engineer doesn’t drop everything and spend a dozen years or so trying to find the proper lubricant. He goes back to the petroleum engineer, puts in his beef, describes the conditions which the lubricant must meet. The petroleum engineer goes away, polymerizes and catalyzes some more molecules, brings back a new sample, and now the mechanical engineer can go a little farther out on his spoke. But he doesn’t communicate except at the product use level.”

“Then how are we going to get these men to use each other’s products, Joe?” Billings asked impatiently. “This thing is all out of hand. It isn’t taking shape at any point. The more we think about it the less it resolves itself, the more chaotic it becomes.”

He turned to Joe and spoke levelly, almost accusingly.

“You seem to know what needs to be done, but you don’t do anything about it, Joe. I counted on you. Maybe I shouldn’t have, but I did. It seemed to me that this thing was a solution for you as well as for me. You’ve never known how to put your talent to use constructively, and you must have wanted that. Well, here’s your chance.”

He saw Joe’s face turn pale, and a mask of no expression settle over it. But his irritation and frustration made Billings plunge in where consideration had held him back before.

“Why can’t you do that, Joe?”

“That would mean going into their minds,” Joe said slowly, through stiff lips. “Taking over portions of their thinking, directing their actions. I haven’t done that since I played around with it as a child, before I realized what I was doing. It isn’t right for one human being—and I do think of myself as human—to control another human being.”

Billings threw back his head and laughed with sudden relief.

“Joe!” he exclaimed. “You’re the living example that special talent or knowledges does not bring with it special wisdom or common sense! Don’t you realize that every time we ask somebody to pass the salt at the table, or honk our horn at someone on the street, or buy a pair of socks, or give a lecture that we are controlling the thought and action of others?”

“It isn’t the same,” Joe insisted. “You normals are blind and fumbling and crude about it. You just bump into one another in your thrashing about. And you can always refuse to obey one another.”

“Not really, Joe,” Billings said. “How long would a man last in his freedom if he refused to do the million things society required of him? I doubt if there’s much essential difference in the kind of pressure you could bring, and the kind which the whole society brings upon a man. You say you fumble, while you could do it expertly. I think I’d rather have an expert work on me than a fumbler. What is the difference in your planting the thought of what these scientists should do, and my sending them a written order? Great Scott, boy, if you can get them to accomplish this thing, then you must get

ahead.”

“Whatever I think needs to be done to accomplish it, doctor?”

“Whatever the project requires to carry it to completion,” Billings defined, “remembering that the thing can be the solution for mankind, push him up to the next evolutionary rung.”

Joe was silent for a little while, and then spoke slowly.

“But they mustn’t know. Outside of a man’s own isolated field of knowledge, he’s as superstitious as all the rest. They’ve got all kinds of the wildest ideas about how dangerous and evil a telepath might be. They mustn’t know. You’ve got to remember that sanity in a person or a civilization is like a small boat on the surface of an ocean. If the subterranean depths get roiled up enough, the boat capsizes and there’s nothing but the storming chaos of madness.”

“Is that the way we appear to you, Joe?”

“That’s the way man is,” Joe said simply.

“Then if you can keep from rocking the boat when you direct their thinking on this project, you can depend on me to keep it secret, Joe.” Billings said reassuringly.

“It’s perfectly ethical, all right, for me to control their thinking on this project, then?”

“Perfectly all right, Joe,” Billings said with emphasis. And he thought he meant it.

The door opened wider.

It was Hoskins, in charge of the cybernetic aspects, who put the general feeling into words a few days later.

“I’ve often observed,” Hoskins said to no one in particular, as several of them sat around the general meeting room, “that you’ll be faced with a problem which looks completely unsolvable—there’s just no point at which you can grab hold of it—then suddenly, for no reason at all, the whole thing smooths out.”

Billings darted a quick look at Joe, but that young man, busy at a small table over in the corner of the room, did not look up from his job of assembling various reports into order.

Another, perhaps even more significant piece of evidence became apparent, that the men were incorporating the problem into their thinking normally. The thing acquired a name—Bossy. Suddenly everyone was using it. The animal husbandry department had supplied it.

“Anybody who has ever handled cows knows they can be the most ornery, cantankerous, stubborn critters’

you ever saw one minute, and completely gentle and obedient the next,” one of the men from the department said.

And that about described their feelings toward Bossy at this time.

Billings had been trying for some time to find a descriptive name, using the familiar method of initials of descriptive words—sensory—apperceptor—indexer—appraiser—comparer—extrapolator—predictor—chooser—activator—He bogged down, not only in that the initials seemed to add up to nothing pronounceable, but the list of terms themselves merely added to the confusion. He, too, called it Bossy. Somehow that was best—for Bossy was, in spite of her contrariness, domesticated, inferior to man, controllable—and gave milk. Quite consciously, he was comforted by the semantics of the name.

Rogan, too, accepted the name. He was a little scandalized and as yet Washington hadn’t give an reaction which would guide his attitude, but unless the meat or dairy industry objected, there seemed to be nothing subversive about it.

A third evidence, stronger than the other two, was that everyone began talking about sensory receptors. They reasoned that if a pilot sees and hears and feels the external world about him, even though instruments are measuring these things more accurately than he can determine them, the



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