

Dynamic Science Fiction

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Cover by Alex Schomberg
(Illustrating "Snail's Pace")

ROBERT W. LOWNDES, Editor

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They gave life to millions, at the cost of rotting death to themselves.

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A Dynamic "First"
by Leonard Wampler

MACHINE COMPLEX

Sometimes a youngster's reading-matter really requires
careful supervision . . .

King: How do you, pretty lady?
Ophelia: Well! they say the owl was
a baker's daughter. We know what we
are, but we know not what we may be.

HAMLET: Act IV, sc. v.

TODAY THE Repairman came to see me again.

He *really* is a doctor, but I like to call him the Repairman, it irritates him so much.

He says it makes him think of a mechanic or some other kind of technician who repairs *inanimate* things. And he says, "Damn it all, boy, I'm a physician, a doctor of human beings, not a garageman!"

Of course he knows I'm only joking, but that doesn't keep him from glowering at me and muttering to himself all the time he's in my room.

This morning he had me strip down to my chassis and gave all my parts a complete going over. When he finished he said I'm alright again, and I can go out and run, tomorrow. I told him I was glad to hear that because my wheels are getting a little rusty, being on the blocks as long as I have been. He frowned and muttered some more about the dubious by-products of the machine age. I rolled into high gear.

"Don't race your motor, Repairman!"

He snapped his tool kit shut and left in a huff. I went out on the land-

ing where I could hear him talking to my mother, downstairs.

"It isn't normal!" he was protesting. "The boy is headed for something of a disaster unless you do something to prevent it. This business of living, thinking as a machine instead of a person is leading him straight toward a breakdown. When and if it hits him, I'll have to recommend a complete psychological overhaul!"

I could hardly keep still. Isn't it a laugh, though? In order to describe the treatment of what he calls my machine complex, he had to resort to a mechanical term. Overhaul, ha!

After awhile—I didn't listen any longer, it was all so stupid—he left, and I came downstairs. I wandered around a few minutes, just looking out the windows and planning what I'd do when I go outside tomorrow, and I guess I must have got in Mother's way. She pushed me into the library.

"Amuse yourself in here for an hour or so," she told me. "I've got to get things ready for your father's dinner."

I didn't mind. I like to read, occasionally. It passes the time.

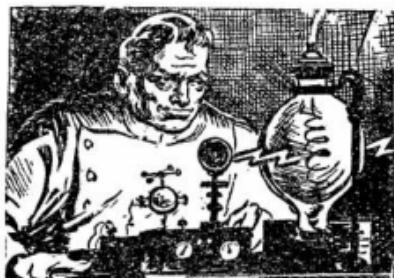
I skipped over the books on the lower shelves. They were just the usual things, anyway, and didn't look very interesting. I finally selected a couple of old ones from Father's collection that he keeps on the shelf nearest the ceiling. They were really ancient. I had to handle them carefully to keep them from crumbling to pieces.

I flipped through the first one. No pictures. I laid it to one side. Reading without pictures can be so tedious.

The other one was much better.

I was chuckling over it when Mother went by the door.

I stopped her and asked her to come in. "Look at these!" I said. "Did you ever see such funny pictures in all your life?"



SHE TOOK one look at what I was reading and stopped in her tracks. "Where did you get that?" she demanded.

She was flushing. Positively flushing. I had never seen her so excited before.

I showed her where I got the book.

"Your father!" she exclaimed. "I'm having a talk with him tonight—you see if I don't!!!"

"With Father?" I asked. "What about?"

"Never mind! Just never you mind!"

I couldn't see what the fuss was about. It was only a book.

The drawings in it were strange, sure, but there was nothing indecent about them. Maybe funny, and a little freakish, but not indecent. Certainly nothing to call a family conference about.

Anyway, she commanded me to give her the book, so I did. I switched over to one called "Jon Dare's Trip To The Moon". It was dull, but at least I got to read it all the way through without causing Mother to strip her gears

again. Once a day is enough for that kind of thing.

I wondered from time to time what would happen when Father came in.

Nothing did. At least not until after we'd assembled in the dining room and filled our fuel tanks. Then Mother took Father into the library. I wanted to come in, too, but she told me to go to my room.

I WENT ONLY as far as the hall, and stopped to listen.

"Chalmers!" she said to him, "look at this!"

Though I couldn't see, I knew she must be holding out the book she had taken from me.

"What about it?"

"What about it? Our son was reading it today, *that's* what about it! I told you when you brought it home he'd get it sooner or later, but you wouldn't listen! Bringing in such, such incredible *trash* for a young mind to absorb. I said at the time . . ."

"And I told you time after time since then that I can't see what harm it can do the boy. There are things in there that he's bound to discover someday, and he may as well get them straight from the beginning! It's all a part of his growing up, and I still can't see what possible harm—"

"You can't?" my mother interrupted. "Well I can!! He's young. Sensitive. And he's already headed for a . . . a . . . machine complex! Ask the doctor; he was here just today. Our son doesn't even think of himself as a human being! This fantastic drivel could easily drive him the rest of the way, if he took it in! It could make a complete neurotic of him! That's what harm it could do!"

I peeked around the door. Neither of my parents noticed me. They were completely engrossed in the book my father held.

"Look at it! Why do you suppose the publishers were ever permitted to

print such a hopelessly incorrect text as that?"

Mother pointed at a page in the book. "Full of misconceptions!" she snorted. "Not a single correct figure. Not one digit as it should be!"

"The boy is fairly intelligent," said my father, and I *glowcd*. "I think he'll understand that this isn't factual information if I explain it to him."

Mother was losing control of herself. "Explain, explain, explain!" she retorted. "I'm going to do something about it!"

"Allis! Have you gone completely off the track? What are you *doing*?"

"I'm destroying your precious ancient manuscript, that's what I'm doing! If you won't protect your child's mind, it's up to me!"

She had uncoiled her middle feeler and snatched the book from my father's tri-digital hands. She was so excited I could hear her intakes clicking.

She ran the book through her shredding mechanism.

"*Textbook of Human Anatomy*, '51 edition, indeed!" she whirred.

