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# SCIENCE STORIES

**Issue No. 3**

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Science Stories is published bi-monthly by Palmer Publications, Inc., 1144 Ashland Avenue, Evanston, Illinois. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Evanston, Illinois. Additional entry at Chicago, Illinois. Printed in U.S.A. by the W. F. Hall Printing Company of Chicago, Illinois. Additional entry applied for at Amherst, Wisconsin. No responsibility is undertaken for unsolicited manuscripts, photographs or artwork. Return envelope and sufficient return postage is required. Advertising rates at request. Subscriptions: 12 issues, \$3.00; 24 issues, \$6.00. Printed in U.S.A. Copyright 1953, Palmer Publications, Inc.

# SURE THING

By Frank Patton

Joe and Twitchy needed a sure way to beat the numbers racket, and Joe found the answer in his science-fiction magazines. It was fool-proof, which is a good thing when you're trying to outsmart Big Ben (the Big Bloody) Bogart.

Illustration by H. W. McCauley

Couple more numbers like that, and we'll land in the Home for Bum-guessing Gamblers," grumbled Twitchy McGoniff.

"Maybe you shoulda took a course in math at the Univoisity," suggested Joe (the Rat) Pefferkorn. There was no humor in his mournful expression, but as Twitchy glared at him, with rising ire, he added hastily, "No kiddin, the numbers is going against us sumpin awful lately."

"The way we figured it, it shoulda been a sure thing," said Twitchy. His right cheek twitched up and down several times until its motion threatened to assume a perpetuity. then he slapped at his face and the twitching stopped.

"Quit knockin' yourself out," said Joe. "It is a sure thing, only the bank don't seem to cooperate none. The clearings always come out with the wrong numbers."

"It ain't the numbers, it's the way we play 'em," said Twitchy.

"If we only knew in advance what the numbers would be. . ."

"You mean like in science fiction, where we step into a time machine and go into the future, then come back and lay out the setup so it avoids all the big winning combos?"

Twitchy laughed sarcastically. "Look, Joe, if you're going to bring up that cockeyed contraption of yours again, I'll crown you with a complete file of *Galaxy*. If you'd quit readin' that *stuff*, as you call it, and do a little figuring on paper, maybe we'd do better in the numbers."

"It ain't *stuff*," said Joe petulantly, "it's *stf....stef....s-t-f*."

"I kin spell!" said Twitchy beligerantly. "It's the numbers that don't come out right . . ."

"Kin you spell entropy?"

"Entropy? What the hell for?"

"Well, that's the stuff that makes time travel work. And it's the stuff I'm using in my machine. I got it out of *Astounding Science*



Fiction, and Campbell bases all his fiction on absolute fact . . . you heard what he said at the Convention."

"Yeah, I *heard* it. And I also heard what he said about that other rag you keep moaning about . . . that *Universe!*"

"Well," defended Joe, "it ain't as bad as *Imagination* . . ."

"You *said* it," said Twitchy. "And now, get the hell out of here, and start thinking about how come we are being beat on the numbers instead of *imagining* all that junk."

Mournfully Joe walked out of the door. In an equally mournful manner he opened the cellar door and went down into the basement. But as he reached the bottom, a

strange elation spread over his face. Very un-mournfully he made his way over to a rough workbench and stood looking at a maze of wires and gadgets that formed a large and awe-inspiring network of confusion surrounding an area of completely empty air. That is, empty except for a copy of *It*.

"Now, *if* I could only send that magazine into the future . . ."

Joe began to study the network of wires, and experimentatively disconnected and reconnected some of them. "Lessee—the entropy goes in here, and comes out . . ." A sharp flash of shorted electricity made him jump. "Dog-gone, thought I had the current off. Might have electrocuted. . ." He

stopped speaking, stared at the network of wires, and at the vacant space they enclosed.

*If* was gone!

For an instant he stared, then he turned and raced up the stairs. He burst into the room where Twitchy sat filling page after page with numbers, shuffling numbers tickets, and slapping at his twitching cheek.

"*If* is gone!" he shouted. "*If* is gone!

Twitchy turned around in his chair. "What?" he asked, his face a complete expanse of annoyance. "What did you say?"

"*If* is gone!" repeated Joe.

"Now what in hell sense does *that* make?" asked Twitchy, twitching and slapping almost in one motion. "You mean it is gone, don't you?"

"Yeah!" babbled Joe. "That's what I mean. It—I mean *If*—is gone! My entropy machine woiks!"

"If?" said Twitchy unbelievingly.

"Yeah!"

Twitchy turned wearily back to his figures. "Okay. And do me a favor, will you?"

"What?"

"*If* it *should* happen to 'woik,' keep me posted, willya?"

"I sure will!" said Joe happily, racing back toward the basement. "If I can get *If* back, I'll go there myself! And then you'll see. . ."

Once more in the basement work shop-reading room, Joe flicked a

switch and *If* was back. He bel-lowed happily in a stentorian voice.

"*If* is back!" he screamed.

There were the sound of footsteps above, and then Twitchy's voice came down the stairwell. "You mean *it*, don't you?" he screamed back. The ire in his voice was punctuated by the violent slam of the cellar door, which crashed into the doorframe with such vigor that the whole house shook for several seconds. Then the footsteps receded again.

Joe picked up the magazine from its nesting place in the network of wires and looked at it puzzledly. "No," he said. "*If*, not *it*. Where does he get that *it* stuff. . .?"

Carefully spreading the wires apart on the tangled contraption he wormed his way inside. Then he carefully reached out with the copy of *If* and pushed the switch button. And disappeared with half of *If* disappearing with him. The other half, containing an article on the Shaver Mystery, fell to the floor in a cloud of fluttering pieces of paper.

\* \* \*

Joe (the Rat) Pefferkorn sauntered nonchalantly into the room where Twitchy McGoniff was still shuffling numbers tickets. "Well," he announced. "I done it."

Twitchy barely gave him heed. "You admit I was right, then," he said.

"Right about what?"

"It was *it*, wasn't it?"

"*It was it* wasn't *it*," said Joe blankly. "Now who's talking silly? What's with all the *it* business?"

Twitchy twitched in annoyance. "What was all *your* business with the *it*?" he snarled.

"Oh that!" Joe assumed a lofty appearance. "Just what I was going to tell you. Me and *If* just went into the future—and back!"

Twitchy turned slowly and faced Joe. "What did you say?"

"I said my machine woiked. "I just came back from tomorrow."

Even more slowly Twitchy got to his feet. "Joe," he said carefully, "I told you if you didn't cut out fooling with that *stuff*. . ." he almost spat the word ". . . I was going to crown you with it. Well, that's exactly what I'm going to do. And when I've done it, I'm going to burn every copy of your collection, and if you ever bring another one into this joint, I'll. . ."

"How'd you like to read tomorrow's paper," said Joe calmly, fishing a folded newspaper from his pocket.

For a tense instant Twitchy stood rooted to the spot, then he began twitching uncontrollably. Joe leaped to his feet, slapped him in the face with the paper. The twitching stopped, and Twitchy said, "Thanks."

Then he took the paper from Joe's hand, opened it and read the date. "March 1, 1956. . ." His hand began to tremble. Joe, watching anxiously, doubled up his fist,

but the expected wave of violent twitching failed to come. Instead Twitchy opened the paper carefully to the financial page and read the number in the small box in one corner. . . Then he uttered a yell, and leaped to the telephone on his desk. In a moment he was barking numbers into the transmitter. For a while Joe watched him, then shrugging his shoulders, he wandered back into the basement.

\* \* \*

"Ruined!" moaned Twitchy, too weak to twitch. "Lost! Every cent. And in hock up to our necks. And in a few minutes Big Ben (the Big Bloody) Bogart will be up here to blast us with his boys. It's the end! We're finished, cooked, dead!"

Joe looked more mournful than he ever had at any time before. "But how could it be? You had tomorrow's paper! You couldn't possibly publish the wrong numbers. There wasn't a winning ticket out anywhere, the way you rigged it!"

"You louse," moaned Twitchy, trying to twitch, and failing. "You louse."

"Me?" How come I am a louse?" Joe looked hurt.

For an instant Twitchy rose to a towering height over Joe, then he slumped down again in complete despair. "Tomorrow's paper," he moaned. "You idiot. What gave you the idea that the newspaper was *tomorrow's* paper?"

"Easy," said Joe indignantly. "I

send myself into the future, and come back with a paper. The paper is dated March 1. Since I make this trip on February 28, the last day of the month, March 1 is *tomorrow's* paper."

"For once you are right," said Twitchy. "March 1 is tomorrow's paper. And today, you jerk, is February 29. It's Leap Year! And in Leap Year, February has twenty-nine days!"

Joe looked stunned, then suddenly he leaped to his feet. "Say! We can pull the same stunt tomorrow, and . . .!"

"Sorry, boys," came a cold voice from the doorway. "Not on Big

Ben you don't pull the same stunt tomorrow! How stupid do you think I am?" He stood aside and waved a hand. "Give it to 'em, boys," he said.

An instant later he surveyed the scene, then picked up a newspaper lying on the desk. "Imagine it," he said, glancing at the date. "They even faked tomorrow's paper. What a nerve! Big Ben don't get taken in the numbers more than once!"

He tossed the paper back on the desk, waved his boys out, and carefully closed the door behind him.

THE END