

SATURN

MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE-FICTION

VOL. 1, No. 4

OCT. 1957

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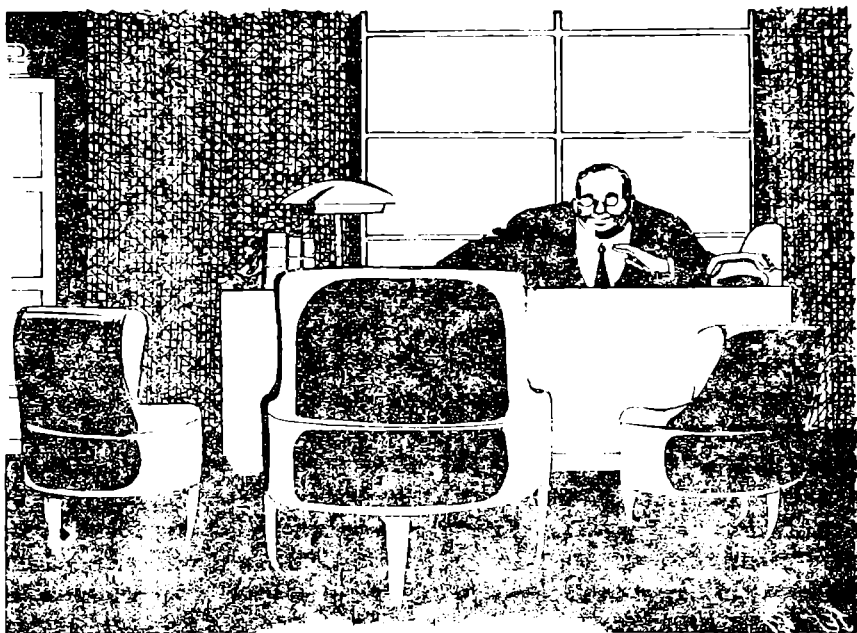
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SATURN, MAGAZINE OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY is published bi-monthly by CANDAR PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., at 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial office, 218 W. 48 St., New York 36, N.Y. Copyright 1957 by CANDAR PUBLISHING CO., INC. Entered as Second Class Matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass. Single copy 35c; Subscriptions: Yearly (6 issues): U. S. and possessions \$2.00; Canada \$2.25; Foreign \$2.50. All material submitted must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelope. The publishers assumes no responsibility for unsolicited material. The names of all characters used in these stories are fictitious; any resemblance to persons living or dead is coincidental. PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

OBSERVATION PLATFORM

Keeping an eye on mankind is only logical for extra-terrestrials in these H-bomb days—but whose eyes?



by MARTIN PEARSON

OTHER eyes watching? Or was it just another notion to scare the fanciful and foolish? Eyes watching mankind from... somewhere? Impossible, fantastic, illogical? Or was it? Other eyes watching? But of course! *They had better!*

Moodily, Danny kicked a pebble at the pigeons. The birds, disturbed in their incessant foraging and philandering, fluttered away for a moment, then settled down again near his park bench. Danny watched their iridescent feathers ruf-

fling, heard them resume their cooing and puffing, and continued his thoughts.

After all is said and done, humanity is not a sweet creature. Humans are deadly, the deadliest beasts of the Earth. Lions, tigers, snakes, eagles; the wicked wolverine, the snarling panther—all mere bait for a bloodlusting huntsman's holiday. Humans are the only animal that kills en masse, that kills not merely for food, but for sport, for lust, for frenzy, for the whims of political and religious fancies—motives of passing validity, generally discarded or revised after a few short decades in favor of some new excuse for mass butchery.

To a creature living on some other world, a creature that may have achieved the peace of social maturity, this ravaging mass of human beasts might well resemble a glass case filled with snakes—with the glass cracking. Snakes, perhaps interesting or instructive to watch, even colorfully pleasing to the eyes, but a screaming, deadly emergency when the glass vanishes. And the humans were removing the glass now!

The drone of an airplane penetrated Danny's mind. His eyes raised to the horizon,

ringed with the towers and skyscrapers of New York around this central park, watched the silvery speck cross the sky en route to some far continent on this planet. Propeller job, thought Danny, but somewhere on this Earth rocket ships are operating. Korea, New Mexico, various proving grounds, Siberia probably, Manchuria certainly, rocket ships of increasing agility, speed, height potential. Somewhere men are working on the application of atomic power to flying craft—several places, Danny was sure. Just a matter of time; maybe just a matter of—months.

Other eyes watching? Other eyes checking, evaluating, pondering. . . warning? No, thought Danny decisively, this was no speculation. A race hundreds or thousands of years in advance of us could keep watch; more definitely *must* keep watch. The snakes were breaking the glass.

So—where? His eyes swept the horizon, lingering on the tall towers of the world's greatest city, looking at the many thousands of glistening windows shining down at him, looking back at him and the others like him.

A CHILL raced its prickly fingers up and down Danny's spine. Where else indeed? A hundred thousand windows looking down on the central city of the most advanced industrial land of this planet. Certainly from one of those hundred thousand must watch an alien eye.

Danny suddenly got up. He had a month's leave from his work, he had two good friends to share his views, he had no time to lose. He strode off, scattering the pigeons from his path with a great flutter of wings.

The psychometer ticked its silent electronic tick, registering the thoughts around it. The psychometer's sympathetic twin registered by induction a similar set of electronic impulses. A void unthinkable to park pigeons separated the two devices. A host of mechanical things, silent to the observable ear, but a mass of whirling action to a sub-atomic sense, sorted through the series of classifications inconceivable to a human mind and turned up certain indicators. A digit was added to a growing column. Another individual was singled out.

Danny finished his explanation, sat back. He was a lit-

tle tense, he was not sure of his reception. A man doesn't get a reputation for brilliance, a record for philosophy, for proven scientific ability, and risk it all on a speculation as apparently wild as this. But Danny felt sure of his premise, and, in any case, he knew he would have the sympathy of the Tylers. Carla and Jonathan Tyler were that unfortunately rare thing, a happily married couple in their thirties, whose home was always a haven of calm and peace to Danny, whose work was identical with his, and who usually shared his views.

Carla poured some more coffee. "Why should they bother to actually station spies here? It would be a physical nuisance if their physiques were not suited to Earth's atmosphere, and it would present a constant danger of exposure. Wouldn't it be just as practical to simply watch us, say from the moon, through telescopic instruments that could conceivably be exact enough to see our every action?"

Jonathan, sitting silently near the window, shook his head. "I can see Danny's point. Even with the best instruments, they would still en-

counter so much atmospheric interference that it is doubtful if even such an obvious source of information as newsprint could be read from the moon. Not to mention more subtle investigations. There can be no real substitute for getting down among the people themselves to test and record their feelings. You know, Carla, you never can understand a problem from mere theory. You have to get into it, get deeply into it, before you can grasp it. In a matter of this sort, it would be imperative for the 'Other Eyes'—if we might call them that—to overlook nothing."

"Besides," Danny pointed out, "the matter is too important to them, I should think, it only superficial attention. A general surveillance from outer space would have been—probably was—sufficient a few hundred years ago, and for the thousands before that. But today, with atomic developments and ionospheric flights, the situation has become crucial. And where else but New York would be the place to keep an eye on world trends?"

Carla ran a hand through her hair. "And what are we going to do about it? After all, why shouldn't they keep an

eye open to what the World Government is up to? I, for one, am entirely in favor of it. Why should we three interfere?"

"Well, now," Danny said, leaning forward. "The point is that, for better or worse, we are human beings and all in this boat together. We didn't know what these aliens might be like or what they might do. We can't assume they will take a paternal viewpoint—why should they? We wouldn't in a similar situation. If they are creatures that have followed a line of evolution leading to personal intelligence, the same sort of line we followed, I would imagine that their benevolence capacity towards dangerous beasts is no better than our own. I don't think that our finding this spy in our midst would stop their efforts, but it would serve as sufficient proof to alert the world's leaders to the danger."

TYLER stood up, went to the window. "And where," he waved a hand outwards, "are you going to find your needle in this cement haystack? What do we do, advertise?"

"W a n t e d—o n e i n t e r p l a n e t a r y m o n s t e r. Applicants please be prepared to prove

identity as anti-human spies," Carla laughed.

"That wouldn't get much results, would it?" said Danny. "But, seriously, we should be able to narrow it down. I would say let us put ourselves in the position of an interplanetary spy and see what we would do. Where, for a start, would we locate? It's logical, for a starting premise, to make this city the headquarters. What next?"

Tyler stood at the window, looked out, up and down, and thought. On the broad ledge, two pigeons were preening themselves, in the streets sparrows were hopping about, mothers were wheeling their babies, a dog was sniffing at a post, a car passed occasionally. The noises of the buses on the avenue could be heard. This was a quiet area, near the park, residential. Tyler did not see this street, for example, as an ideal spot for observation. It was closed in.

He raised his eyes. You couldn't see the skyscrapers from here, but he knew that this four-story building's roof could be seen from some of the taller buildings. Why not, as Danny suggested, your alien observation platform in a high floor of a skyscraper from which every major develop-

ment could be seen, from which every building, major and minor, could be surveyed and its inhabitants studied?

He turned away, sat down, and explained this chain of thought.

Carla arched her eyebrows. "Why, with directional apparatus, I should think they could do an awful lot of snooping, couldn't they? Peeping Toms on a grand scale."

"Yes," Danny carried it further. "An electronic hearing device, properly rigged up, could hear at many windows. Good concealed telescopes, in the right high windows, could sweep many of the most important office buildings—buildings that house the executive departments of dozens of the most important American businesses and international agencies. Again, the Other Eye, would need a free means of relaying his messages to his planetary base. With a special narrow-beam render, he could probably do that from the top of a high building without much interference or detection."

Tyler rubbed his jaw. "Then our problem becomes a bit simpler. I would say that we should be able to narrow down the number of buildings best

suiting for those purposes to a specific area, figure out which floors would be most useful. Offhand, I would say the party would rent an office in a tower, where he could have access to all four directions. In other words, we have to look for a whole floor—not necessarily a large floor, perhaps a penthouse office—in a very high skyscraper in the lower midtown section of the city. It would be occupied by a firm of no clear occupation, and it might also be distinguished by television masts or something of that nature.”

“Hmm.” Danny tapped a cigarette against his wrist. “Handled like a true-born detective. Now, as I see it, we have a project for ourselves. Fortunately, we also have the time.”

“Martians, look out!” laughed Carla. “Just tell me one thing, boys. Where are you going to put your Martian when you find him?”

THE PSYCHOMETER beat out its emotionless record. On a distant place, in a location not to be easily described, a sympathetically attuned recorder repeated the message. An indicator moved sharply, to call the attention of a non-me-

chanical observer. Note was duly taken.

It took the three of them exactly twenty-two days and six hours to locate the offices described on the bulletin board as *Zenith Enterprises, Penthouse, Take Stairs from 57th Floor*. Carla tried to go up there, telling the express elevator man that she was looking for a secretarial job. The elevator man said he hadn't heard they were hiring, hadn't seen anybody recently except Mr. Blue, and didn't think she could get in just at this time. Which was true, for the door to the penthouse stairs was locked, and there was no answer to her knock.

The elevator man shrugged. “I dunno what they do,” he said. “Maybe some kinda clipping bureau, promotion maybe. They get a lotta newspapers. That's about all they get, no regular business mail, come to think of it. Dozens of papers and magazines. Some come airmail, even, from Europe, Japan, even Africa. Must be able to read a lotta languages.”

“Do you know when I could see Mr. Blue?” Carla asked.

“Couldn't say, lady, he comes and goes. You don't

wanta work for a firm like that, anyway. They're tight-wads, never handed out a cent come Christmas. But if you still wanta see him, you could hang around some morning. Maybe ask the night man to keep an eye open, too."

Carla thanked him, went back to report her findings. The search had been intensive, but, thanks to Tyler's reasoning, had been speeded up. They had first assembled on a rooftop in the major business area, and from there had observed the buildings that seemed to fit the bill. Of those, several had what might have been either penthouses or elevator shacks. They worked around the problem, finally pinned it down.

This looked like a good thing. Zenith Enterprises did not have a telephone listing, oddly enough, though there may have been a private wire. The building management declined to advance any information about their tenant and the help knew but little. Carla's lead about a man named Blue was about all they could find out.

Danny and Tyler agreed to stand watch in the building lobby to see who went up to the fifty-seventh floor. They

hoped to see the man before they approached him. Danny took the first watch, standing by the starter, kidding him a bit, bribing him by promising that if they could sell Mr. Blue some insurance, the starter would get a ten-spot.

Mr. Blue did not show up that day.

In a distant place, not on the map of Earth, a number of beings conferred. Before them the registers of the psychometers reeled off their unending records, including the latest reading on the search being conducted by three humans.

I find this of very great interest, observed one being. A very simple plan of action revealed a target. This is rather incredible. Do you suppose they will really uncover the observer? And what will happen then? I do not favor having action precipitated sooner than necessary. No action at all is still the most desirable course. But, another being pointed out, we may have to interfere....

PIGEONS were strutting before the entrance of the skyscraper. You would never know there was a problem like this, thought Carla, as she made her way into the lobby.

The sun is shining, the sky is soft and blue. It's wonderful spring weather. Do you suppose *it* enjoys this?

Carla had courage. She was going to see Mr. Blue. She had written to him, after the three had discussed the matter. She was going to see him now, as per the hour she had set. They had decided on their approach. They would act innocent, as simple scientific observers. Their intent would be merely to learn, to bask in the light of another world's genius.

Just what they would actually do they were none too sure. It would probably involve calling on the International Bureau of Investigation, or otherwise involving the World Government. Actually, Danny was somewhat idealistic. He felt that perhaps a more advanced world would not really want to damage humanity. Maybe they could even be persuaded to befriend us. Even a snake can be charmed, as Danny explained, and if they regard humanity as a deadlier snake, still, it might pay to be nice to it.

So they wrote a letter to Mr. Blue of Zenith Enterprises. Not a crazy letter, charging him with what they thought, but a rather subtle one. If the

observer could read between the lines, he would be caught. If he chose to act innocent, he would be permitted to get away with it, and they would then follow a different procedure.

Carlo got off at the fifty-seventh floor and went to the stairs. The metal door leading to the penthouse, which had been locked when last she had been there, was open. She climbed the stairs and came to a smooth wooden door, neatly lettered with the firm name. She knocked.

The door opened. A little bald man, somewhat less than five feet tall, with thick round glasses, let her in, smiled to her, waved a hand and led her silently into the main office.

Wide windows faced a great panorama of the city; the sweep of Manhattan could be seen in all its glory. Several short, thick-barreled telescopes stood around on movable stands, and there were thick cables leading to and from several large boxes with dials and controls...in short, *this was it!*

Subconsciously Carla knew it. There would be no subterfuge.

She sat down in front of the desk. Danny and her husband

would be on the fifty-seventh floor landing by now, waiting for an emergency call. She wondered if anything would really happen to her. Somehow she doubted it.

"You are the lady who wrote me," said the little man, seating himself opposite her. She watched his face. It seemed friendly, sympathetic. The thought suddenly occurred to her that this was probably a very cunning mask, a face of back at her.

"I wonder just what you expect of me" he said. "Surely you are not interested in black-artificial, fleshlike substance. The face of Mr. Blue smiled mail. No one would be likely to believe you, and I could easily remove my little establishment."

HIS DELIBERATE frankness left Carla perplexed. She had assumed a conversational gambit about a mythical job, in which she would slowly lead the "Other Eye" into error, then would confront him with the charge. It had not even occurred to her that she would have to answer to a simple admission like this.

"I really don't think we expected anything. My husband and I are merely investigators of scientific phenomena. We

conjectured your existence as an exercise in what I suppose should be termed the interplanetary viewpoint, and, frankly, I am a little amazed to find it so easily proven. Where are you from?"

Mr. Blue leaned back, folded his hands. "Now, really, I do not think it fair of you to ask. I appreciate your attitude; After all, I am an investigator of extraplanetary phenomena also. I see that you realize the alarm that moves my native world at the thought of being neighbors to a planet as dynamic and explosive as yours."

"Mars?" said Carla, becoming suddenly excited. "Venus?" Incredibly, a flash of recognition went through her, like an electric shock. Here was an actual non-Terrestrial! The infinites this prospect opened!

"Neighbors' is a relative term. It all depends on the speed of your transport; you really must not assume anything. Besides, I am forced to assure you, your own people will discover where I come from during their next two or three generations."

He stood up. "If you wish some information in advance of your descendants, would

you please be so kind as to call up your husband and his friend from downstairs. We can all go over the matter together."

Carla went to the head of the penthouse stairs and called down. Danny and Tyler, who were getting anxious, dashed up. Back in Mr. Blue's office, the three were seated, while Mr. Blue, standing up, began a little lecture.

"I must begin by informing you that there are many inhabited worlds," he commenced....

The psychometer bank carried the whole thing. The central non-mechanical being manipulated certain devices, touched certain hitherto unused arrangement.

Mr. Blue stood in his office, alone. For a while he stood there, looking thoughtfully across his desk at the three chairs that had been moved from their usual spots. He walked over to the penthouse stairs, closed the door. Returning to his desk, he sat down, started to unwrap the newspapers that had arrived that morning, prepared to transmit their contents photostatically to the moon base, from where the Ganymede home Observatory would pick them up, ana-

lyse their developments. Mr. Blue thought to himself, as he worked, that he had better apply for a replacement. He was getting a bit absent-minded lately.

CARLA, Danny, and Tyler sat on a bench in Central Park, feeding the pigeons. "I have the strangest feeling that I've forgotten to do something," said Carla.

"Did you remember to turn off the gas?" said her husband. "You know I feel that way too."

Danny looked up at the towers around him. "Sometimes I wonder if there wouldn't be observers from some other world hidden among these buildings, watching us humans climb towards the interplanetary rocket and the atomic drive?"

Carla laughed. "You do get the silliest ideas," she giggled. "You need to get back on the job in the lab again. You know that's just a lot of unscientific moonshine."

Danny scratched his head. "I guess it is," he said, feeling foolish and a bit perplexed. "But, you know, somehow I can't seem to remember how we spent the past month."

"Time does fly, doesn't it?" Carla said. "Well, that's how vacations go."

The psychometer ticked away. On a place somewhere else in the universe, a sympathetic device removed an indicator from a special surveillance rack, sent it back among the electronic whirl again. But soon a different indicator was aglow. Several non-mechanical beings watched this new one.

Humanity is still a century or so away from being a direct problem, observed one. We can handle it. But the Gany-medean now—they are a mere two or three centuries ahead of humanity, and that is a tricky period. They do not have psychometers, nor the advantages of ten thousand more years of civilization...they are the snake unleashed. We must keep a closer watch on Mr. Blue....

A little man with thick glasses left an office building that afternoon, his day's chores

done, and set off home. A pigeon flew from his path with a desperate flapping of wings.

A mutationally devised and inherited arrangement of natural bones within the skeleton of the pigeon—of all the pigeons in all the human cities—whose special qualities could be detected only on an electronic scale, ticked out Mr. Blue's thought as he passed. The tick was repeated by sympathetic induction on a bank of similar recorders in a place elsewhere than Earth. Hundreds of thousands of such psychometric bones in hundreds of thousands of pigeons from one end of the world to the other ticked off the thoughts of the average man for another world's observers. Some of the emitters of thought were not so average. And one was not of this Earth at all.

THE END