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Cover illustration by Chesley Bonestell

(Space ship in trouble with meteor swarm; Europa and Jupiter in background)

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The Mad Scientist we have always had with us; even that greatest of science fiction protagonists, Professor George Edward Challenger, was mad at least north-north-west. But H. Nearing, Jr. has created, in Professor Cleanth Penn Ransom, something far more dangerous: the Sane Scientist. Ransom is a logical man, unaffected by the poetry and philosophy that can influence his colleague MacTate; when ideas impinge upon him, he follows them through, as a resolute logical mathematician who has a decent smattering of other sciences. And the results are far more devastating than anything that could be achieved by madness. You've read in earlier issues of Ransom's construction of a poetry machine, and of his attempts (unswervingly logical) to teach mathematics by means of a voodoo doll. This time Ransom speculates on the nature of the fifth dimension and tries to produce the crystalline opposite of scopolamine — seemingly harmless occupations, both of them; but no Mad Scientist ever produced such maddening and delightful results.

The Embarrassing Dimension

by H. NEARING, JR.

"I HAVE just — what do you call it — excogitated it," said Professor Cleanth Penn Ransom of the Mathematics Faculty. "The fifth dimension, I mean."

Professor Archibald MacTate, of Philosophy, fumbled in his coat pockets. "Do you have a cigarette?"

Ransom opened his desk drawer, handed a crumpled pack to his colleague, and struck a match. "Nothing to it once you get away from physics," he said, holding out the match. "The fourth dimension relates time and space. You know, Einstein. So I figure the fifth dimension does the same with mind and matter."

MacTate drew on his cigarette, blew a delicate stream of smoke over Ransom's head, and regarded him with calm expectancy.

Ransom held up his left hand and touched the pudgy thumb with his right forefinger. "You know the analogy. You say you'll meet somebody at Forty-Second and Broadway. Two dimensions." His right hand grasped the left thumb and forefinger. "But your friend might be upstairs in the Times building, so you have to think of three dimensions. When you say you'll meet him, I mean." He pinched the middle finger of his left hand. "But if

he comes at two o'clock and you come at three —" He curled his right forefinger around the left ring finger. "Fourth dimension. Time." His eyes gleamed, and he pointed his forefinger at MacTate. "Now." He bent back the little finger of his left hand with the right forefinger. "Suppose you meet this person on the right floor at the right time. Suppose all four dimensions click, I mean, *but you don't recognize him.*"

The ash of MacTate's cigarette fell on the desk top. He started, bent over to blow it off, and looked up at Ransom again.

"Recognition, the fifth dimension." Ransom thrust out his little round belly and began to swing in his swivel chair.

"But my dear Ransom —" MacTate waved his cigarette deprecatingly.

"Wait." Ransom stopped swinging and leaned over the desk. "You've been lost sometime. In the woods, I mean. And you didn't know what time it was. All the space-time dimensions were there, weren't they? You were somewhere east, somewhere north, somewhere in altitude, at some time of the day. But you weren't — related to them. You didn't recognize them."

"But —"

"What I mean is that pragmatically speaking you didn't exist. You were lost, which is like being instantaneous or infinitesimal. You miss one dimension and you miss them all. See?"

"But obviously I found my way out of the woods." MacTate held up his hands to call attention to his existence.

"Sure. You got back into the dimensional continuum again. Like speeding up a slow electron to give it the same mass as a faster one. It's all relative."

"But look at it the other way." MacTate ground out his cigarette in an icosahedral ashtray on Ransom's desk and tapped the desk with his finger. "I have gone to places that I felt I had visited before, and yet I knew I hadn't. How do you account for that?"

"Easy. A fifth-dimensional equivalent of thinking it's Wednesday when it's Tuesday. Or taking the wrong train. You think you're going to New York when you're really headed for Miami or someplace." Ransom warmed to the explanation. He flung out both arms, pointing in the two relevant directions. "You ride along all right for a while. No worry at all. Then you begin noticing the scenery out the window. Looks funny. Different, I mean. You begin to think. Then you hit Baltimore. See the station sign. My God. It comes to you like that. Your mind has been traveling in one dimensional continuum while your matter was off in another. You've been crazy. Temporarily crazy."

"But why didn't I cease pragmatically to exist, as I did in the woods?"

"Ah." Ransom leaned back in his chair. "Because on the train you were occupying two continua at once. Before, you weren't occupying any. In

the woods, I mean. As a matter of fact" — he reached into his inside coat pocket — "I've been fooling with an idea for combining two continua any time. Over in the chemistry laboratory." He took out a little jewelry box, opened it, and set it on the desk. In it was a crystal, something like a diamond, though there was no sparkle. Instead, it seemed to emit waves of force that almost imperceptibly distorted the parts of the room caught in the corner of the eye.

MacTate leaned forward to examine it. "Odd-looking, isn't it? You say you can merge two continua with it?"

"No. Not yet, I mean." Ransom picked the crystal up and squinted through it at the window. "This one didn't work out right. You see, I figured that if this stuff they give you to make you forget an experience — scopalomine, *you* know — I figured that if scopalomine would make you forget an experience, then the opposite of scopalomine would make you recognize experiences you never had. I'm oversimplifying, I know, but you see what I mean. Anyway, all you have to do is discover the opposite of scopalomine, right?"

MacTate stared at him.

"Well, it happens that scopalomine can be crystallized from ether, and the crystals make polarized light turn counterclockwise. What do you call it? Levorotatory. Well" — Ransom put the crystal on the desk and pointed his finger at MacTate — "suppose you could make an isomer of scopalomine that turned polarized light *clockwise*."

"My dear Ransom —"

"Wait. Do you remember what happened when those Frenchmen shot a beam of electrons through a crystal? Diffracted. The electrons, I mean. Just like light waves. I tell you, MacTate, the inside of a crystal is a weird thing. So why not clockwise?"

"But what connection is there between the physical structure and its chemical effect on the body — or the mind?"

"Look, MacTate. What's the connection between hydrocarbons and life? I don't know. All I know is that you can't have one without the other. I've got the right to fool with an hypothesis, haven't I?"

MacTate pointed at the thing on the desk. "But what's this? You say it didn't —"

"That's right. I got the research boys in the laboratory to synthesize a hydrocarbon chain, one I worked out. But instead of dextrorotatory scopalomine, we got this. It isn't much like scopalomine at all. Has a melting point something under 59 C. and doesn't seem to do anything to polarized light." Ransom looked queerly at the abortive crystal and poked it with his finger. "I don't know —"

There was a banging on the door. Ransom and MacTate looked up. The knob rattled and the door, which seemed somehow a little larger than usual, flew open.

"Professor Ransom. I am gratified to find you in your office. It is a privilege to see you, sir."

The newcomer was a portly personage of florid complexion. He swept off a black fedora to reveal white hair, almost yellow in spots. Ransom gaped at him. MacTate waved numbly toward a chair.

"I thank you, sir." He stowed his amplitude in the chair and held out a handful of cigars. "If I may take the liberty, Professor, of engaging a few moments of your time, I have a proposition which I am confident will compel your interest." He pocketed the cigars, which Ransom and MacTate ignored, and rubbed his hands together. "As I was saying to the other senators in the cloak-room last night, what our country needs in this time of peril — and I refer, Professor, to those insidious perils which threaten our interior economy as well as those from foreign shores, get me? — what our country needs in these perilous times is a realistic, rational attitude toward the facts of political, economic, and atomic life. What does this country of ours need most desperately in this crucial age?" He stabbed a finger toward the ceiling.

"Televised Congresses?" said MacTate.

The senator brushed an imaginary speck from his shoulder and turned back to Ransom.

"What, I repeat, is the crucial need of our country in this desperate age, Professor?" He pounded the desk to emphasize the answer. "Logic. Get me? Just plain, ordinary old logic. But the rarest commodity this country produces, Professor. Rarer than uranium, rarer than plutonium, rarer than — neptunium. Logic."

He paused impressively, thrust a cigar into his mouth, and crossed his legs.

"And how, Professor, can we step up our production of this rare commodity? That is the question I asked my colleagues in the cloak-room. From what mine is it dug? From what operators can it be purchased?" He beamed at Ransom. "You know the answer to that, Professor. You and those other chosen few who, in obscure and often thankless toil, keep alive the flickering spark of logic in the gloom of these perilous times. The mathematicians, Professor, the mathematicians."

Ransom glanced vaguely at the desk top as if looking for a goblet to raise.

"What this country needs," said the senator, suddenly stern, "is a Bureau of Mathematics." He shot out a finger at Ransom. "And you, Professor, are the man to head it."

MacTate looked at Ransom. "Congratulations, old boy."

"Wait." Ransom's eyes narrowed. He fingered the crystal on his desk.

"Don't say a word, Professor." The senator smiled understandingly. "Not right now. I realize only too thoroughly that you must have time to consider a momentous step of this kind. The terrible responsibility, the sacred trust. I know." He nodded sympathetically as if to a fellow martyr. "But in a few days — get me? — the Chief Justice and I, and maybe the President, we'll be here for your answer. And I am confident, Professor —"

At that moment the door flew open and a tall black figure leaped into the room. Beating thunderously on a hand drum attached to its waist, it hopped ecstatically about, first on one foot, then on the other, the gold rings around its wrists and ankles jangling rhythmically to the drum.

The dancer hopped to the front of Ransom's desk, flung out his arms, bowed, and stood erect again. Nearly seven feet tall, his glistening body was nude except for a leopard-skin breech clout. Two circles of yellow and blue paint were smeared on his chest, four lines of red paint on his cheeks. In his swollen underlip was imbedded a diamond chip, and stuck through his woolly topknot was an immense bone. He exuded an odor of the deep jungle.

"Bwana," he boomed, and bowed again. "Bwana, Mbongo hear you sick in head. Come make ju ju. No be sick." From his leopard skin he drew a long needle. "Bad god, he inside bwana. This make bad god go way. Big ju ju." He stepped around the desk.

In Ransom's face astonishment gave way to terror. "MacTate —!"

MacTate started from his chair and seized the witch doctor's arm. "Mbongo, wait." He pondered how to speak to the giant. There was little time to spare. "Mbongo, no make ju ju. White ju ju man just here. You see him. He say no make ju ju today."

The witch doctor looked at MacTate with suspicion. He thrust out his lips. "Make ju ju," he said stubbornly.

Ransom had crawled to the other side of the desk. "MacTate, listen. You can't —"

"Mbongo," said MacTate. "You good boy, come make ju ju. But not today. White ju ju man say bad god sleep today. You wait till god wake up. Next week, maybe. Then you make ju ju." He nodded vigorously to emphasize his point.

Mbongo began to look more hurt than suspicious. His great lips pouted with disappointment.

Suddenly he brightened. "Mbongo wake god up," he said. He jabbed his needle into the air demonstratively.

MacTate shook his head gravely. "No good. God sound asleep." He imitated a snore. "White ju ju man try."

Mbongo looked disconsolately at the needle and put it sadly back into the

leopard skin. He sighed. "Mbongo come next week. God wake up. Make ju ju."

"That's the idea." MacTate led him to the door. "Mbongo good boy. We see Mbongo next week." He shut the door behind the witch doctor and snapped the lock. "Whew!"

Ransom plopped weakly into his chair and wiped his face with a handkerchief. "MacTate, what is this? Are we both crazy?" He twisted the crystal on his desk nervously. "What do you —?"

"I say, Ransom, what happened to the senator?"

Ransom looked vaguely about the room. "The senator? I don't know. I didn't see him —"

There was a series of thumps on the door.

"Oh, no." MacTate turned wearily.

"MacTate, don't let that ju ju thing come in again." Ransom was nearly hysterical.

"All right. Just keep calm." MacTate unlocked the door and opened it a crack to peer out. He was thrown violently back as a clanging blow knocked the door open.

A short, massive figure in rusted armor stalked into the room, carrying a visored helmet under one arm. His head was bullet-shaped, the hair cropped short. His face, smooth-shaven, bore an unpleasant expression.

"God den, varlet." The tone was grim. He was followed in by a lanky, dull-eyed youth dressed in green jerkin and hose.

The knight squinted disdainfully at MacTate and addressed himself to Ransom. "Thy lackeys want courtesy, my lord almagester. But enough. I desire thy skill, to speak plain. An thou readest me well the stars for to vanquish the Douglas, thou hast made thy fortune."

Ransom looked at MacTate helplessly.

"He wants you to cast a horoscope," said MacTate. "Apparently it's about a propitious moment for a battle he has in mind."

"Aye," said the knight, flapping a gauntlet toward MacTate. "He speaks less fool than acts. I would have this devil of a Douglas roast on my spit." He tapped the blade in his belt. "See what he hath done. Up hand, lad."

The tall youth raised his right hand. The second and third fingers were missing.

"Hath caught Jenkin here and snatched off his bowstring fingers. Fiend of hell. Read me the stars, for I will see his entrails smoking on the ground."

Ransom's eyes were frightened and wild. MacTate thought quickly. He stepped forward.

"My lord keeps vows of silence this day, sir knight," he said. "Give me the figures and we'll work it out for you." He took a notebook and pencil

from his pocket and looked interested. "Now, let's see. Where were you born?"

"Pomfret Castle," said the knight.

MacTate made a note. "And when was it?"

The knight rubbed his chin. "Michaelmas Eve, it was," he said. "Methinks it was in the twelfth year of the king's father, the old king that was."

MacTate scribbled briskly, then looked up. "And what is the birth date of the Douglas?"

The knight smiled sardonically. "Sayst thou? Am I his sib to know when the fiend gave him life?"

MacTate put on a worried expression. "That's so. I shouldn't think you would. But can you find out? It's really necessary for the almagest."

The knight frowned evilly. "Almagest me no almagest, scribeyn," he roared. "Read me the stars for to kill any man, and at the hour I will slay the Douglas."

MacTate looked at the ceiling judiciously and then shook his head. "I'm afraid it's not that simple," he said. "You see, we have to find a time when you're strong and the Douglas is weak. We couldn't tell when you'd be stronger than everyone else unless we read the stars for all the people in the world. You want it to be a sure thing, don't you?"

The knight looked frustrated. He glowered at the maimed youth as if trying to think of a way to blame him for the impasse.

"Twill mean a pining of prisoners that else were ransomed," he said. "Warlocks and the Douglas. Of a kind." He sighed. "Come, lad."

He looked at MacTate darkly and turned toward the door. MacTate started to follow.

"Stand off!" The knight raised his gauntlet. MacTate fell back.

As soon as they had gone, Ransom pushed back his chair. "Let's get out of here."

"I suppose we'd better," said MacTate. "Who do you suppose that was? He said Pomfret Castle —"

Ransom looked at him and shook his head weakly. "That, right now, is the thing I care about least in the whole world." He pushed the crystal aside to put his elbows on the desk and hold his head in his hands. "I just want —"

There was a sound at the open door. In it stood a majestic woman clad only in a garment which was about to slide from her hips.

"Χαιρετον Κυριω," she said.

"MacTate!" Ransom leaped to the door, knocking the crystal off the desk. He slammed the door in the woman's face and locked it. "Go away, please just go away," he breathed.

"Ransom, did you see her arms?" MacTate was staring at the closed door.

"I didn't see anything. I just want to keep it shut. The door, I mean. Let's just not open it any more. For anything."

"Listen, Ransom. I didn't see her arms either. *Because she didn't have any.*"

Ransom stared at him. "No arms? You mean like the Venus de —?"

MacTate nodded. "That's right. There's a lifesize plaster cast of her in the hall just across from your office. Does that mean anything to you?"

Ransom's mouth was open. His eyes were glassy. "Wait." He jumped up, unlocked the door, and looked out. Venus stood calmly on her pedestal, her garment clinging safely to her hips. Cold plaster.

MacTate, who was looking over his shoulder, sighed and went back to the desk. Ransom closed the door and locked it.

"MacTate, what —?"

"I say, Ransom." MacTate was staring at the desk. "What's happened to the crystal?"

"I don't know. I think I knocked it off when —" Ransom bent over to reach into the wastebasket that stood beside his desk. "Here it is." He held it up.

A megathelial bellow thundered in the hall outside. Ransom dropped the crystal and stood paralyzed.

When the last reverberation had died away, MacTate tiptoed to the door, unlocked it noiselessly, and opened it a crack to peer out. He opened it a little wider, then all the way. "Nothing there." He looked at Ransom. "Give me another cigarette." He opened the desk drawer, took out the cigarettes and lit one. "You know, this is as bad as the train to Baltimore, really. You notice — what was it you said? Strange scenery. Strange characters."

"Like the senator," Ransom said.

MacTate nodded. "And Mbongo, and Jenkin's friend."

"And the Venus de — No. *She's* plaster. I just saw her out there."

"But what was it you said about the fifth dimension relating mind and matter? Presumably a continuum could exist in which a mental afflatus informing plaster with —"

"Wait." Ransom looked at the door. "How about that noise? Can a continuum exist that's inhabited by disembodied bellownings?"

"For all we know, it was a dinosaur." MacTate shrugged.

"But why wasn't it there when you looked?" Ransom's voice was agitated. "And how did it get there in the first place? That's what I want to know. How did they all get there? What's making this happen, MacTate?"

MacTate looked at him thoughtfully. "Let's see, now. Let's reconstruct it. Starting from this end. What did you do when you heard the noise?"

Ransom looked puzzled. "I don't know. I just stood there." He turned

toward the desk. "I'd just fished the crystal out of the wastebasket, and when I heard the noise, I — The crystal. I dropped the crystal, and —"

"What were you doing when the Venus came to the door?"

"Why, I was sitting at the desk" — Ransom sat down at it — "with my elbows on it like this."

"And you moved the crystal to make room for your elbows?"

"Yes. Say." Ransom got up. "Where is the crystal? When I heard the noise, I dropped it. Here." He bent over to pick it up.

"Ransom! Just a minute. *Don't touch that thing.*" MacTate took the jewelry box from the desk and placed it carefully, upside down, over the crystal on the floor. "Now." He scooped up the crystal with the box and snapped the lid shut. "I should advise you to keep this insulated, if that's the word for it. The box apparently serves. It's safe only when in contact with continua in which nothing happens."

"What do you mean?" Ransom took the box and cupped it in his hands. "It's just a good-for-nothing alkaloid crystal that won't even warp polarized light. What harm —?"

MacTate looked at him patiently. "Don't you see, old man? Every time you moved that crystal, we had a visitor. Fortunately, you dropped it before the last one became anything more than a noise." He shook his head. "Of course it doesn't warp light. It warps space-time continua."

"That's very neat, MacTate. Very neat. There's just one little thing wrong. How did those people know who I am?"

"Well, I suppose there must be someone corresponding to you in those respective continua. Avatars, so to speak."

"Then why don't I remember any of them?" Ransom thrust out his belly challengingly.

"Oh, have you forgotten the second floor of the Times building? Temporary insanity and all that? Anyway, I think avatars aren't supposed to recall one another's experiences. But —" MacTate's eyes twinkled. He took the jewelry box from Ransom's hands. "It's perfectly easy to find out how they recognized you. We'll get them back and ask them."

"MacTate!" Ransom turned pale. He grabbed the box from MacTate and clasped it to his bosom, almost snarling. "You wouldn't. You wouldn't. But I'll make sure." He took a sheet of paper from his desk drawer, crumpled it around the box, and set it on the icosahedral ashtray. Then he struck a match and lit the paper. The flames shot up brightly. The box appeared through the charred paper, blackened, and lost shape. Ransom sank into his chair once more and wiped his face with his handkerchief. "That's the end of *that*," he said. "Thank God that stuff has a low melting point."