

# FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

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# The Professor From Pyjm

by BRUCE TUCKER  
& IRVING COX, JR.

Mytohell was out of this world, and so was his story of impending destruction and the apparatus he swore would save Earth. But, looney or not, he was a fine teacher . . .

**M**Y SON, unity is the necessary prerequisite to maturity; never forget that." He spoke gently, in that paternal way of his—like a teacher lecturing a somewhat thick-witted student. I ignored him. He talked that way most of the time, and I was used to it. Usually I just gave him a transistor, or a coil of wire, or a condenser—or whatever gadget he'd asked me to bring. Then he'd settle down and quit babbling his other-world nonsense.

His name was Mytohell. That might have been his first or his last name; I didn't know. He refused to be called anything else. It was an unusual name, and very much in keeping with the rest of the man. Mytohell was tall—but not unusually so—and a big man, surprisingly well-built and well-preserved for his age. His hair was white, with a foggy touch of blue in it. Dressed in that long, flowing nightgown—which he preferred to wear most of the time—Mytohell resembled a Greek philosopher or a modern prophet. Or, more to the point, a schoolteacher recreated out of ancient Athens. I could never entirely escape that comparison.

Socrates, prophet, teacher: yet his home was the Sunset Sanitarium, where "The Aged Receive a Well-earned Rest in the Golden Years."

I'm majoring in chemistry,

in my second year at the university. My grandfather was committed to the Sunset Sanitarium seven months ago and, because he and I had always been very close, I spent a great deal of time there with him. For the first month or so, grandpop waited eagerly for each of my frequent visits. He'd save every scrap of gossip that his inquisitive—and highly imaginative—mind could uncover, and insist on releasing this jumbled flood on my unsuspecting ears. That was at the beginning. Then slowly grandpop lost interest in the gossip; he became silent and serious. He wanted me to come see him, but when I did he never had much to say. I knew my being there helped him, so I continued visiting the sanitarium whenever I could. I began bringing my assignments and my lecture problems to work on while I sat by his wheelchair.

**T**HAT WAS how I met Mytohell. One day I found him sharing grandpop's room; he'd been moved in from another ward—a prison ward, I found out later. For a while Mytohell watched me working at a particularly aggravating problem in atomic weights. Usually, chem didn't bother me. It was a subject I liked; I went through the work in a breeze. But that afternoon nothing came out the way it should. Maybe it was because I was tired; maybe it was be-

cause I was worrying about Grandpop's condition.

Or maybe it was because Mytohell's eyes were fixed on me—glittering, black agates. His stare was hypnotic and uncomfortable. I felt like a naughty schoolboy caught in a silly, classroom prank. I'll never understand how Mytohell was always able to give me that feeling.

"I'm glad to see you studying a discipline like chemistry," Mytohell said. "Even a system as primitive as yours. Most of your people, I'm afraid, think more in terms of emotion; you give me hope that something can still be worked out."

"I'm sure it will, sir," I answered glibly. I had visited grandpop often enough to know it was necessary to humor the inmates.

"You seem to be having trouble," Mytohell went on. "Is there something your mind can't grasp?"

"It's nothing. I don't really think—"

"Let me see your—ah—your word for it is textbook, is it not?"

**M**YTOHELL took the text from me and, after glancing at the problem, he began to talk patiently and precisely, for all the world like one of my professors at the university. And he made as much sense. More, perhaps: I'd never heard such a lucid, clear-cut explanation. He talked

from one end of the equation to the other, filling in various related facts and theories which evolved from that particular equation. Unhurried, unassuming he explained a complex chemical statement—a madman who looked like a Biblical prophet. Where had he learned so much? How could he speak so accurately and so completely on a difficult point? Even my college professors would have had to refresh their memories on some of the points he brought up.

But he gave me no chance to question him. He fixed me with those glittering eyes and said, "In my world, the study of the chemical structure of matter is far advanced. We have long known these things which to you are new discoveries."

He was off again. A pity, too, for he could have made my college professors look like kiddies in the kindergarten. And he was a surprisingly good teacher, too. Mythell could make any problem readily understandable. A complex discussion in the text he always reduced to statements as elemental as grammar school math. When I learned from him—or pretended to—he was very pleased. When I was more thick-witted than usual, he turned curt; sometimes he became furiously angry. I made every effort to avoid angering him in any way.

AND I DID everything I could to humor him, because I had genuine respect for his knowledge and his ability to teach. I brought him transistors, or coils of wire, or chemical compounds—any of the gadgets he said he needed for some secret project he believed he was working on. He called his machine a Unifactor. Once I ventured to ask him for a definition; he snapped that, of course, it was a device which would electronically unify all the nations of the earth. He seemed more than a little touchy on that point, so I didn't ask about the Unifactor again.

"My son, unity is a necessary prerequisite to maturity," he told me, nodding his head sagely.

"Oh?" He seemed to expect me to make some sort of reply, but I was at a loss for words.

"Until such a condition exists, Earth cannot take its place in the System."

"I—ah—I'm sure you're right, sir."

"The others say the Unifactor won't work on your type of mentality, and the alternative is to transpose your system beyond the universe. But that sort of brutality we want to avoid—at least the minority of us are against it."

HE HAD A great deal more to say in the same vein. I pretended to listen.

It was after that particular conversation that I tried to find out about Mytohell's past. The people in charge of the Sunset Sanitarium told me that Mytohell—the only name under which he was registered—had been committed to the rest home by the alienation proceedings of a police court. At first he had been confined in a locked ward until the sanitarium psychiatrist decided Mytohell was harmless enough to be admitted to the general wards.

I cut classes one morning and spent three hours reading through the record of Mytohell's case in the county courthouse. The information was by no means complete, but it was all I ever learned about Mytohell.

The man had been arrested while stealing drugs from a serve-yourself pharmacy. With no previous record of arrest, Mytohell might have been sent to the county rehabilitation farm, but he told such a strange story he was held for an alienation hearing. Mytohell insisted that he needed the material he had stolen in order to complete a machine he was building. He said he didn't know anything about the use of money, and he considered all that rather trivial.

"Please understand," he was quoted as saying, "I'm working desperately against time. I must finish my Uni-factor before the System

votes to remove your world beyond the universe."

"The System?" he was asked.

"The organized government of the other civilized worlds. My home planet is Pyjm; I came here without a travel permit, and consequently I did not have access to the latest data on your economy. That's how I made this foolish mistake about money. Now that you understand why I am here, you will of course give me your complete cooperation. I expect you to supply me with a place to work and the material I need to complete my machine."

**A**FTER THAT, naturally, Mytohell was turned over to the psychiatrists. The police were unable to trace a family—not a single relative, near or distant—who could be responsible for the old man. He had no source of income. He held no social security card; he gave no address; neither his fingerprints nor his name were on file with any government agency.

Following Mytohell's first talk with a police department psychiatrist, a notation had been entered in the police file: "The delusion is amazingly well-integrated; subject lectures on details, irritably and impatiently; to a degree, his attitude suggests that he may have been a teacher—possibly a professor of chem-

istry, or a related science." So the psychiatrist had been aware of that, too. I felt better about my own reaction.

By the third interview, Mytohell's irritability was described as rage. His fury was increased by the fact that someone in the department had nicknamed him the Professor from Pyjm and the name had stuck. He threatened to discipline the psychiatrist unless his attitude changed.

The written record broke off there. After a good deal of checking, I found a sergeant who remembered the rest of it. Immediately after that third interview between Mytohell and the psychiatrist, the doctor suffered a disastrous mental breakdown, from which he never recovered. There was no apparent cause; but unfortunately, it gave Mytohell the opening to claim he had punished the psychiatrist, disciplining him for insubordination (The teacher again!) The police didn't waste any more time on Mytohell's case; he was at once committed to the sanitarium, where I had met him.

**A**LL THAT happened a year ago. Since then, Mytohell told me, it was difficult, to remember that his intention was to help the earth. He had thought a great deal about revenge, he admitted, until I came along

"You've brought me what I

need to build the Unifactor," he said. "I'll never forget that."

"When are you going to let me see the machine?"

"After it's finished, perhaps. I need but two items to complete it. Maybe you can bring them next time you come."

"Sure thing; you name it—I'll bring it." It was a rash statement, but I didn't think about what I was saying. I was too satisfied with my friendship for Mytohell; it was paying big dividends for me. All my university grades had taken a consistent turn for the better. Of course, old Doc Daniels—Biochem 235—suggested that I had invented a new and clever way of cheating. (Nobody had picked off an A from Daniels since 1923—the first year he taught when, as he kept telling us, he didn't know any better.) But, thanks to Mytohell's coaching, I had satisfied even Doc Daniels in the last exam; Doc hung over my shoulder, breathing down my neck, but I still got through it without even a minor mistake. Obviously, then, I would have agreed to bring Mytohell anything he said he wanted to build that dream-gadget of his.

**"I** WANT A hand generator," Mytohell said matter-of-factly.

"Check."

"And a three inch cube of solid yttrium."

Yttrium—one of the rarest of the rare earths! I swallowed hard. "Sir, wouldn't something else do just as well?"

"No, I must have that. My son, you are a student of chemistry; it should be simple for you to obtain a pure element." His glance turned hard and brittle; he became the schoolteacher, ready to discipline the recalcitrant student. "Don't you let me down, too; I couldn't face that, my son."

For a few days I stalled. I brought the old man a second-hand generator and that satisfied him temporarily. But shortly he was asking for the cube of yttrium again. That good old trivalent, metallic element, atomic weight 89.3. I kept telling Mytohell I was trying to locate what he wanted, but I hadn't rounded up enough quite yet. He seemed to believe I was deliberately stalling.

**THE SUNSET SANITARIUM** has a private and extensive garden for the use of its inmates. Very private, so the patients would not be subject to prying; and large, because the bigger it was the more space it provided for the patient to use in tiring himself out. The high walls around the garden acted in the interests of both privacy and restraint. There were spa-

ciuous lawns, well-kept pathways and fragrant flowers. And under a patch of hedge, Mytohell had concealed the Rube Goldberg gadget which he called his Unifactor.

He took me there one evening to show me what he had done—so I would understand, he said, how much he needed the cube of yttrium. It was dusk; the brighter stars were already glittering in the darkening sky. We walked along the gravel paths, that prophet-like man and I, until we reached the far end of the garden. Without speaking, he pointed out the hedge he had used. I stooped and pulled aside the lower branches. On the ground lay the thing he called a Unifactor. Not only did it *not* look capable of electronically pulling together this earth's belligerent nationalities; the machine looked as if it would barely stand the strain of holding itself together.

I gazed in what I hoped was a suitable attitude of awed reverence.

"And it's finished?"

"Except for that other substance. I must have the yttrium."

"This means a great deal to you, doesn't it, sir?"

"I've given my life to do this." There was something hypnotic in the way he spoke; he believed in himself, in his own mission.

A BREEZE began to stir through the garden. It whispered and sighed and seemed, somehow, to hold all the sounds of the world. It brought with it the loneliness of eternity, of a martyr's dedication. For a moment the past and the future were one.

"I would bring you peace," Mytohell said softly. "I would save you from oblivion; you and your people. You are worth saving; you have shown me that. If I could, I would tell my feelings to the wind, and let it carry my message around and around your earth until it has been heard and understood by you all. But I cannot reach you with that kind of rationality; in spite of the risks, I must use the Unifactor. And the System has left me so little time." His trembling fingers closed on my arm. "So little time! And I must bring peace to your world. Give me the material I need."

My voice was a choked whisper. "I will do my best," I promised. At that moment I meant it. "Old man," I asked, "you say you came from a world called Pjym; how did you come here?"

"Our techniques of transposition are beyond the means of expression in your primitive science."

"How is it that you speak our language so well?"

"It is an illusion of your own understanding; you

aren't yet able to identify telepathy."

He had an answer to every approach to reality.

We turned back toward the sanitarium. For a moment Mytohell looked up at the stars. The wind, stirring through his white hair, dramatized his Socratic appearance.

"This world called Pjym," I said; "can you see it tonight?"

"A planet of a distant sun, light years beyond your Milky Way? You know better than that, my son."

"Then why do you watch the stars?"

"They are silent and complete; the majestic monuments of time."

THE NEXT time I saw Mytohell he was flat on his back, strapped to his bed. His hands were slowly clenching and unclenching and his lips were drawn back. An attendant sat by the foot of the bed, an apple half-eaten in one hand and a book in the other. He paid no attention.

Mytohell recognized me—at least he seemed to. "Did you bring it?"

I'd almost forgotten the yttrium. "No. It—ah—it slipped my mind. But don't you think something else—"

Mytohell's body trembled with a fury so violent I thought he would snap the straps that bound him to the bed. "You've never really be-



lieved me; you're like the rest of them!"

"What happened?" I asked the attendant.

He looked up, looked at Mytohell. "Oh, him. "Threw a fit."

"**A**LL RIGHT, fill me in. What kind of a fit? When?"

"About four this afternoon. He came stampedin' in from the garden, screaming that something had happened to some kind of factory he had out there."

"The Unifactor."

"Yeah, maybe that's what he called it. So here he comes pullin' a tantrum. As quick as I could I got the ol' straight jacket on him an' then I called the supervisor. You done it just right, he says to me. You done it right."

"How long are you going to keep him here?"

"Till the Doc looks him over. Probably let him up today."

I left the attendant and walked over to my grandpop's bed. He told me much the same story, with the addition of one more detail. Mytohell seemed to think that someone had deliberately disturbed his Unifactor; and he had threatened to use it for something else. "You fools don't want help!"

**F**OR THREE days Mytohell's rage lasted; then, suddenly, he was very calm.

He asked to go into the garden. The supervisor was opposed to lifting all the restraints so rapidly; the psychologist was in favor of it—and the psychologist made his point. But there was a condition. Mytohell specified that he wanted me to go into the garden with him before dawn, and the psychologist strongly urged me to comply.

The old man meant nothing to me; yet I agreed to help them out. To help them? No, but I realized then that, in some indefinable way, Mytohell had become more than a friend to me.

The next morning, just before dawn, I met Mytohell in the common room of the sanitarium we went into the garden alone. In silence I followed Mytohell along the gravel path to the hedge at the back of the garden. On the ground I saw the remains of his Unifactor. Mytohell picked up the parts and, cradling the junk in his arm, he began to fit the machine together in a new pattern.

"You didn't let me finish what I came to do," Mytohell said to me very quietly.

"The material you asked for was so difficult to—"

"You didn't mention difficulties; all you wanted to do was humor me—string me along seems to be the popular phrase for it—because I was helping you improve your grades in the university. Naturally telepathy made a

great deal of my knowledge available to you—everything that you had the ability to understand."

HE TWISTED two wires into the generator terminals and looked into my eyes. I felt a shame—and afraid I was a little boy facing an angry tutor.

"You are typical of your world," Mytohell went on, in the same quiet tone. "A world too selfish to understand your own capabilities. That's the supreme irony of it all; your mind towers far above mine—if you could use it."

"I came to help you; you turned my help down and destroyed my machine."

He raised one arm toward the morning sky. The folds of his nightgown gave him the appearance of an ancient Roman patrician. "The others were right," he said. "You people do not deserve a place in the System. We have every right to banish you into that outer darkness where time has never been."

He caressed the generator. "But that is too serious a decision for me to make alone. I've revised the Unifactor; with this new machine, I could finish the job—but I won't. The final decision, my son, I leave to your world. This morning I'll send you part-way—into the gray limbo of transition. There your world will stay until the Sys-

tem carries out the sentence of banishment, or—" Mytohell smiled gently, sadly, "—or until you give us a reason to bring you back. One valid reason, my son; that's all we ask of Earth. One reason why you should not be condemned to oblivion."

FOR A SPLIT-SECOND he was the schoolteacher again. "Is it a lesson you're capable of learning? I've failed to teach it to you; now, can you pull yourselves up by your own bootstraps?" There was agony in his voice.

He glanced into my eyes and, in a sudden spasm of remorse, he twisted the handle of the generator. Knives of ice tore at my soul; nausea churned through my body. The pain passed. I stumbled back from hedge. Dimly, I was aware that Mytohell and his machine had vanished.

The sky was empty. Mytohell offers us a reprieve, a chance to survive. But are we capable of dragging ourselves back from oblivion? Can we find one valid reason why Earth and its culture should survive? I wonder... and I wonder in this gray desert, this fog of nothingness to which we have been condemned. This limbo where the stars do not turn through the black velvet of space; where the suns are dead and color and emotion is drained from our souls...