

# FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

FEBRUARY, 1956

Vol. 5, No. 1

The End of the Journey . . . . .	4
<i>by Edmund Cooper</i>	
Grandma's Lie Soap . . . . .	22
<i>by Robert Abernathy</i>	
Shades of Davy Crockett . . . . .	38
<i>by Theodore Pratt</i>	
The Man Who Had Spiders . . . . .	45
<i>by Roger Dee</i>	
Passage to Anywhere . . . . .	54
<i>by Sam Merwin Jr.</i>	
The Vapor Horn . . . . .	76
<i>by Ethel G. Lewis</i>	
A Woman's Right . . . . .	85
<i>by Robert Silverberg</i>	
For Men Must Work . . . . .	96
<i>by F. B. Bryning</i>	
Universe in Books . . . . .	110
<i>by Hans Stefan Santesson</i>	
Young Man With a Trumpet . . . . .	114
<i>by Frank Belknap Long</i>	
The Cybernetic Kid . . . . .	117
<i>by John Jakes</i>	

---

H. L. Herbert  
*President*

---

Leo Margulies  
*Publisher*  
*Editorial Director*

---

Kelly Freas  
*Cover Design*

# the cybernetic kid

by . . . John Jakes

**A child genius is like an atomic acorn. He can grow into a sturdy oak, or blow the lid off generally.**

PTUI! went the old-fashioned pea-shooter.

"Wow!" exclaimed Sailor Burns, massaging his knobby dome once so familiar to habitues of the system-wide wrestling telecasts. The Sailor's usually cheery expression disappeared, to be replaced by a complete and rapturous stare of puzzled dullness.

"Will you for Pete's sake quit yelling?" snapped Mr. Fred Ajax, removing his cigar from his lips. "If I don't figure out an angle pretty soon, the creditors are going to heave us into the nearest penal institution."

*Ptui!* repeated the deadly weapon.

"Zowie!" ejaculated the Sailor, more out of surprise than pain.

This homely scene was enacted early one morning in the city park as Mr. Fred Ajax and his associate were on their way to their place of business, Ajax Enterprises. What they were going to do when they arrived was a mystery to Ajax.

The Sailor did not trouble his head about such abstract considerations.

Ajax's most recent invention, the Skin-of-Delight lamp, had run

---

*When a science-fantasy writer with a bent for stark realism—remember John Jakes' chillingly somber DIRGE FOR THE SANE?—lifts a child prodigy to his shoulders and goes prancing about with chuckles of high glee we're left a little stunned. But somber or joyous, a Jakes yarn has a magic all its own!*

---

its course of popularity, leaving the business, to say the least, almost broke. Monthly bills had completed the annihilation.

As the second missile connected with the Sailor's dome, causing him to cry out, Ajax stopped dead in the gravel path. "What's wrong with you?" he demanded. "It's too early in the year for mosquitoes."

Perplexed, the Sailor replied, "I dunno, Fred. Something's been hitting my head." The Sailor appeared sad. "It hurts."

"I'm amazed," Ajax replied with a slight shade of sarcasm in his tone. He looked into the shrubbery on both sides of the path. "Aha! There's the trouble, I'll bet."

The trouble happened to be a small boy of around eight, with crew-cut hair and large glasses which magnified his eyes to peculiar proportions. He was watching our friends with a smirk of fiendish pleasure on his face, all the while waving his pea-shooter in derision. The lower half of his body was concealed by a shrub.

The lad uttered a loud raspberry.

Ajax put his hands on his hips, screwed up the side of his mouth and leered. "Come here, kid." The boy hesitated, his face losing its air of jolly hellishness. The Sailor blinked, not understanding his companion's severe manner. "I said come here," intoned Ajax with a gangsterish cast to his features.

The boy was clearly trained to obey his elders. With a sad, reluc-

tant face he stepped from the bushes and came toward the two, scuffing his oxfords on the gravel of the path.

"I was only seeking a little relaxation," the youth exclaimed woefully. "Surely you can't blame me for that!"

Ajax, taken aback, nevertheless grinned and stuck out his hand. "Put her there, sonny. I'm not sore. I just wanted to get you out of those bushes to congratulate you."

"Congratulate him!" howled the Sailor. "For beaming me?"

"Quiet, you," hissed Ajax to his burly friend. The Sailor sank deep into his noisy sport coat. "Sonny," Ajax continued to the boy, who was beaming again, "you are the first person who has ever been able to make a dent in my friend's dome, outside of Four-arms Fogerty, the Venusian Terror. But that was years ago in the wrestling business."

"I am extremely happy that my antics pleased you," the boy replied. He cast anxious looks up and down the path.

"What's the matter, kid?" Sailor Burns asked confidentially. "They after you for pinching the baby-sitter?"

"Nothing as ridiculous as that," the boy said. "However, I regret to say that I am being more or less pursued."

"Don't your folks want you to play in the park?" Ajax asked, puffing deeply on his fragrant cigar.

"Not my parents," the lad answered. "My guardian."

"Oh," replied Ajax, pushing the subject no further.

"He was a colleague of my father's, only I do not happen to find him congenial. I do not mind intellectual activity, in fact I find it refreshing, but a strict diet of that sort of thing is not healthy. My guardian refuses to let me indulge in childish play, and so I am forced to use deception."

"Sneak out on the bas . . . him, huh?" the Sailor grinned.

The boy nodded. "Exactly. I confess I was disturbed by the glimmer in this large gentleman's orbs when I propelled my missiles in his direction, but I trust that all has been forgiven."

"Sure," the Sailor said heartily. "I was ready to bust you in the orbs, too, but I ain't mad any more. I get what you're driving at. This guardian of yours won't let you go to the depths on Saturday afternoon or play baseball with the kids, huh?"

"No," the lad replied. "He insists I keep in strict practice for my career."

"Career!" Ajax exclaimed. "How old *are* you?"

"Seven," was the piping reply.

"And what's this career?"

"Oh," replied the youth off-handedly, "I'm a genius."

Suffice to say that it would not have taken a loaded sandbag to knock Fred Ajax into a horizontal position on the path. Since the boy

aroused his curiosity and there was nothing waiting for him at the office of Ajax Enterprises except perhaps creditors, he soon found himself seated on a park bench with the boy, learning more of his peculiar background.

The Sailor sprawled on the grass, intellectually lost but spiritually interested.

The boy's name was Dennis Ogg. His father had been Professor of Mathematics at Harvard and Venusburg Universities, and Dennis seemed to accept the fact that a tragic accident during a rocket trip back to Earth on vacation had caused his parents' death. It appeared that Dennis had a mind that could encompass the most complicated mathematical and philosophical problems as easily as normal children understood nursery rhymes.

At three Dennis had dismissed Einstein of the last century as "kindergarten stuff." At six he had completed requirements for entrance into Harvard University but a frantic directors' board had turned thumbs down at the last moment, envisioning a tot in shorts toddling across the campus, smirking smugly after having confounded the leading lights of learning in the institution.

"In fact," Dennis told them, "my guardian has often placed me in competition with one of the largest electronic brains on Venus. I find it fascinating sport. I have even broken one record set by that

big brain for solving a complicated problem."

"You . . ." Ajax gasped. "You're kidding me."

"I wish I were," Dennis Ogg replied, a trace of sadness in his voice. "I sometimes think it would be a lot of fun to be a dope."

"You mean you race them cy . . . cy . . ." Sailor Burns sputtered.

"Cybernetic," Ajax assisted.

"Yeah, cybernetic. You race them cybernetic things—and *beat 'em?*"

"Every time," Dennis replied wistfully.

Illumination from heaven struck Fred Ajax. "Ah!" he chorused. "*Ab!*" He surged to his feet. "Dennis, how would you like to have some fun? How would you like to be in a *real* race, with an audience and everything?"

"Audience?" Dennis replied, blinking behind the large glasses. "I'm not sure that I quite understand."

"You're fogging me, too," the Sailor said mournfully.

"Here's the setup," Ajax said rapidly, visions of gleeful creditors who nipped at his heels dancing in his thoughts.

"Aha! There you are, Dennis!"

This stern exclamation came from the lips of a seedy individual who had just stuck his bowlered head through the shrubbery. The rest of his frame followed in jerky succession. He carried a rolled-up umbrella and wore pince-nez glasses. He was prim and

haughty, and Ajax did not particularly like his looks. Ajax immediately identified him as the guardian.

"Dennis!" exclaimed the seedy individual, shaking his umbrella and frowning sternly. "Who are these persons?"

"And who the hell are you, getting so nose-y?" the Sailor growled belligerently. He towered over the other man, causing a flinching response which was counteracted by a defiant curl of the lip.

"My name is Ellsworth Cranch. I happen to be the guardian of this boy."

"Pin a rose on me," growled the Sailor. "I think I'll bust you in the orbs."

Feigning unconcern, Cranch said to Dennis, "I warned you that I would take stern measures if you continued to disobey me by sneaking out of the apartment. I—"

Ajax put on a placating air. "Now, now, Mr. Cranch. Dennis was just telling us how much he enjoyed working with you. He was telling us all about his mental gymnastics, you might call it."

Cranch's face became less suspicious. This speech by Ajax caused Dennis to frown as if faith had been shattered, but a wink from Ajax which Cranch could not see restored it.

Cranch fumbled with his frayed string tie. "He's . . . been telling how I'm training him, eh?"

"Yes, sir! A brilliant piece of work! Brilliant."

"Well! Hem! I wouldn't say— although I will admit, Dennis has a splendid future ahead of him, if he is properly handled."

"I agree. He was also telling us that he has been in competition with a cybernetic brain on Venus, and solved problems more rapidly than the machine was able to do."

"Quite right," Cranch replied.

"Have a cigar," Ajax effused. "Here's my card, too. Ajax Enterprises." The confusion of paraphernalia thrust upon Cranch gave Ajax time to press his point home. "It appears to me, Mr. Cranch, that the public would be interested in a boy like Dennis. Why, I think they'd pay *money* to watch him beat a big brain. Culturally, you know," Ajax went on, spinning something out of nothing, "mankind is getting rather worried about the superiority of machines. It would be refreshing to see a mere lad who could make a monkey out of a mechanical contraption."

"What is all this talk about the public?" Cranch scowled. "The 'public' has never fostered genius."

"But everybody likes kids," the Sailor put in helpfully.

Ajax ran his eyes suggestively over Ellsworth Cranch's frayed lapels. "Tell me, Cranch old boy. How's the take? Managing a genius, I mean. A good racket?"

"Racket? I don't— ah! Well— hem—Mr.—Ajax is it? I confess that the financial aspect is rather discouraging. The small fund

which Dennis' father left for his care has almost run out, and I have always considered myself too talented a man to stoop to labor in the market place."

"Haw!" ejaculated the Sailor.

Ajax nudged him to silence, scowling venomously. "Here is my proposition," he said to Cranch. Although it was decidedly important from the aspect of his pocket-book, Ajax added casually, "You can take it or leave it. I have plenty of other enterprises to hold my attention, but such a project interests me. Also, it would give you a chance to gain cash to further Dennis' education."

Ajax went on to outline his scheme. He concluded, "For the services of Dennis for one week, plus the investment of the remainder of the fund money, you would collect fifty percent of the profits, which I am sure would be enormous."

Cranch scratched his angular chin. "It—*it would* be better than working," he said, as if in meditation.

"*Psst!*"

Dennis was shaking Ajax's sleeve. He motioned Ajax down to his level and whispered so that Cranch could not hear: "I have *my* conditions also."

"Spill it," Ajax whispered fur- tively.

"All the pop I want to drink, and promise that the Sailor will take me to Western depths when

I'm not performing and that Mr. Cranch won't interfere."

"Done," Ajax replied.

The face of Dennis Ogg lit with a jubilant smile.

"Mr. Ajax," Cranch announced suddenly, "I'll take you up on your offer. Mind you, I do not think it is proper and correct, but in view of the condition of my personal finances, I will agree. Shall we go to your office to discuss the matter more fully?"

"Why certainly—er, no, let's stay right here in the park. It's a beautiful day." Visions of greedy creditors camping on the doorstep danced through the mind of Fred Ajax.

The Sailor nudged Cranch, who recoiled. "You ought to unbend a little, buddy," the Sailor informed him. "You ever been boozed up?"

"Boozed—*up*?" The eyebrows of Ellsworth Cranch elevated in unison with his last word. "Certainly not."

The Sailor slapped him on the back, nearly causing Cranch to collapse. "We'll fix that too, eh, buddy?"

"Well, I—"

Ajax saved the situation. "To business!" he exclaimed, and herded a leering Sailor, a doubtful Cranch and a beaming Dennis toward the peanut vendor's stand, where they could obtain some slight refreshment before dipping into the various considerations related to the coming battle of man (better—boy) versus machine.

Fred Ajax was more than busy during the following days. Ellsworth Cranch presented him with slightly over five hundred dollars cold cash with which to begin operations. Ajax had steered through dangerous waters on this point, keeping Cranch, who was a novice in such matters anyway, so much in the dark that he never thought to ask why Ajax could not use some of his own cash, which was non-existent.

Ajax paid one hundred dollars rental on a vacant lot for a period of one week. He paid one hundred dollars to have a large tent erected for a period of one week. He paid three hundred dollars for a small Cybernetic Calculator rented out by the day to business firms with a special and complicated mathematical problem to solve.

This was a service of a company only recently established in the city, a company which had sprung up like similar companies all across the system after the electronic antics of the big brains became feasible on a small basis.

The Sailor, Ajax, and a sweating Ellsworth Cranch erected a small shack at one end of the tent while the workmen moved the brain machine into the other end. Dennis, unbeknownst to his guardian, was gorging himself on Orange-dee-lite pop at the rear of the lot. In the print shop of Ajax Enterprises where advertising was produced for the occasional inventions of the

firm, posters rolled from the presses:

*Boy vs. Machine! Dennis Ogg, the Seven-year-old Genius! See Him Solve Problems Faster Than a Cybernetic!*

Though Dennis had a slight bellyache from too much Orange-dee-lite on opening day, things went more than smoothly. Video-sheets had been intrigued by the peculiar nature of the exhibition and had given it a guffawing play-up. The first "show" was at noon. Only a trickle of customers was on hand. But after three more shows, every hour on the hour, admission one dollar per person, the tide began to swell.

The procedure was thus:

Fred Ajax appeared before the standing spectators, microphone in hand. On one side of him was the crude shack, on the other the electronic brain with its banks of switches and lights, looking malignantly perfect. Aha! exclaimed Ajax, man triumphs over technology! A mere boy et cetera, et cetera, proves that man is not doomed to be subjugated by his own creations, et cetera, et cetera. Then Dennis appeared, herded by Ellsworth Cranch who wore a faded and frayed suit of tails. Cranch himself, an expert on such things, drew up the problem.

An official of the company renting the small electronic brain was on hand to verify that it was not fixed in any manner, shape or form. Ajax gave Dennis a ream of paper,

several pencils and a copy of the problem. Dennis advanced to the door of the shack. Ajax, melodramatically, fired a blank cartridge pistol into the air and Dennis darted into the shack.

The lights on the brain began to wink and flash as the official fed the problem into it. The Sailor put the *Gay Parisienne* on the phonograph and its frenetic strains dinned through the tent.

Strangely enough the suspense became monumental. At the end of thirty-five minutes, when the nerves of the patrons were frayed by the dinning of the can-can music, Dennis burst from the shack, waving a sheet of paper.

"I've got it!" he cried, having been coached by Ajax.

A cheer went up from the crowd.

The electronic brain finished the problem in forty-eight minutes. Both Dennis and the brain had the same correct answer.

The audience, amazed, was allowed to clap for a bowing Dennis and then was directed out to make room for the next group. And at the end of the day, a triumphant Ajax counted slightly under twenty-five hundred paid admissions. The race of boy versus machine was a success.

Certain improvements in the pitch were inevitable.

A larger electronic brain was rented to replace the small model. In view of the fact that certain patrons might suspect chicanery,



the front wall of the shack was knocked out and replaced with glass during the night so that patrons could watch Dennis seated at a wooden table with his pencil flying over the paper. The shack was painted white and decorated at Sailor's suggestion by a sign reading, *Quiet! Genius at Work.*

Chairs were installed for the patrons to sit upon. A refreshment stand was installed and vendors hawked balloons, souvenir photos of Dennis, (autographed) and all sorts of drinks such as Orange-dee-lite and Galaxy Beer. It may be noted that the Sailor, out of some fiendish quirk of personality, was constantly plying Ellsworth Cranch with bottles of Galaxy Beer, but the latter would not relent.

Electric lights were hung from the tent. The videosheets now acknowledged the talents of Dennis Ogg. *A spectacular show!* they proclaimed. And the audiences were capacity, and the green flowed in like water, and all was right with the world to the tune of a second week. Ajax kept Ellsworth Cranch busy during the off hours going over financial matters, and Cranch, in lip-smacking approval of his cut, did not bother to reflect on the whereabouts of Dennis, who was whooping it up with the Sailor in the third row at the local depthie house.

Another inevitable result of the exhibition was the interest of men from Earth's centers of learning. During the first few days they

scoffed. Then they read the reports in the videosheets and came to stand skeptically in the back row. Then, at the beginning of the second week, the spokesman for the group, Dr. Heinz Hockelbach of a noted eastern university approached Ajax.

"We challenge this boy!" Dr. Hockelbach exclaimed, waving his index finger at Dennis who was hiccupping noisily from too much Orange-dee-lite. "On Venus, perhaps. On Earth, never! We are certain that he cannot defeat the mammoth electronic brain Egbert IX from our university."

"Egbert IX!" breathed Ellsworth Cranch in awe.

Ajax massaged his palms against one another. "Dr. Hockelbach, next Saturday is our last day here. *We* will challenge *you*. One performance, five dollars per person, Dennis Ogg against Egbert IX."

"I don't care about the money," Hockelbach said in an inflammatory manner. "It is preposterous to assume that a mere boy can outwit a mechanical brain I personally have spent twenty-five years helping to develop."

"We'll see," Ajax smiled.

"This Egbert IX sounds pretty tough," the Sailor said ominously. "Can you do it, Dennis?"

Owlishly from behind his large glasses Dennis grinned. "I—*hic*—absolutely can, podner."

Fortunately, the worldly influences which had been recently op-

erating upon his sensitive nature were not recognized at the moment by Cranch. That person was contemplating the ceiling of the tent and sighing, "At five dollars per person—"

"Make it ten," Ajax replied expansively.

"Ten dollars per person!" rhapsodized Ellsworth Cranch.

"Can you do it, Dennis, boy?" the Sailor breathed.

"Impossible!" snapped Dr. Heinz Hockelbach.

"*Can I! Wahoo, I'm a Sioux!*"

And thus the Frankenstein of boy versus machine rolled on. Coast to Coast, planet to planet, the name of Dennis Ogg was on each pair of lips, the face of Dennis Ogg, pixilated and large-eyed, greeted each pair of orbs from out the videosheets and telecasts. Saturday sold out. Standing room only. Crowds jammed to the street. A brass band playing. Celebrities arriving. Helicopters landing.

Fred Ajax had never enjoyed such prosperity before.

But the best laid plans of mice and men, as an ancient Scot once said, often get bollixed up.

The performance was set for three o'clock in the afternoon. The problem, set up by Dr. Hockelbach, was designed to take the giant and malignant-looking Egbert IX slightly less than three hours to solve. At fifteen minutes until three, Fred Ajax was pacing back and forth behind the tent, nervously puffing on his cigar and glancing

from time to time at his watch. Ellsworth Cranch was not present. But worse, neither was Dennis.

Ten minutes to three. Five minutes. The crowd murmured. The band played. And across the rear of the lot came running a frantic Sailor Burns, his face a picture of panic.

"Fred!" the Sailor blurted. "Fred! He's gone!"

"He's—gone? You mean Dennis is gone? You don't mean Dennis is gone, is that what you mean?"

"That's what I mean," mournfully declared the Sailor.

"But how! How! My grandmother, *how!* You were supposed to take him to the depthies and bring him back here at two-thirty!"

"We were at the depthies, all right," the Sailor declared. "A swell show, *Blood on the Prairie*, it was called, and—"

"Never *mind!*" Ajax roared in excruciating frenzy. "We'll be booted out of town or worse if Dennis doesn't show up. What happened?"

The Sailor gasped deeply and started his recital. "About two o'clock Dennis got up and said he wanted to go to the men's room. I said, okay, hurry back, I guess I should have gone along—he *was* feeling kind of sick—but I wanted to see the serial again, and—"

"Sick!" howled Ajax in a vision of disintegration. "Why was he sick?"

"I dunno," the Sailor confessed.

"All we were eating was popcorn and chocolate bars and hot dogs with onions and piccalilli and mustard and cotton candy and Orange-dee-lite. I had twelve bottles, but Dennis beat me." The Sailor beamed. "He had fourteen."

"Since eleven o'clock this morning?" wailed Ajax.

"Yep."

"Oh, my God! No wonder he's sick. For two weeks he hasn't had anything to eat except popcorn and that damned insidious Orange-dee-lite. Well, what happened, did you just sit there? Didn't he come back?"

The Sailor related that Dennis had failed to return for twenty minutes, at which time, becoming curious rather than worried, the Sailor had gone into the lobby and asked if anyone had seen a boy resembling Dennis. Whereupon he was informed that said boy about twenty minutes before had made a trip to the men's room, had reeled back out as if intoxicated, and had continued to reel out of the theater as if he did not know which direction was up, down or otherwise.

"My God!" wailed Ajax. "Dennis is walking around the town drunk on Orange-dee-lite, and—"

"Mr. Ajax!" The voice of Dr. Heinz Hockelbach, followed by his body, came through the rear flap of the tent, frowning displeasure. "It is three o'clock. Egbert IX is ready to begin. Where is this Dennis Ogg?"

"He's not here," Ajax said sad-

ly. "Look, Dr. Hockelbach, he's sick, couldn't we—"

Hockelbach stamped his foot. "No! My colleagues, in fact all of Terran science has been insulted by the precocity of this stripling. We will no longer be humiliated. Produce your Dennis Ogg. Make him un-sick. But Egbert IX begins the problem at once!" And turning on his angry heel, Hockelbach vanished.

Ajax mournfully threw his cigar to the ground. "Finished. Where would a boy like Dennis go if he was plas—er, sick from too much pop? Where? I don't know. And if we don't find him—"

The Sailor tapped his knobby dome. "Maybe the park, huh? Sub-conscious, huh? How about that?"

The mouth of Fred Ajax dropped open. "No time to lose!" he shouted, and raced pell mell across the lot, the Sailor in hot pursuit. As they headed for the nearest 'copter stand, thoughts whirled in the mind of Fred Ajax: The park! A place of release from good old guardian Cranch. Maybe? Brother, let's hope, or we're candidates for laughingstocks and we might as well go mine carbonates on Mars.

The moments that followed were sheer agony. At three-sixteen the 'copter set them down in the park. Fred Ajax immediately enlisted the aid of three policemen, but it so happened that the policemen were also hunting for Dennis.

Pandemonium had invaded the park that afternoon.

A young boy described by all who came in contact with him as a Monster had been running berserk during the last hour, pelting people with peas from his pea-shooter, tripping fat ladies, crossing bridle paths, leaping over water fountains, walking on the grass when no walking was allowed, screeching, howling, scalping small girls with an imaginary tomahawk and hiccupping frantically.

At twenty minutes until four they found Dennis trying to swim the park lagoon. The unfortunate fact was that the lagoon had been drained of water that morning to facilitate cleaning.

Now the police wanted Dennis. But Fred Ajax and the Sailor tore him out of their grasp and there was another frantic chase along graveled paths, through grassy nooks and sylvan dells, until Ajax and company outdistanced the law and made it to the 'copter stand. The 'copter pilot was induced to swear off the stuff when he saw two grown men pinching the cheeks of an owl-eyed little boy and mumbling, "Sober up, sober up!" while they rolled their eyes frantically.

The 'copter set down back of the tent at ten minutes past four, and Egbert IX had seventy minutes head start.

Dennis reeled from the 'copter, more or less understanding Ajax's frantic pleas that he had a problem to solve, could not let them down, and so forth. Dennis blinked behind his large glasses.

"Can you do it, Dennis?" Ajax pleaded frantically.

Dennis cocked an eyebrow, weaved to and fro and pointed an index finger at Ajax. "Gimme a swig of Orange-dee-lite and I can do anything!"

"Orange-dee-lite!" Ajax said wildly to the Sailor. "Quick!"

The Sailor got a bottle from the refreshment stand and pressed it into Dennis' feverish hands. Dennis swigged. "I'm ready, boys," he said.

Ajax, mouthing supplications to the powers that be, held the tent flap aside. Dennis staggered inside on rubbery legs. The crowd gasped. Dennis bowed low, almost falling on his face, walked over and kicked the side of Egbert IX, snatched the problem sheet from the hands of a gape-jawed Dr. Heinz Hockelbach, kicked Hockelbach in the shins, and marched into the shack.

The rest is history.

At precisely five thirty-eight Dennis Ogg emerged with a sheaf of scribbled paper and loudly demanded a shot of Orange-dee-lite. At five forty-one Egbert IX came through with the same correct answer as Dennis had. But the machine was vanquished. To account for this phenomenon, Dennis himself told the videosheet reporters:

"The Orange-dee-lite stimulated me. It is an excellent beverage. I attribute my success to the lucid quality of my thought while under the influence of this liquid.

The phenomenon strikes me as similar to the conditions under which Edgar Allan Poe purportedly composed much of his poetry. That is all I have to say. Let's all go have some Orange-dee-lite."

Monday, in the offices of Ajax Enterprises, a very sick Dennis Ogg groaned and held his stomach while reclining on the couch.

"I hope he's gonna be all right," the Sailor said dolefully. "He's sure a game little kid."

"The doctor said it was only a very severe stomach ache," Ajax told him.

Dennis groaned, blinked and sat up.

"How do you feel, Dennis?" Ajax asked, taking time off from counting up the semi-fortune he had made from his enterprise.

"Awful," Dennis said, trying to muster a grin. "But it's fun for a change. I'm going to hate going back to practicing to be a genius."

The Sailor and Ajax exchanged significant glances. Humorously smiling, Fred Ajax puffed his cigar. "I think your life will be a lot less strict from now on, Dennis.

Your guardian has—shall we say—mellowed."

Dennis blinked behind his large glasses. "I don't understand."

"Ol' Cranch took the hint last Friday night," the Sailor said.

Ajax nodded. "Yes, he finally succumbed to the Sailor's bad influence."

"Where is he?" Dennis asked.

The Sailor opened the door to the outer office. "I wunnered when you boys were goin' to let me in," came the voice of Ellsworth Cranch.

"He arrived a few minutes ago," Ajax commented wryly. "Under his own power, amazingly enough."

Dennis gasped. Ellsworth Cranch had changed considerably. His clothing was rumpled. His bowler hat looked as if someone had punched a fist out through the crown. His pince-nez had disappeared. Around his neck hung one gaudy orange necktie, one artificial flower lei and one cardboard sign on a string, similar to those seen hanging on the walls of libation establishments, said sign reading, *Drink Galaxy Beer.*

