

**All
Stories
Complete**

**THE ORIGINAL
SCIENCE
FICTION**

STORIES

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Number 3

NOVELETS

- BEYOND THE SNAKE PLANET** *Bill Wesley* 31
There was no woman for Captain Dave Norwood on this ship, and there'd be no going back to Earth for him, either. But if, say, Colonist Lor Halvorsen met with an accident, and his blonde wife became a widow . . . well . . .
- HEAP BIG MEDICINE** *Robert Silverberg* 75
Behold the brave, virtuous Earthmen! Do they repeat the wickedness of their forebears who corrupted natives with whiskey, to steal their lands? Nope; the natives feed the Earthmen powerful hooch instead!

SHORT STORIES

- THE BARE FACTS** *George H. Smith* 6
It was a serious problem for April Dawn, popular strip-tease artist. What was she going to do in a society where no one—but no one at all—ever wore clothes?
- NIGHT OF THE ROBOTS** *Allen Wilder* 16
Either Rand found the leader of the robots tonight, or he became a robot himself. . .
- TWIST OF THE CENTURY (A Fable of Futurity)**
..... *Donald Franson* 62
- BUILDING NINE** *J. Martin Graetz* 99
Young Miller couldn't believe his eyes; suddenly he was in a part of the University no one he knew had ever seen before—a section where they taught Spells, Necromancy, and Magic!
- ALIEN CORNUCOPIA (A Vignette of Tomorrow)**
..... *Walter Liebscher* 113

DEPARTMENTS

- THE LAST WORD and THE RECKONING** 114
- SOMETHING HAPPENS (editorial)** .. *Robert A. W. Lowndes* 117
- READERS' PREFERENCE COUPON (The Reckoning is
based on your votes!)** 130

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BUILDING NINE

by J. Martin

Graetz

Suddenly, young Miller found himself wandering down halls that did not exist, in a building that wasn't there!

NATURALLY, Ford Miller was lost. Because he was a two-weeks freshman, because he was in a very particular hurry, but most of all because he was well into the maze of corridors that is The Institute's main building, he was lost. The Rogers Building is a monstrous, crab-shaped edifice, more than a quarter-mile through the halls from claw-tip to claw-tip. It is neatly chopped off into imaginary numbered sections ("buildings") which differ from each other only the age of the paint on the walls. It takes months of acquaintance to gain familiarity, so the result of Ford Miller's desperate search for a men's room was to turn the unguarded Administration of the Institute of Technology on its collective ear.

Damn! thought Ford furiously. The whole length of Building Six and not even a faucet in sight!

But as Ford sped by Lecture Hall 6-120, he caught a glimpse of the building's exit onto the East Campus, where he lived. His overwhelming thought as he veered off to the right was,

"If I can just hold out till I get to the dorm..."

...no dice. He was still in the Institute's main building. Ford was pretty badly off by this time, so he scarcely noticed the titles on the doors as he ran down this new corridor that shouldn't have been, but was.

9-103

Pyrology Spell Research

Prof. Culp

D. A. Appling

— —

9-112

Senior Necromancy Laboratory

— —

9-121

Sealed Bottle Supply Room

(Keep Door Closed)

— —

9-126

MEN

The letters leaped out at him, grabbed him by the throat, and smacked him in the eye. Ford dived for the door.

WHEN FORD plunged across the unique threshold into Building Nine, he had forced a discriminator to jam; this tripped a relay, which op-

erated a solenoid that closed a microswitch, which set a buzzer to sawing away in room 9-102, Headquarters, Undergraduate Alchemy Laboratory (Prof. Ashton. Enter Room 9-105). At the time, Professor Ashton was lecturing juniors in Building Two. His secretary had just entered the file room to check on a student's records, and she did not hear the signal for thirty-five seconds. Twenty-seven seconds after the buzzer began sounding off, Ford Miller had found the room of his choice, so the secretary saw no one when she perfunctorily glanced into the corridor before resetting the relay and shutting off the buzzer. Since no one who was not aware of Building Nine's existence could actually enter it, the system's only purpose was to prevent such persons from getting stuck in the interphase between the building and the rest of the Institute.

But Ford Miller's singular, overpowering thought jammed the discriminator.

HIS MISSION accomplished, Ford was no longer in a hurry. He ambled down

the corridor of Building Nine, studying the door captions like any freshman. He suffered several rapid-fire shocks. When his brain cleared, the True Scientist in him manifested itself. He began to recite:

"It is intuitively obvious" (a phrase he had learned at his first Physics lecture) "that Tech has set up a research laboratory and several courses to investigate the medieval theories of Alchemy. This is perfectly legitimate work and may very well lead to significant discoveries in modern chemistry. I'll have to see about electives here." And Ford Miller wandered back into the conservative continuum of Building Six. He turned to re-enter the Alchemy labs and found himself strolling out into the rare bright sunshine of the East Campus Quad. The True Scientist was stunned into catatonia, and the purely human Ford Miller ran all the way to his dormitory room and locked the door.

DAN "BUCK" ROGERS, president of the IT Science Fiction Society banged his fist on the table. "All right, you

guys, the meeting will please come the hell to order!" The members subsided, and the term's first meeting was on its way. In fifteen minutes, the business was disposed of, and the eighth motion for adjournment proved successful. As the general discussion started up, Ford Miller, eager to make a good first impression, began to tell the Society about his unsettling experiences at the threshold of Building Nine. As he neared the end of his tale, a gaunt, mustached figure, his trousers pegged tight with bicycle clips, strode into the room. A mock groan went up from several members as he turned to face Ford and enunciated in his clipped, not-quite-British style, "You are obviously demented from the unseasonable heat. There is no such place as Building Nine."

Ford stared. The tall man continued, "My name is C. Robert Keppel, or Crober T., as you wish. I am the Lord High Impotentate of the Science-Fiction Society." You could hear the hyphen. The new arrival seemed to melt onto the floor, head resting finally on the limp musette bag he car-

ried with him. He all but disappeared under the table.

"However," said the floor, "Continue with your narrative. I shall be delighted to hear the end, at which time I will pass judgement upon its merits as a story."

The Society could hardly contain itself, but Ford was so confused that he was silent the rest of the evening. The other members, though, were fascinated with the possibilities of the situation, and they were soon caught up in a loud and wordy free-for-all. None of them noticed a member who had remained silent the whole time, puffing, at first nervously, then speculatively, on an oversize bulldog pipe.

AFTER THE meeting, Harold Copley, the pipe-puffer, drew Ford Miller aside, out of earshot of the rest.

"Do you know what you've done?" he asked Ford sternly. "You have nearly broken the Institute's most closely-held secret of the last fifty years!"

Ford blinked. Finally he summoned enough college-bred savoir-faire to mumble, "Huh?"

"This business about Building Nine," said Copley. "There's more in it than either you or the rest of the Society knows. Didn't you watch the others when you started to talk? As far as they're concerned, there just isn't any such place as you described, and they were ready to turn you out on your fanny until Keppel walked in."

"I still don't follow you," Ford said. "Is there or isn't there a building where I thought it was? Or did I imagine the whole thing?"

"Yes and no to the first question," Copley answered him, "and though it stretches my credibilities, no to the second. In fact, the most surprising thing is that I'm able to talk to you about it at all."

"Look, I want to explain this in detail. Can you come to my room in the Graduate House tomorrow afternoon? It's Saturday, so you shouldn't have any classes after twelve."

"Uh-yeah," Ford said uncertainly, "I guess I'd better. I'm all fouled up now. I'll come around."

THE GRADUATE HOUSE is unique on the Tech campus. Like none of the other living groups, it exudes an ivied permanence from its vaulted lobby, through the long, dim, carpeted halls, to the heavy, oak-paneled doors that should open into quarters which reflect a hushed, restrained mode of living. This effect is soon dispelled upon entering the cluttered studies of most graduate students, but it is only intensified in the rooms of Harold Copley. Everything bespeaks a quiet assumption of post-graduate superiority, not crudely flaunted, nor yet idly tossed off with an affectation of *noblesse oblige*. It is just right in the scheme of things. . .

. . . as was the intermittent smoke signal that rose from the overstuffed chair in the corner, facing the door. When Ford Miller looked again, he separated Copley from the rest of the decor, and managed to mutter nervously, "Uh, hello!"

"Ah, Mr. Miller!" Copley greeted him with a precise measure of heartiness that revealed, somehow, a true warmth and friendship. "Come in, close the door, and sit down. There's

Lisbon on the table if you're thirsty."

"Thanks, Mr. Copley." Ford, now infused with confidence at having been accepted, sat down by the window.

"It's Mr. Copley only to my students. To members of the Society and people, it's Harold. Really, Graduates *are* human—in some respects. Now, about this Building Nine matter," Copley's voice became serious, "It's something you are involved in much more than you probably realize. I was on the phone a good part of last evening and this morning, just to decide what to tell you and how much. Uh-oh, you're getting that glazed look again; I'll have to fill you in. Won't take long.

LOOK—I. T. has been the world's most highly-regarded school of engineering and science for nearly a century. But back before 1916, when the present buildings were constructed, we had a devil of a time getting the really top researchers from Europe and the Far East to come over here. Reason: No magical research."

It would only be approx-

imately accurate, to say that Ford goggled.

"I mean it. For hundreds of years, apparently, the best universities in the Old World had conducted rigorous work in the fields of Magic and what we now call Alchemy, though that isn't quite the same as what it used to be. At any rate, around 1910, when the plans for the new campus were being discussed, the most influential of these scientists who had been persuaded to come to Tech insisted that a School of Magical Sciences be incorporated into the plans. Understand that this was back at a time of intense skepticism, so it is no surprise that the Administration was shaken.

"But the European group were well acquainted with the problem, since the 'black arts' had always been a matter of suspicion and superstition over there. These men showed in detail how to set up the interphase co-ordinate system which would enable the Research section of the School to be built. The upshot was that the Administration agreed, and what is now known as Course XI was created. They didn't ne-

glect expansion, of course, and if you will notice the next time you study a map of the campus, there is no building whose number ends in nine."

"Guh!" said Ford.

HAROLD COPLEY grinned. "Precisely. Now, about theory. It depends on the existence of what might be called a serial universe, though I doubt that's very accurate. The effects of what we call 'magic' here are based on the application of interphase mechanics, which allows one to utilize the natural laws from some other phase, or continuum, or whatever you like to call it, in this one. The Ninth Level buildings, as we call them, are in one of these other phases. The connection is made simultaneous with an actual exit in Building Six, so that when one of us walks out the door, no one really notices if we don't come out the other side. People are not terribly observant. Oh, yes, I suppose I should mention that I'm a Graduate Fellow in Alchemic Engineering. My lab is in Building 19, which stands in a spot corresponding to the Hyden Library on the main

campus. We get in through the back door to the Science Library, which everyone thinks is locked."

"But—but—but," protested Ford, "How do you get into the place, and worse, how did I?"

"I'm not too sure how you did it," said Harold, "but the method we use is quite simple. As might be expected, some of the laws we can apply involve mental abilities. And don't you dare say *psi*! The term is out of favor. Anyway, since the energy levels between phases are tremendous, we can't maintain a permanent connection, so we use a feedback system that runs a make-and-break threshold. If someone knows that Building Nine is there, and wants to enter it, a discriminator picks up the thought and closes a relay which holds the interphase steady long enough to let him pass through it. If anyone else goes out the door on the main campus and happens to brush the threshold on one of its 'make' cycles, the discriminator trips an alarm. The cycle is short enough so that the person will usually pass out the main door with no

trouble, but there is a very remote possibility of getting stuck, so Prof—uh, a certain professor's secretary peeks out the door before she shuts off the buzzer. It's not too rigorous a job, so I guess your hurry to get to a john got you past her.

"ONE LAST item. Every person working in Magic has a selective geas—it's really a form of psychological block—on him that prevents his talking with an outsider. Apparently, since you got past the interphase, you're a special case, which is why I'm able to tell you all this."

"All this" had left Ford visibly shaken. But the True Scientist rallied. "I still don't see your point in telling me anything. I'd think it would be much easier to let me forget it."

Copley was disappointed. "You mean after what I just said, you still can't figure it out? I thought you were an Engineer!"

Ford's mind was jolted into operation, mostly by his concern over having fallen from grace. Finally he said, "I'm the

only one you can talk to who isn't in Course XI, right? Obviously, then, you think maybe I can talk to others, where you people can't. Does that mean you want the rest of the Institute to know?"

"Hmmm. You do have promise, after all." Copley's voice was quiet again. Ford brightened. Copley continued, "The corresponding schools in Europe have been on an equal footing with their parent universities for twenty-five years. Only in America, at Tech, are we still forced to keep it a secret. Until you happened, we had no way of exposing the place. Most of us in Alchemy are tired of living half a lie, so to speak, since we have to carry on a certain amount of 'ordinary' research to justify our fellowships. Much more real work could be done if we could devote full time to Magic. As it stands, everyone but a few ancient Emeriti has done a little. ah unsponsored research to figure out some way of getting around the geas.

"Besides, if the Institute were to openly admit the existence of Course XI, other centers in the country would

set up their own Schools. Face it, I. T. is a pretty fine place, and what it does is certain to influence the operations of other colleges."

"So you want me to spread the news?" asked Ford.

"No. I have a better idea. At the next meeting of the SFS..."

PRESIDENT ROGERS recognized Ford Miller at the beginning of New Business.

"Buck," he began, "remember last week when I was talking about Building Nine? Well, I found out that the place really does exist."

"Oh, lay off it, Ford," someone said. "After all, we aren't cultists—we just like to read the stuff."

"No, I mean it," insisted Ford. "Harold Copley gave me the whole story. He's a student there in Alchemic Engineering. He can't tell you about it, but I think he can say whether or not I'm telling the truth."

Eyes turned toward the Society's ex-Vice-President. The pipe stopped puffing just long enough to allow, "He speaks the truth," to escape.

If ever there was an incredu-

lous murmur, the ensuing one was it. From the geographic center of the conversational undercurrent, the commanding voice of the floor spoke precisely.

"Let us hear him to his point," Crober T. Keppel said. "The matter is well worth discussion by this Society."

"This Society" subsided. Ford told them all that Harold Copley had explained to him, and finished by describing the gas.

Some one said, "Hold on here. Why can't these folks just write out what they want and toss leaflets around?"

FORD ANSWERED him. "The gas prevents their writing anything concerning the field when they're outside—here. This also means they have to do all their research in the other phase. And something in the gas overrides any thoughts about printing up exposes while they are in the School of Magic and then bringing them here. Harold says that every new student tries it, but it never works."

The member persisted. "So how did you get through?"

Ford blushed. "Harold found that out yesterday," he answered. "It seems that since I had such a powerful thought, about having to find a head and all, that I flooded the discriminator. You know how sometimes when a person lives near a radio transmitter, the signal will blanket the band, and his radio will get nothing but that station and its harmonics. I did the same thing on the level of thought. The discriminator got confused, and jammed. It held the threshold steady and set off the alarm all at once."

Rogers asked Ford, "Granted, as you say, that the people in Course XI want to let everyone else in on the secret—where do we come in. As the Society, I mean."

"I can get all the information from Harold," said Ford, "and pass it on to you. Then we can all start dropping hints all over."

"Ha! An excellent idea!" The top half of Keppel appeared from under the table. "Whether the labs exist—and since my estimation of Mr. Copley is of the highest I am inclined to believe that they do

—there is much to be said for such a plan, if only for the entertainment value. It would be extreme folly to let opportunity for at least a masterful joke slip away.”

Ford was so pleased with this favorable reception that it wasn't until minutes later he realized that the whole of Keppel's little speech had been a single sentence.

MILLER outlined Harold Copley's proposal. “From now on, each of us—and as many others as he can convince—should drop mentions of Building Nine activities in quizzes, lab reports, problem sheets, and other work that's turned in to staff and faculty. Some of it is bound to reach strategic professors, since they all have to do some conventional work to keep up appearances. Enough of these hints, and they'll start comparing notes. Harold has already told me where the various course offices and laboratories are in the Ninth Level, and I've printed up some floor plans and a poop sheet of facts about the place.” He passed them around.

“You know,” said Crober T.

Keppel. “This is detailed enough to be credible. I should like to go on record as being in favor of a motion to put these proposals into effect.”

“I so move!” This from Jim Gilbreth.

“Second!” Don Waters.

“Call for the vote!” Ford Miller, immediately.

“All in favor!” shouted Buck Rogers. A chorus of ayes.

“Opposed!” Silence.

—1—

INSTRUCTOR Hines glared at the paper before him. In answer to the third quiz problem, Don Waters had written, “This problem took seven separate steps. If one were able to use a method recently worked out in Magical Calculus by the Ninth Level people, it could be done in three.”

Hines grunted. “Joker, eh? Ten points off for being funny!”

—2—

Research Assistant Wickman was wearily reading Jim Gilbreth's lab report. The student was off on another of his

tirades against the poor quality of lab equipment. "However," the paper read, "if one were to set this experiment up in line with Alchemic principles, the new Seeder and Kohlbruth spirit balances recently purchased by the Necro lab could be used to decided advantage. Our aged triple-beams just are not precise enough for the requirements." and on and on and

"My God. How did *he* know we just replaced our balances?"

—3—

Professor Werthman stiffened. On the paper he was holding, Jim Richardson had solved a field theory problem using Simpson's Pentagram Series, a direct development of the Solomon's Seal Equations discovered by the Leipzig School of Magical Arts over three hundred years ago.

LATER, Professor Werthman insisted to his colleagues in the Common Room, "He just can't know. The geas is positively secure. It's been tested and re-tested. The whole thing

is a vicious, coincidental joke!"

"I wonder, Carl," Dr. Gilman of Communications turned to answer. "Professor Anders told me today that one of his lab assistants, who also does Necro research in Alchemic Engineering, received a lab report in his Instrumental Analysis course which contained a reference to his magic specialty. One or two others have also noticed a few hints. It should be investigated, at any rate, just in case there has been some circumvention of the geas. You know how the students and younger faculty feel about the secrecy; someone may have come up with something."

"Nonsense!" snorted Professor Werthman. "The geas is cross-blocked. It's absolutely foolproof!"

The flood of hints at the existence of the Ninth Level phase of the campus increased. Every day, each department of the Institute's conventional curriculum received papers, reports, and homework that dropped references to Magic and Alchemy as she is taught at I. T. Instructors who, themselves, knew nothing of the interphase passed it off as a

typical Tech prank. But those on the faculty and teaching staff of Course XI, Magic and Interphase Mechanics, and Course XI-A, Alchemy and Alchemical Engineering, were frantically comparing notes, drawing correlations, assessing data, and gradually coming to realize that what had been just an awful suspicion was an established fact. Final, crushing, irrefutable proof came on the day they fed the data into the metallic maw of WHIRLWIND, the Omniscient (for \$5 per minute) Digital Computer.

Paraphrased, what WHIRLWIND said was, "You guys have had it. Somebody has beat the hex and is hipped to jaw with cats and squares alike. The Outs and the Ins are now in the same pad, boys. That'll be \$335, please."

THE ADMINISTRATION and the Faculty of Course XI held a closed meeting. Professor Anders presided, and Dr. Gilman of Communications presented the situation.

"Gentlemen," he reported, "as of this morning, the Instructors and Professors who double in Magic, so to speak,

have received 973 references, hints, and even outright accusations regarding the secrecy of the Ninth Level in the papers of 613 students. No doubt these figures could be increased four-fold if there were a way to investigate the files of the rest of the teaching staff. As it is, we have been hard put to keep our concern hidden from the others. The strain is telling, I assure you.

"Fortunately, it appears that most of these students are treating the matter as a joke. Still, a significant number of cases seem to be serious. They are our main worry. Yes, Arthur?"

Dr. Culp had signaled a question. "I understand," he said, "that there is a nucleus in this latter group. Have you discovered what it is?"

Dr. Gilman answered, "Yes, we have—I was just going to mention that. The very first references that came to our attention, and also those which have been more specific and pointed of late are the work of about twelve students, all of whom have one very interesting thing in common.

"They are all members of the

I. T. Science Fiction Society.”

Professor Ashton looked up. “I suppose we should have known. Harold Copley is a member of that organization.”

“Quite right,” Dr. Gilman assented. “Much of the specific information on Course XI-A which is in the hands of these students is related to Mr. Copley’s line of research. It is evident that whoever crossed the interphase is also a member of the SFS.”

PROFESSOR WERTHMAN emerged from behind his cigar. “Hmph! You say there are only twelve persons in this nucleus. Why not have them all brought over into the Ninth Level, put under a geas, and be done with the whole matter. Lacking a driving point, the joke would lose its currency, and Mr. Copley will have lost his contact.”

“If it were that simple, Carl,” returned Dr. Gilman, “we wouldn’t have needed this meeting. But the problem has gotten out of hand. There are too many of our own students involved now. If we were to suddenly cut off their channel to the Main Phase, here, we would

still have the aroused complaint of their forced silence about the interphase itself. Techmen being what they are, it wouldn’t be long before they discovered a way to get someone else past the discriminator. We still aren’t exactly sure how it was done the first time—but if it was done once, it can be done again. Consequently, the Administration has asked me to present two alternative approaches.

“1. That the members of the Science Fiction Society be taken into the lab and given a selective geas which would block their memories of this episode. It is a touchy thing to do at best, as you all know.

“2. That the Institute finally come into the open and reveal the existence of Course XI and the Ninth Level.”

AFIST POUNDED for order above the noise “Gentlemen. *Gentlemen!* DAMMIT, GENTLEMEN!” Professor Anders finally calmed the meeting down. Then he called on Holden G. Frederick, Associate Dean of Students and Dean of the School of Interphase Sciences, to speak for the

Administration.

"There are several points in favor of the second solution," Dean Frederick said, "and I, for one, would like to see it accepted. The necessity for secrecy was imposed by conditions current nearly fifty years ago, when the new campus was built. The Administration is of the opinion that public thought nowadays is sufficiently receptive to the unusual in science that we can safely take the wraps off our work. I. T. is so well established that there would be no question of embarrassment. On the contrary, there are interested persons who would be quite pleased to see the Institute conducting serious research in these fields. It is certain that we have nothing to lose, and most likely some brilliant workers to gain."

In a short time, the meeting voted to allow the second solution to be implemented.

"Hblrglhh!" growled Professor Werthman, and went back into seclusion behind his cigar.

HAROLD COPLEY had just finished reading a letter from Dr. Gilman of Communications to the SFS.

"We were most successful," he was telling the members, "and it was much easier than I expected. Apparently the faculty was sitting on edge as it was, and all we had to do was push them off. It's a lot like leaning against a solid wall, only to have it give way just as you put your full weight on it. Anyway, the whole story will be printed in *The Tech* and published as a Special Report to the I. T. Fam— Oh my Lord!"

The Society stared aghast as the usually dour Harold Copley rolled on the floor in a fit of uncontrolled laughter, his pipe forgotten. Crober T. Koppel was the first to overcome shock. "His mind has snapped from the sudden release of strain," he decided aloud.

"Nh-nh-no!" gasped Harold Copley, now sitting up, but still shaking with mirth, tears streaming down his face. "I j-just happened to think what the Institute is up against-t-th-ha-ha. . ." He struggled for control. "Ha-ho-how can the Administration reveal to millions of people that their biggest secret had to be disclosed because a freshman had to go to the john!"