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# THE ORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

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Eventually, they got around to what we were waiting for. They hit the keys and ship one was gone, out over the ocean. . . .And I knew something they didn't. . . .and wondered.

*The most important thing of all, once the first moon-ship was constructed, was that it didn't succeed.*

# THE WILHELM SPOT

by LES COLE

**T**HERE WAS no sound when it struck; there wouldn't be, of course. There was no sound *where* it struck, but 240,000 miles away sound was generated in great quantity. Regardless of whether it was the physical definition or the physiological, sound emerged: "Monstrous! My constituents will demand an investigation of this cheap advertising trick.. Monumental! A real tribute to scientific endeavor.. Classified? Hell, we didn't have anything to do with it.. Corn, pure corn. You'd think they could come up with something a little more subtle. I'll never use their products again. "

However, the sound affect-

ed me not one whit; its presence was merely indicative of success and that I'd had complete confidence in. It was the first one—the failure—that intrigued me and made me hopeful, but I'll get to that shortly.

The wild dream started as such one evening up at Russ' house. Russell Arthur I am pleased to call a friend. He's a guy just under average height with sandy hair, glasses, and a spare frame. Unprepossessing to look at, Russ is what I call a "specialized genius." He's one of those people who know just about all there is to know about his own particular field, and while I could battle like crazy with him over most any subject, when it came to publicity

or publications, I sat up and listened. You had to. In addition—or maybe it's more important than his know-how—he has one of the most flexible minds I've ever seen in action.

That night Russ had just landed a job as editor on one of Wilhelm's trade magazines. It was a big step for him, and although Russ is one of those guys who likes to play it steely-hard, I could tell he was pleased and excited. And after we'd drunk a beer or two in celebration, we began kicking things around.

That night I didn't get the drift right away. Russ had muttered something about "concatenation of forces" and "the right person in the right place at the right time." I was all set to drag in Korzybski, whom I knew Russ hadn't read, because I was confused.

And right there he said, "Wilhelm is one of the biggest industrialists in the country."

OK, I thought, so we're back to him again. If you want to discuss your new-found job, well I guess you've got a right. So I just answered him with a non-committal "Umm."

Russ went on, "I don't imagine that anyone really knows the extent of his holdings. Steel, coal, magnesium, cement, aluminum, and Lord

knows what-all, as well as intangibles: brain teams, legal staffs, and everything that goes into the makeup of a leader of industry. Plus a very, very bright management policy. If you can handle your job, you go up; if not, you're out. But if you have an idea that's good enough, you can always get to see Wilhelm himself; you can go right to the top. Only Lord help you if the idea or problem could be handled by the lower echelons; you'll be on your way out again."

I figured it was about time to throw in another "Umm." Frankly, I wasn't too much interested in the industrialist or his workings.

Russ continued to discuss Wilhelm. He seemed to know pretty much about the man and his background, but I was only listening with half an ear.

And then apropos of nothing Russ asked me, "Suppose you were going to build the first rocket to the moon. How would you go about it?"

"I'm no rocket engineer. Haven't you got a copy of 'Rockets, Missiles, and Space Travel' around?"

"Stop hedging," he replied. "Suppose somebody came up to you and told you to go ahead. What would you need?"

I tried to think. "Well," I

began, "I suppose I'd organize a company to get funds. Sell shares, check with the UN—"

Russ broke in. "You don't need to make like Harriman. What would you need to build it?"

He was pushing me, and I just said what popped into my mind. "Oh, industrial minerals and metals, I guess. Not too much steel but some. Magnesium and aluminum in large quantities; concrete, maybe, for building the launching platforms..."

And suddenly it came up and beat my brains out. Some body turned on the lights. What was that Russ had said about Wilhelm's holdings? No wonder he had been talking about him so much.

I jumped out of my chair, looking at Russ' grin. "Hey! Do do you know something I don't? *Is it being built?*" My voice was tense with excitement.

He shook his head, regretfully. "No, nothing is being built that I know of." Then the gleam came back into his eye. "But can you think of a better man to do the job? If there were only some way of getting the idea over to him, of convincing him that it would be worth the effort. I know the value of the publicity he'd get; actually it would probably exceed the cost of the ship itself, consid-

ering that Wilhelm has everything he needs to start going. In addition, it probably is deductible."

We spent a lot of time that evening discussing the problem. We couldn't think of a way to get it across. It wasn't simply a case of Russ walking in to see Wilhelm. He'd still have had to go through channels, and the next step up probably would have thrown him out. He didn't want to risk his job on what was, after all, a crazy idea, and I couldn't say that I blamed him. But we had fun kicking that one around.

**T**HAT ENDS act one. Skip a year when we forgot about it. Get to me.

I'm a drifter, a labor dil-  
etante if you will, though I dislike the use of the term. I'd like to find a job that could hold my interest, although I must admit that there are a few things I haven't tried yet. In fact, I'd love to hire out on one of those expeditions on the Trail of Ancient—it doesn't particularly matter Ancient *what*; I'm a sucker for the title. The only drawback is a wife and family that have to be supported, so instead of looking around for old, living *Metasequoia*, I found myself tossing around new, deadweight 100-pound sacks.

A couple of weeks of that and you begin to look for the fastest way out.

One morning, about four o'clock, I got this brilliant idea. Why not get into publicity? And how? Easy! Sell Mr. Wilhelm the moon. Crazy? You know how good ideas look at 4:00 A.M. So I sat down and wrote the gentleman a long letter pointing out that I'd heard if you have an idea good enough you could get in to see him. I was also friendishly clever, I thought, in piquing his curiosity. I asked for an appointment—he lives in the area—and sealed the letter. Then I went back to sleep.

The next day, in the cold light of the cement sacks, I realized that I had been foolish; that I wasn't facing my particular problem squarely; and that I was going to tear the letter up when I got home and do some mature thinking. Only, when I did get home, I found that my wife had mailed the letter. And anyway, I was a little tired that night for constructive thinking...

Three days later I got an answer to that letter. An appointment had been made for me to see the industrialist. Of all things, I hadn't expected that; but sometimes it's surprising what you can get by just asking. I put on my best suit, shined my shoes, and

started for the interview feeling like a damn fool. Now that I had his attention, just what was I going to say?

I was ushered in and, to make matters worse, it hit me then that what I had to do was a selling job. I'm no salesman—I tried selling furnaces door to door once—and I just don't go for this "positive thinking" stuff or the Big Smile.

Wilhelm was slightly stout and balding. I judged him to be six-footish, but he was sitting down, so I wasn't sure. You've seen the pictures; you don't need any more of a physical description. What you can't know until you come into contact with it is the aura that surrounded him. I have a pretty fair opinion of myself, and I've always figured that when the time came for leadership I could do all right, but this Wilhelm was something else again. He was a big man. Now I know what they meant by "Captain of Industry." Here was a man who *had* to make a name for himself; it was something inherent like blue eyes or big bones.

I LOOKED around at the furnishings, the desk, and the rest of the office. And my first words were completely banal: "Just like the movies." I felt silly, and smiled.

He smiled back. "Some-

what." Then he looked me over, smiled again, and asked, "No briefcase?"

I shook my head. "I'm a virgin at this business."

"So I see." Wilhelm glanced at his watch. "You've wasted almost a minute with platitudes; got anything to say in the next four?"

That busy-executive-looks-at-watch act made me a little mad; I'd met the type before and it struck me that he was too big a guy to try that hard to impress me. "Don't blame me for being a little nervous," I shot back, which really wasn't indicative of my best repartee.

"I don't," he replied, and added, "We can sit here for the rest of the time staring at each other if you wish. I've given you five minutes, so you can do what you want with it."

So here it was. Brass had carried me that far—brass and a screwy idea. Brass wouldn't get me any farther, not with that personality across from me, so it was put up or shut up.

And the first of three good inspirations hit me. I suddenly remembered my first look at Saturn through a twelve-inch refractor; it had been cloudy during the day and that night there was just enough of a few tenuous wisps left to make the ringed beauty almost unreal. I remembered

a conversation I'd had with one of the older kids when I was seven; he'd located Venus for me in the early evening sky and asked, "Do you think there are any people up there?" and I couldn't sleep for hours wondering.

I remembered the occasion when I was five that a mining engineer stuck a hunk of fossiliferous sandstone in my hand and said, "Those animals are one hundred seventy million years old" and I felt the wonder of time in the palm of my hand.

I remembered *G-8 and His Battle Aces*, *Doc Savage*, and *Air Wonder Stories*. I remembered my first look at a mounted dinosaur skeleton and how, when the guard wasn't looking, I'd timidly stuck out a hand and felt those live dead bones; I remembered asking a lecturer in the Hayden Planetarium for her autograph.

It was easy. I gave Wilhelm both barrels. The words weren't important. I had to get the emotion over to him.

And then I said, "How would you like me to build you a monument that would last for the lifetime of man and longer? A monument that would need no upkeep, that wouldn't be affected by weather, and that every human would see at some time or other in his life?"

He asked, "Where?" But I was willing to bet my bottom dollar he knew.

"The moon."

I liked that guy. There was no double take, no stupidly uttered, "Huh?" That he was big enough for the biggest job I had confirmed for me in that moment. "How do you propose to get there?" was all he asked.

"I don't," I said and happened to note the time. My five minutes were up. He saw what I'd seen. "Keep talking; you've earned more time."

I exulted and went on, "Nobody will go. We'll build that monument right here and smear it all over a portion of the moon's surface. If the payload of a multi-step rocket was a couple of hundred pounds of powered aluminum or gypsum or any good light-reflector, and if the rocket crashed, why you'd have the...the..." I groped for the right words and then that second inspiration took hold. "You'd have the Wilhelm Spot."

He kind of smiled and said, "Neat touch that—the 'Wilhelm Spot'."

I blushed; he seemed to be able to see through me and my machinations. But in spite of the blushing, I could tell that down under he liked the name. I continued, "This is going to cost you."

"Now you're getting ama-

teurish again," he snapped. "Of course it'll cost. How much?"

"I haven't more than just a vague idea, and I'd hate to put a price on it at this shaky stage. But it'll probably be more than you think you can possibly spend and, since it isn't my money, less than what I'd estimate."

He was more than just a bit sarcastic. "You certainly have a practical head on your shoulders, young man. Don't you know that you're supposed to carry that briefcase in here, all packed with facts and figures?"

"I can't give you facts and figures; that'll be up to your engineering staff. But I think part of it may be deductible." He began to look interested. "I really don't know anything about corporation tax, so I might be wrong," I said, and he shook his head at me.

Then I went on to tell him about the ideal position he was in and how he was the one man in the country who could carry it off. And as I talked, I began to be swept by a feeling of failure. It was hard to describe. It just seemed as though the light in his eye, which I lit by my emotional appeal, was slowly going out. I was desperate—I had a feeling that there wasn't going to be another chance—and then that third inspiration came up.



It was born out of something Russ had said during the conversation a year before. Something that I hadn't paid any attention to, but something that buried itself in my subconscious waiting to blossom out.

I leaned forward in my chair and looked him full in the face. I didn't allow myself to think that this was the final appeal, that this had to do it. "They say that at our present stage of technology the thing can't be done. They say it is impossible. I'm betting that you could do it; I've heard that you've done the impossible."

The light flickered, went out, flickered on again. I sat there almost exhausted and... I...couldn't...tell!

He said, "I want to think about this; I'll let you know."

They were discouraging-sounding words, but I wasn't sure which way the dice had fallen. Frankly, I don't think Wilhelm knew either.

**T**HE NEXT day, those sacks weighed one thousand pounds a piece, and it took me five minutes to move each one. I worked hard all day and discovered that it was ten o'clock in the morning. Something had happened to my space and time sense; but, fortunately for my sanity, a month later that day came to

an end. And during the day my wife had received a phone call summoning me back for more discussion. I was excited enough to forget to shine my shoes.

I walked in and—well, have you ever gotten a hunch over a roulette table? *Known* that the number you played was coming up? Or, if you're not the gambling sort, have you ever watched a football game and known after a minute of play that the three-to-one underdog was going to win? I was hot; I knew we were going to try it, and Wilhelm knew I knew.

"What do you want out of it?" he asked.

"I could be altruistic—" I began.

"You've been honest up to now," he put in.

"—so," I continued, "let's say three things. First, I'd like to see how a full-fledged publicity campaign is run. I would like to work along with the guy who is going to handle the publicity on this."

"At a good salary," he interjected dryly.

That burned me. "You might be surprised," I said and told him; he was surprised.

"I'm trying to figure out for some years now, myself." And then I got back on the subject: "Second—and this one is going to be hard for

you to take—I want to name the man to handle the publicity.”

It was hard for him to take. He didn't like the idea. I told him about Russ Arthur and his capabilities; he still didn't like it.

“Why should I trust what will be the world's biggest story to someone I don't know?” he asked.

“Because it is the world's biggest story,” I replied. “Hell, a trained chimpanzee could get you results on this. And, without Russ, the whole thing is off.”

He sat there looking at me coldly. “Do you really think that would bother me? What's to stop me from going ahead on my own?”

Suddenly my head came down out of the clouds. My bubble was bursting. Here I'd been playing big wheel for the last few minutes, and I was forcibly reminded that my part in this was at the sufferance and grace of Wilhelm. “Well,” I said, “there's really nothing except that I have ideas and sources that might take you a while to dig up.”

**I**T WAS THE first and only time I ever tried to bluff him. I had nothing, really, that any informed layman couldn't get in fifteen minutes thought. But it had popped out so suddenly and

without much thought that I didn't have a chance to build up an emotional charge—and he didn't thereby have a chance to judge it for what it was. Still, I often wondered whether he didn't suspect that I was bluffing; basically he was pretty nice, and he may have been giving me a break.

“I'll accept the first two conditions tentatively,” he said after a few seconds. “What was the third?”

“That you turn over the results to whichever of the government bodies is engaged in rocket research.”

“Why?”

“Because it'll be helpful when they start putting men in them.”

“I don't like it,” he frowned.

“Look, you aren't and won't be in the business of building two-way rockets.” I noticed look on his face and amended hastily, “At least, not for the next few years. But by helping the people who are, you may be hastening the exploration of the solar system.” I hated the phrase the minute I said it; it was too trite. But then I realized that Wilhelm hadn't heard it a tenth so much as I, and it didn't seem to affect him as it had me. “Besides,” I added, “it might be deductible.” I couldn't help it; when I get nervous I try to get funny.

He was interested again. “It

might at that; that is, it might be saleable.”

That didn't hit me too well, but I said, “I don't care how it gets to them as long as it does. The information is the important thing.”

That seemed to tie it all up in ribbons. Wilhelm went back to discussing Russ and me. “I wonder how long you'll last. There are going to be a hundred and one very capable people trying to edge you out. They'll push and pressurize, all in a very subtle way.”

“Russ can take care of himself. As for me, if things get too bad, I can always throw myself on your mercy.”

“It won't do you any good,” he replied, “unless you can prove you're capable of handling your job. Either do or get out; you're in for a rude shock.”

We exchanged a few more amenities, and I left. I was going to dig up Russ and spring it on him. But when I was by myself, what was happening dawned on me. I shook and a sweat—I was too nervous to note whether it was hot or cold—broke out all over. Visualize it, if you can. Here I was, a science fiction habitue, who was going to have a hand in getting the first rocket to the moon. The hope of a hundred thousand of us, and I was going to be allowed to convert part of it into reality.

I was proud and scared, and if the long-dead dream of an eleven-year-old of a c t u a l l y building the first rocket was gone—all I knew about rocketry you could stuff into eff equals emmay—well, I could at least spread the word around. It was one of those moments in your life that you keep and hang onto and drag out to re-indulge in later on.

Saying that Russ was excited is, of course, an understatement. How can you describe an emotion like that? But he still managed, after a moment, to maintain a poker expression. He said, “It took you long enough.”

My mouth dropped open. “You mean...I was supposed to—”

He nodded.

“You haven't any research you'd like done,” I asked, “about jumping off a bridge with me doing the research?”

“No,” he replied, “but if this doesn't work out, you might be trying it on your own.”

But what the heck. I imagine I'm the first catspaw who was ever so pleased to be a catspaw. Russ got right to work, cooking up ideas. This was his baby, and he'd had a lot of time thinking what to do with it.

Me? Call it the perversity of animate objects. I finished out my week with the sacks.

I wanted everything to be right.

**M**OST OF what follows was made public in broad outline. Russ and I worked hard enough for that effect. But there are some of those behind the scenes workings that should be told.

Russ planned it this way: until we were ready to make it public, there would be no word of what we were doing. We were going to keep it silent until we hit them with everything we had, and then we were going to keep hitting until we had everyone groggy—and incidentally, the name Wilhelm and its products known all over the world. I had envisioned part of the fun of this as being able to mention casually to friends that I was working on Wilhelm's rocket, but—well, it was the hardest part of the job to keep quiet. We did it, too, and without Security regulations.

Part of our job was initial organization, before the publicity began, and I'll never forget that interview with Ley. We played it close to the vest, although I wanted badly to give him the story, and I have a feeling he thought we were crazy. But I guess when you get right down to it, the hardest person in the world to convince that a science fiction event is actually occurring

would be a science fiction "name." Only maybe he wasn't too sure; he gave us some good leads to follow.

Von Braun didn't need much urging. He jumped right in—and nearly jumped out of his skin when we finally told him. Ever see the cat that just ate the canary? That expression typified him for the next months.

And the organization began to grow. Russ was a hard taskmaster. If we were going to make the publicity on this, we were going to know all about it, or he'd know why. So, while we were still in the planning stage, we attended conferences. Conferences on this, conferences on that. Math that I couldn't begin to follow paraded across my eyelids when I had 'em shut at night—that is, when I was allowed to sleep. Words like "feed" and "calorie" and "inject," which to me had always had dietary connotations, were now thrown around with abandon. Liquidus and solidus and what were the diffraction patterns in that last batch of magnesium alloy? What about crystallization? What about it? Two, four, six, eight; add 'em up and integrate. Nuts. I was bored sick, and I wouldn't have missed a second of it.

A not-so-subtle-to-me direction began to appear in our

advertising. Remember the double spread in that was done by Bonestell? The one in blue that showed, through the blast pattern, the Earth dropping away and with the words across the top "*When We're Ready—*" and at the bottom, simply, "*Wilhelm Industries?*" We did it. We framed, amidst hysterical laughter, the letter that said the writer, if he had the occasion, would use Wilhelm products because he liked our dignified advertising.

Then there was the series that followed it in the national magazines. We doubled in spades "*Conquest in Space.*" We had Bonestell working overtime. There wasn't a billboard in a large city that didn't have "*When We're Ready—*" lettered on it.

There was the Chicago Round Table series of discussions; that was a plant. So was that nut who stood up while Congress was in session and started screaming what defense were our two friendly oceans from the attackers from the moon. We spread it out, of course; we wanted just enough to get the idea over without saturation, and I think we succeeded.

We even trotted out, towards the end, that old dog about claiming a hunk of the moon's surface. That one almost backfired; the guy who

was doing it almost got inundated in a wave of crackpots who wanted to form a Moon Cult—but we should have expected that from California.

THE DAY finally came when we could take the wraps off, when we could announce it. Russ sweated like mad over the release; it was going to be short, terse, and the dam would break in back of it.

"Why can't you use as a lead," I suggested, "something simple like '*Wilhelm announced today that he is beginning construction on a moon rocket?*'"

He shook his head. "It's like a literary hook: you have to have a lead that will knock the pins out."

"Well sure, but it strikes me that the 'respectfully submitted' lead *would* knock the pins out."

"But why not make it as effective as possible?" And then he had it and typed out the lead that everyone knew very shortly, the one that began, "*We're Ready—*"

Russ may have been; I wasn't. If I'd thought the previous rat-race was something, it was only because I had nothing to compare it with. We were caught up in a small-sized atomic explosion. I've always liked newspaper men; that's because I'd met them

singly. Newspapermen en masse I can do without. I hate the sight of them. Questions and pictures and more questions; stale cigaret smoke and staler gags; and I was on the fringe of all this. How the people in the middle ever took it is something I can't understand. But in a sense those cigaret butts were paving the road up there, so I couldn't complain.

And right about here another factor came into the picture: a safety factor. Because of it, my neck was saved; and, I found out later, it was Russ who'd instigated it. It was after one of those interminable conferences when he casually asked one of the top engineers, "Is this thing going to work?"

The engineer knew Russ for a humorist. "Why yes," he said with a straight face, "you see, it really doesn't have to *push* against anything—"

"I'm serious!" Russ interrupted. "What if it blows up or something? I understand that we still can't predict the behavior of chemical fuels too well. How much would it cost to build a second, parallel ship?"

And the engineer began to calculate, and he eventually convinced Production that if two couldn't live as cheaply as one, at least two could be made almost as cheaply as one

in terms of overall, comparative expense.

WITH IT all there were compensations: like those visits to the construction site. Somehow, though I guess I should have known better, I'd always thought that building a ship would be delicate and precisioned. There was nothing delicate about the way those gantry cranes would set down their loads of material; there'd be a dull thud and more of the after-end of step one would be scattered around the assembly area. Stiffeners and braces and strong-boys were set with screeches and stronger language. Serrated angles went into place with a clang that would jar your nerves. Meanwhile, burners and welders—specially trained because of the alloys involved—would wiggle in and out like worms, cutting by eye a piece here, measuring to maybe an eighth there. Delicate? Precisioned?

I even tried it myself because I wanted to say that I had a hand in the actual construction. Plates would come out of the shop milled to the proper curvature—only they weren't quite proper and they'd miss fitting say an eighth of an inch. So you'd get up on a rigging with an eight pound sledge and beat the bejaysus out of the corner

of the plate that didn't fit. If you didn't hit the plate head on, but with the corner of the sledge, you'd make a dent or you'd plow a furrow in the alloy. The Red Sea never had a furrow in it like the one I put in plate seven, step one, of ship one. Delicate, precisioned?

However, it was wonderful because the ships grew. Each day, each week the dream came closer to reality. In spite of what the Freudians will sneer about the conventional shape of a rocket ship, I thought they were lovely. And so did the people working on them.

There were other compensations, too. With the wraps off, of course, it was no longer a secret—not completely a secret, that is. There are still some things, like total cost, that haven't been made public. I was allowed to talk, within limits, and nothing is as much fun as having people think you're giving them The Word. Then, too, I was feeling pretty cocky because not only had I hung onto my job, but I'd asked for—and received—a raise. I *thought* it was because I'd begun to learn some of the ins and outs.

Finally the time that we'd pointed for, that we worked and sweated for, came. They were sitting out there, shining

in the sunlight, finished, pretty—and you want more background? Try: the assembled big-wigs, the blockhouse, the heat, the dials and tubes and the frantic looking young man with the radio. The hushed voices were saying what had to be said, and there was sweat between my fingers and on my forearms. Part of me drew back, looked at the scene, and wondered if we'd be sued for plagiarizing "Destination Moon." It was that standard.

Eventually, they even got around to what we were waiting for. They hit the keys and ship one was gone, out over the ocean. And a little while later a man said that step one had given her some trouble, that it didn't disengage immediately, but that it finally had. And after some more waiting the man said that step two was gone. We all went home and got drunk.

Not too drunk. We had to be sober for Wilhelm's celebration in a few days. We were. We sobered up in time to get drunk all over again for his blow-out; only we didn't.

It was daylight here, inconveniently enough, so we couldn't watch when she hit. But we had a teletype and were getting constant reports. Contact time came—and went. Minutes dragged by. Nothing.

Something like that was pretty well calculated. By the time she was ten minutes overdue we all knew that she was going to be indefinitely overdue.

Somebody, in a terribly weary voice, said, "When step one failed to disengage properly—if it dragged her butt down...a tiny angular displacement here would be magnified over 240,000 miles. She missed."

**T**HE SILENCE was loud but not very long. And then I knew why I'd hung onto my job all that time; I was to be the whipping-boy, the sacrificial goat. I got it but good. Wilhelm spoke quietly and without a single cuss word. It was worse that way. I was taken apart; my ancestors were examined; up and down and around we went. Each atom of me was examined for something good, and failing to pass the test, each atom was discarded. I was Judas and Benedict Arnold and the Man Without A Country. And at that time I believed it, and wondered how I could be so low. I don't want to go through that again, ever.

Russ, again. He'd waited, quietly and calmly, until the proper moment. Wilhelm's words—the awful ones I'd been expecting along the lines of "*You're through*"—never materialized. Russ made him

see that it wasn't my fault; really, there was no trick involved. Wilhelm knew it, and knew also—Thank God for that second ship—that he still had an ace up his sleeve.

The man gained my everlasting loyalty and respect by turning to me and saying, "I was extremely disappointed, and quite a bit of money out of pocket, when the ship didn't hit. What I was indulging in was an immature display of emotion; you have my deepest apologies." And he said it in front of everyone there.

So we went back to work. Ship Two had become the most important thing in everyone's life who was working on the project. Wives, mothers, and mistresses went by the board. No, they were all rolled into one and personified in our last remaining hope: Ship Two. She *had* to do it, had to succeed. There was something more at stake here than simply our ability and pride—and jobs. The world was ready for space travel; and—if you'll excuse this horror of a phrase—nothing succeeds like success. We didn't want to think of what two failures would mean.

We went over every inch of Two. The disengaging mechanisms were checked and rechecked and checked again. Every nook and cranny were



examined and you'd be surprised how many there are in a ship that at first glance has so few angles. Short of disassembling her and starting all over, we gave her the most complete examination possible.

The Big Day arrived—again. The same background sights and smells were present but something new had been added. Observers were more cynical: the press outspokenly so; the military more subtly so.

Again they fired, and Ship Two was gone in a burst of anticlimax.

THAT WAS a few years ago, but all you have to do any clear night is look at the moon, and you'll see where it was that Two made contact. I don't know whether Two was the inspiration or not, but we are out, into the Solar System at least, and with inefficient chemical fuels. Someday that atomic drive is going to come along, too.

For me the Wilhelm Spot meant a change from mediocrity to, perhaps, financial competence. But more important for me was the Wilhelm Spot's failure: Ship One.

Occasionally, in my less ra-

tional moments, I fantasy. Of course, the odds against it happening are impossibly long, but some day, somewhere that payload is going to splatter itself on a landscape. In a billion or two billion years or longer, if need be. It'll crash—because they always do—in some farmer's field. He'll scratch his orange colored head in puzzlement when he sees the wreckage. (And if the purely anthropomorphic action of head-scratching is objectionable, remember that this is my fantasy.)

The farmer will call in the University people, and they'll recognize the payload for what it is. They'll even think there is a message on the scrap that's stamped "*Product of Wilhelm Industry.*"

Maybe this race will be of a different psychology from ours; maybe they'll have explored their system and not found any life. Maybe they'll need further encouragement, and we'll have given it to them. This is my dream and humanity's conceit: the payload will have been our way of smiling, sticking out a hand, and saying, "There is other life around. Come on out and be neighborly."

