

# fantastic

JULY

1957

Volume 6

Number 6

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY  
William B. Ziff (1898-1953) Founder  
Editorial and Executive Offices  
366 Madison Avenue  
New York 17, New York

President  
B. G. DAVIS

Administrative Vice President  
WILLIAM B. ZIFF

Vice Presidents —  
H. J. MORGANROTH  
MICHAEL H. FROELICH

Vice President and  
Circulation Director  
MICHAEL MICHAELSON

Secretary-Treasurer  
G. E. CARNEY

Art Director  
ALBERT GRUEN



## FICTION

### THE SECRET OF MARRACOTT DEEP

By Henry Slesar..... 6

### CHANGE OF VENUE

By Richard Wilson..... 53

### GAS!

By Paul V. Dallas..... 58

### DARK MIRACLE

By Ivar Jorgensen..... 75

### HEADS YOU LOSE

By Gerald Vance..... 88

### THE DAY BASEBALL DIED

By Jim Cooper..... 96

### THE MARRIAGE MACHINE

By O. H. Leslie..... 110

## FEATURES

### LOW MAN ON THE ASTEROID

By The Editor..... 3

### ACCORDING TO YOU...

By The Readers..... 124

IT SOUNDS FANTASTIC, BUT... 128

KNOW YOUR SUPERMEN..... 129



Cover: EDWARD VALIGURSKY

Editor

PAUL W. FAIRMAN

Managing Editor  
CELE GOLDSMITH

Art Editor  
HERBERT ROGOFF



The choice wasn't compulsory of course, but who needed compulsion?

# THE MARRIAGE MACHINE

By O. H. LESLIE

---

*The Parson was an iron monster dedicated to taking the nonsense out of marriage—making it simple and scientific. The Parson went to work in behalf of Betty and Warren and Doug. And the results? Well, they satisfied the Parson.*

---

THE young man was distracting.

Betty Bryce watched his antics through the curved glass windows of the Matrimonial Advisory Association Building. He was parading back and forth across the lawn like a disgruntled sentry; hand shoved deep into his trouser pockets; his nice-if-he-would-only-smile face contorted into a boyish frown.

Betty sighed, and tried to concentrate on the application blank in front of her. She put the end of her pencil to her red mouth, drew her neat eyebrows down thoughtfully, and kept her eyes on the paper.

But it was no good. There he was, criss-crossing in front of the building, his dark-blue sweater a blur in front of her eyes.

"Honestly!"

She slammed the pencil to the desk and swept the thick blonde hair away from her forehead.

Warren de Witt, the branch manager, looked up from the opposite desk. He pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Something wrong?"

"I wish he'd go *away!*" She didn't look at Warren when she said it; Warren had an unpleasant habit of looking back at her too long and thoroughly.

"Who would? And from where?"

"That boy." She tossed her head in the direction of the window. "And from here. He's been walking back and forth for the last half hour."

"Ha." Warren stood up stiffly, tugged at his trim

jacket, and took the knot of his tie delicately between his long fingers. "I'll see what he wants—"

"Please," Betty said. "I've got two dozen applications to process through the machine this morning—"

Warren stopped by her desk on the way to the doorway. He glanced curiously out of the plate-glass, and sniffed when he saw the object of her attention.

"Looks like a hoodlum," he said.

"Oh, I don't think he's *that*—"

"He's wearing a *sweater*."

"Well, so am I."

Warren looked at her, and his eyebrows lifted. "Ah, yes," he said. He put his hand on her arm. "Betty, dear—"

"Please send him away, Warren."

"There's no need. He's coming in."

The young man seemed to have made up his mind at last. He was striding long-legged to the entrance, his jaw grim with purpose. He flung the door open, and closed it with a slam that made Betty's nerves jump.

"Now see here—" Warren began.

"Is this MAA Branch Thirty-two?" the boy shouted.

"Yes!" Betty spoke just as loudly. "You ought to know by *now*!"

"I'm Douglas Brady!"

"So what!"

"Please!" Warren was dismayed. "Must everybody *yell*?" He set a good example by lowering his voice to a dignified level. "If you have some business here, young man—"

"Don't call me young man!" the young man snapped. He looked around the office, half-curious, half-cautious. "What a joint," he said, faintly disgusted.

"This is not a joint," Warren said coldly. "This is a recognized institution."

Douglas Brady was peering at the objects displayed on the walls. Most of them were framed certificates.

"Where's the pictures?" he said.

"What pictures?" Betty asked.

"Pictures of the prospects," Doug said sourly. "All the pretty girls and boys. This is a Marriage Bureau, isn't it?" His tone was acrid.

"It's nothing of the sort!" Warren de Witt was horrified. "This is an advisory service—a scientific guidance center—"

The young man looked confused. Then he took a closer look at Betty, and looked even more bewildered. Then he

proved that blushing wasn't a forgotten art.

"I think the whole thing's pretty stupid," he muttered.

"Well!" Warren turned his back, shoved the swinging gate behind him, and returned to his desk.

"Did you want to file an application?" Betty said.

He glanced up under his beetled brows and looked at Betty again. The surveillance reminded her of Warren's, but she didn't mind it as much.

"Who are you?" he said sullenly.

"I'm Miss Bryce. And this is Mr. de Witt, our branch manager." She paused, and then reached across her desk for a yellow pamphlet. "Do you have our literature?"

The young man shook his head.

"I'm sure you'll understand our service better when you read it." She handed him the pamphlet, but he didn't take it.

"You tell me about it," he said.

Warren de Witt made a noise.

Betty was perplexed. "Certainly, you must *know*—"

"Well, I want *your* views," Doug Brady said. He leaned his elbows on the railing and studied her face. "What do

*you* think of this—this eugenic nonsense?"

"It's not eugenics." Betty wouldn't let their eyes meet. "Not in the old-fashioned sense. It's just a way of helping people find their—well, their most suitable mate. The MAA's been doing it for ten years, since 1960. We keep the biographical records of over forty million unmarried people. Possible partners are chosen electronically by the Parson." She reddened, and laughed apologetically. "We only call it the Parson," she explained. "It's officially the EMCC—Electronic Marriage Compatibility Computer."

"Very scientific," Doug grunted.

"The Computer selects several possible partners," Betty said, somewhat defensively. "There's no compulsion, you know. It's strictly an optional service."

"Big deal," the young man said.

"There are almost four thousand MAA branches in cities and towns all over the country. You read the pamphlet. We have statistics about the divorce rate that will—"

"Statistics?" Doug Brady said. "Is that what you think love and marriage is? A bunch of statistics?"

"Ha!" Warren de Witt said.

Then: "How old are you, young man?"

Defiantly: "Twenty-six."

"You have some old-fashioned ideas for a man of twenty-six." He sniffed.

"Do you want an application blank or don't you?" Betty said.

"All right," he glowered. "Let me see your silly application—"

She passed it across the desk.

Then he scanned it: "Age, height, weight, hair color, eye color, background, schooling, hobbies, interests, psychological tests—" He glared at the girl. "Are you in that— machine?"

She lifted her head. "Certainly."

"Husand-hunting?"

"That's not the point."

"Ever run off a few marriage prospects for yourself?"

"Now see here—" The branch manager started out of his chair.

"As a mater of fact, no," Betty said.

"You don't have to tell *him*—" Warren said angrily.

"Okay, okay!" Doug Brady waved his hands. "I didn't mean to get personal." He flipped through the sheets of paper in his grip. "You know, this looks awfully complicat-

ed." He turned to Betty. "I don't suppose you'd be interested in helping me fill this out?"

"It's not *that* difficult," Warren said sharply.

"It really isn't," Betty echoed shyly.

"I mean at lunch or something. Or dinner, if you haven't got anything better to do."

"Ha!" Warren de Witt said. "Ties are required in most restaurants, you know. Except diners, of course."

"I'm *wearing* a tie," Doug Brady said stoutly. He tugged at the collar of his wool sweater. "See?"

"I'm afraid I can't. I have a lunch date," Betty said. "But I *am* free for dinner . . ." She looked wistfully toward the branch manager, who pursed his lips and wrote furiously on the notepaper in front of him.

"Swell!" The young man's face brightened for the first time. "Tell me where to pick you up. I'll be around at seven."

"80 Clarence Avenue . . ." Betty said dreamily.

"Good." He started out, but had to return for the application forms. "Mustn't forget the Parson," he said cheerfully.

When he had gone, Warren

de Witt looked at Betty with his mouth open.

"Now what in the world made you do that?"

"I really don't know . . ." she said.

That night, Doug Brady arrived in an automobile of ancient vintage—1950 at least—and honked the horn while she made last-minute adjustments on her make-up. For a boy whom she had met only hours ago, he acted terribly casual and possessive. He held her arm familiarly when helping her into the car, and grasped it firmly and positively when they entered the Candlelight Restaurant on Route 22.

He didn't lack for small talk, and somehow he made it sound more important. Betty didn't learn too much about him (he was single, a Navy veteran, and a something-or-other engineer) but she found herself talking fluently and happily about herself.

They went to a drive-in theatre after dinner, and the only advantage he took of the darkness and isolation was to put one arm comfortably around her shoulder.

He never once spoke of the Matrimonial Advisory Association, and he left her at the door of her home with nothing more than a friendly handshake.

Betty hated to admit it. But she was disappointed.

She felt better the next morning. Her office telephone rang, and it was Doug.

"Hi. How's the Parson?"

She laughed. "Very busy. We had four clients before ten o'clock. You can really tell it's spring."

"You know what I forgot to ask you?"

"What?"

"What happens if the Parson picks a partner—whew! what a tongue-twister!—what happens if the partner picks out a mate that doesn't like you?"

"That's up to the individual. The Parson gives several choices, you know. The chances are usually pretty good that the people get along. Why don't you read the pamphlet?"

"No time for reading. I'll have to get more facts about the business first-hand. Is tonight all right?"

"Betty." Warren de Witt came out of the back room that housed the Marriage Machine.

"How about it?" Doug Brady said on the other end of the phone. "I can pick you up at the office at five, when I bring in my application."

"Betty!" Warren must have

sensed something; he looked definitely disturbed. "Would you mind stepping in back a moment?"

"All right, Warren."

"All right, who?" said Doug.

"All right, Doug," she said into the mouthpiece.

"All right, who?" said Warren.

"Oh, nothing." She hung up the phone. "Now what about that back room?"

"Was that—that sweater boy on the phone?"

"Yes."

"Did you go out with him last night?"

"Yes."

"Are you seeing him again?"

"Yes."

He sniffed. "Ha. That's funny. Seems to me you've always been too busy for dates." He turned his back. "Or are you just too busy to date me?"

Quickly: "Oh, no, Warren. It isn't that at all. Well, you know—people working in the same office. And you *are* the branch manager, after all."

Warren looked at her curiously.

"Betty—do you really *believe* in your work?"

"Of course!"

"I mean *really*." His hand went to his tie. "Believe in it

for yourself. That's what I'm driving at."

She hesitated. "I suppose I do. I'm on file with the Parson, you know. That should prove something."

"Does it?" He circled the desk and took her seat. He looked up at her with an angelic smile and tapped his fingertips together. "Did you ever think of—locating your mate?"

Betty colored. The effect was pretty, and it didn't escape Warren. "I—I never thought of it. I suppose I never thought of it. I suppose I never really wanted to find out. And besides—I know you'll think this is old-fashioned of me, Warren—but it seems to me that a woman has to—well . . ."

"Has to be chased?" Warren said. She reddened further, so he hastily spelled the word. "I mean pursued," he said. Betty understood.

"Well—it seems like a good arrangement."

"Sometimes I wonder. The MAA Manual doesn't have much to say on the subject. But it seems to me, if women are *really* emancipated, they should be permitted to take the initiative. Especially since the innovation of the Marriage Machine."

"Yes," Betty said vaguely.



"Now what was it you wanted in the back room?"

Warren de Witt sighed. "Never mind," he said. "I don't think the time is right."

"Huh?" said Betty.

Doug Brady picked a different restaurant that night, and his conversation was different, too.

"I can't believe it," he said.

"Can't believe what?"

"Can't believe that *you* believe it," he said

"I'm mixed up."

"That's what I think." He leaned across the table. "I think this Parson nonsense has you all mixed up. The whole idea is an abomination in the sight of Mother Nature. What are all the love songs about? What's the moon for? What are all the poets knocking themselves out over?"

"My!" Betty said.

"Oh, I know. It's practically heretical nowadays. But I can't help feeling that there are *some* subjects that Thinking Machines shouldn't be Thinking about. It's—indecent!"

"You're starting to shout."

"I *feel* like shouting!" he shouted. The people at the adjoining tables turned towards them. "Listen. Machines don't have hearts. Machines don't hold hands. If you kiss 'em,

you get oil on your face. And the day you show me a machine that can have a baby—"

"Doug!"

"Well, it's true, isn't it? So what makes this all-holy Marriage Machine so darn great? What the heck was wrong with Dorothy Dix?"

"Now you're being ridiculous. The principles of the EMCC are very simple. They don't *force* anyone to—"

"You sound just like the pamphlet," Doug said.

"So you *did* read it."

"Sure, I read it. But it didn't change my mind. Machines just don't know how to make love, Betty. That's one thing reserved for us humans." His hand went across the table and touched hers. "You believe *that*, don't you?"

"Yes," she whispered. "I believe *that*, Doug . . ."

It went on for two happy weeks.

Happy, that is, for Betty. Her boss, branch manager Warren de Witt, saw things differently.

The first thing he said to her on Thursday morning was:

"Let's have lunch today, Betty."

"Lunch?"

"It's important. Very important." He pinched his nose

and looked like a man with the weight of the world perched on his shoulder blades.

"Well, I did have a sort of tentative date—"

"Break it," Warren said curtly. "I want to talk to you about something vital. Business, you might say . . ."

She looked at him oddly. "All right, Warren."

He took her to Coq Rouge, the most exclusive wine-and-dinery within forty miles. The main dining room was all red velvet, gleaming brass, and damask white, and you could not hear a footstep in the place.

"Well, now. Isn't this nice?" Warren said.

"Yes. It's lovely."

Warren's early-morning mood had changed. He had been somber and mysterious when he made the invitation; now he was Mine Goodly Host. He smiled broadly, and Betty was amazed at the amount of teeth he had.

"Some wine with our meal?" he asked suavely.

"I suppose that would be nice."

He ordered something so exotically-named that the very sight of the label made Betty's head swim. By the time the coffee had arrived, she was feeling far more

light-headed than was comfortable. She even giggled.

"Well, what's so big and vital?" she asked, blinking at him over the coffee cup. His head refused to stay in focus.

"It's about the MAA," Warren said carefully, dotting his mouth with the napkin. "And the EMCC."

"O.K.," Betty said gaily. "P.D.Q." She hiccupped. "Pardon me."

"And it's about Douglas Brady, too," Warren said pointedly.

"What about him?"

"Betty—" He leaned across the table and clutched her limp hand. "Are you serious about this—boy?"

She eyed him with what she supposed to be shrewdness. "Maybe I am. And maybe I'm not." She tittered.

"Betty, there's a great deal at stake here. A great deal at stake."

"Steak?" she said blankly, smothering a lady-like burp.

"There's a vital principle involved. A national institution. Do you know what I'm talking about?"

She shook her head. It was not the best idea. "You know," she said bleakly, "I don't think I'm much of a wine-drinker . . ."

"You've been with the MAA for three years now. You're

one of our most promising people. You *understand* the organization. That's important."

"Could I have some more coffee?"

"Faith. Sincerity. These are highly important attributes. That's why I've been keeping my eye on you. Your attributes—"

"I beg your pardon!"

"I mean your ability," Warren said hastily. "Your love of the work. Your devotion to the principles of compatibility." He leaned back in his chair. "I don't want to see you throw it all away, Betty."

"Throw what away?"

"Your opportunity." He grabbed her hand again. "Betty, don't you see? This—this hoodlum you've been seeing. The one who scoffs at everything we stand for. He's subverting you—"

"He is not!" Betty's head wobbled. "He didn't even *kiss* me 'till last week—"

"Why, your very *interest* in him is a subversion of our principles! I tell you, there's only one thing to do in this situation—"

"What's that?"

Warren paused. Then he displayed his toothy smile and said:

"Ask the Parson."

Betty left the office early

that afternoon. She had a headache, and it wasn't all due to the luncheon wine. Warren's advice had hit something in her mind, and stuck there like a clinging burr.

Doug called her at home when he learned she was out, and she cancelled their evening date, pleading illness.

She spent a restless night, and when she appeared the next morning, her eyes were tired.

"Warren," she said to the branch manager.

"Yes, my dear."

"Warren, I've been thinking about what you said yesterday, at lunch. About the Parson."

"And you've decided—?"

"I think you're right." She sat down and stared at the floor. "It can't do any *harm*, can it? After all, there's no *compulsion*—"

"Of course not," Warren said smoothly. His grin was wide. "But you owe it to yourself to express your faith in the MAA—"

"Yes. Yes, that's the way I look at it."

"Fine. We'll run you through this morning." Warren rubbed his hands together.

"There's one thing," Betty said.

"What's that?"

"Doug Brady. Have you processed his application? Is he in the machine?"

"Of course. I did it last week."

She rose wearily. "Well. Then let's get it over with."

They went into the back room, where the Parson was.

It stretched out for some fifty feet, its chrome face gleaming, its dials and counters merrily turning, locating the Perfect Partners for one of the early-morning clients.

"I'll just take care of Mrs. Forbush," Warren said.

"Mrs.?"

"A widow. Sixty-eight years old, but still romantic. It's quite a spring," he said gleefully.

The machine wound up its business, and the branch manager lifted out the tiny discs that bore the names and chief characteristics of recommended mates for the sprightly Mrs. Forbush. He ran the discs through the teleprinting machine, and produced half a dozen file cards, with names, addresses and other pertinent data.

"I'll just put these in the mailroom," he said, "and we'll be all set."

When he returned, Betty was sitting disconsolately on the stool in front of the main operating controls of the

EMCC. She watched the branch manager as he went through the familiar process of setting the switches and dials.

He held up a tiny disc. "This is you," he said happily. "And in we go—" He dropped the disc into the slot.

The Parson chattered.

In fifty seconds, the Answer came tumbling out—fourteen little discs, bearing the names of the Parson's choices.

"I'll put them in the teleprinter," Warren said.

He whistled while he worked.

"Here they are!"

He handed her the file cards.

She read the names aloud, in a voice she didn't recognize as her own.

"Martin McGee, William Davison, Harry Lundgren, Jerry Jameson, Frank Baker . . ."

She stopped, and her eyes widened at the next card.

"*Warren de Witt . . .*"

Warren was tactful. His conversation to her for the rest of the day was limited to business matters. And when Doug Brady called that afternoon, he politely moved out of earshot.

He might have been pleased with Betty's part of the conversation.

"No, Doug," she said into the phone, her eyes shut tight. "I just can't make it tonight . . . No, not this week-end. I—I think I might have to go out of town. To see some friends . . . No, really, it's nothing like that . . . I just think we've been . . . (she choked when she said the next words) . . . well, seeing each other just a little too much. I don't think it's wise . . . for both of us . . ."

Warren came back into the room just as she hung up.

He was still whistling.

Monday morning was bright, but Betty's mood was gray.

She processed the applications mechanically, absorbed in the lengthy statistics. When she had occasion to operate the Parson, she found herself fumbling with the operating switches.

Warren was thoughtful. He straightened out the complexity of dials, and told her not to worry.

"Thank you," she said sadly. "You're very kind, Warren."

About eleven o'clock, she glanced out of the curved glass window in front of the building.

"Honestly!" she said.

Warren looked up. First he appraised her, then he looked

in the direction of her glance.

"Is *he* back again?" he said tightly.

"No," Betty told him. "It's a girl this time. And she's acting just as silly."

Warren looked out, and the girl, who had stopped her restless pacing in front of the MAA building, looked back at him. Then she hastily averted her eyes and began to stroll back and forth once more.

"Seems to be a national hobby," he said grimly. "I'll tell her to come in or go away." Grumbling, he started for the door. "You'd think we were being picketed . . ."

Betty made a noise, and Warren paused in his march to the entrance and looked at her.

"What is it?"

"Doug—"

Warren opened the door, just in time to admit a determined Douglas Brady. He wore a blue sweater and a black scowl.

"Well!" Warren said. "And what can we do for *you*?"

"I want to see Betty?"

"Must I remind you that this is a *business* office?"

Doug went to her desk. "Now, look—" he said.

She turned away. "I don't have anything to say, Doug."

"You've got *plenty* to say to me! You and your week-end!"

"What do you mean?"

"I passed your house on Sunday morning." He looked at the floor. "Passed nothing. I went there deliberately."

"Ha!" Warren said. "Spying!"

"I saw you take in the milk." He came closer to her. "You looked so cute and domestic—in your housecoat—"

"Really!" Warren was bristling.

"What's come over you, Betty? What happened?"

"Nothing, Doug!" She still wouldn't look at him. "I told you exactly how I felt over the phone. I just think we're—rushing this thing, that's all." She was hardly convincing.

"Rushing?" Doug scratched his head. "Listen, what's the good of slowing down? Why do you think there are so few snails in the world?"

"Ha!" Warren said.

"Listen, if I did anything wrong—"

"You didn't, Doug. That's not the reason—"

"Then what *is* the reason?"

"Is this MAA Branch Thirty-two?" The voice came from the doorway, and the three heads turned in that direction.

The speaker was a girl, in a neat charcoal gray suit. She looked doubtfully at them from behind the door.

"That's right, that's right,"

Warren said impatiently.

"The Marriage Machine office?"

"The Marriage Machine!" Doug said. He reached out and caught Betty's shoulder. "*That's* it! Isn't it, Betty? This has something to do with the Marriage Machine!"

The strange girl said: "I wonder if you can help me—"

"Later!" Warren snapped.

"Well, Betty? Does it?"

"No—yes—" She put her hand through her hair. "I don't know *what* to tell you, Doug—"

The young man's arms dropped to his side, and he looked forlorn.

"Then you found out," he said dully.

A tear squeezed itself out on Betty's cheek. "I—I couldn't help it, Doug. I wanted to see—"

"I hated to tell you," Doug said. "It seemed so—so artificial or something. And I wanted to find out for myself—if you were really everything I was looking for—"

"Hey," the girl in the gray suit said vexedly. "I'm trying to find—"

"Please!" Doug said. He put his hand on Betty's arm. "You don't really *mind*, do you? I mean, you believe in this Parson of yours—"

"Yes," Betty said, at the beginning of a sob. "That's the trouble—"

"If you have such faith in the Parson, then everything should be fine between us. After all, it was the Parson that brought me to you—"

"Brought *you*?"

"I didn't want to tell you before. I had my disc run through on the EMCC in Hartford. Branch Twenty-one. You were one of the Parson's choices. That's why I came here—"

"But I thought—" Betty was dazed. "But Warren—"

"Just a little joke," the branch manager said. He

backed away from the girl.

"You *didn't* run my disc into the machine! You *ran* somebody else's! Some girl the Parson picked out for *you*—"

Warren's smile wasn't convincing. "Ha!" he said, fingers digging into his collar. "Just a joke, Betty. Girl was really Floria Gunderson—"

"Floria who?" the girl in gray said.

"Gunderson," said Warren.

"Ha!" the girl said. "That's me!"

She threw herself into his arms. "Warren!" she cried.

"Betty!" Doug said.

"Darling!" said Betty.

It was a triumph of Science.

#### THE END

