

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

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Picture horrid
monsters—those
that came were
worse!



the zoet space

by Earl Goodale

My invention was successful beyond the dreams of more things than I suspected.

THE GLOBAL STORAGE COMPANY—"You Name It, We Store It"—was the last name on my list. I had started, hopefully and timidly, with the smaller outfits and had worked on up through the larger and wealthier companies. I laboriously punched out a query tape, fed it into the receptionist and waited for an answer—even Global couldn't afford one of the

new voice-translator receptionists. The answer was discouragingly similar to those I had received at World-Wide and Transworld and all the rest: "Your idea has been evaluated and cannot be used at this time by our company. We regret it is impossible to arrange an interview with an executive. Thank you for your interest in our company."

So I stamped away from the

great green slab that housed Global's central offices and as I went I mentally multiplied their claimed cube-miles of storage space by one hundred. The computation was simple, the result fabulous. My invention would do this for them, it would give them a hundred times more space than they had now, and at a trifling cost. Small wonder that I was irritated at being balked by a robot receptionist. But I knew why: everyone said that the companies all worked together, and a common man didn't have a chance. Of course I couldn't talk to one of their executives, chances were that they were all out playing marbut—grown men trying to maneuver a tetrahedron into a time slot!

BUT WE ZOETS are not a brooding, worrying family—however low in the ridiculous class structure of Karn we may be—and before I had gone many miles on the sibilant walkies the problem had simplified itself. Then I could feel the solution close as I manually walked that last short and featureless block. I beat down the last wall catchie with its hypnotic suggestion to buy Itsy Bitsy Kit-sies by adding a splendidly obscene couplet; and then as I lifted to my kubicle, the complete solution of my problem came to me.

Do the makers of zigs or

kaims run around trying to sell them to customers? No, they merely use advertising in the form of wall catchies or through the feelie networks. They saturate the customers' eyes; they flood the air with suggestive sounds, and they just wait for the customer to buy their product. There was my answer: I had to advertise, publicize, and my customers would come to me; and I wouldn't have to use the semi-legal hypnotic techniques, either. It was simple. Details were—naturally—harder than the principle involved. How did one advertise if one had no professional standing, or corporate credit?

BUT THE magicians were coming to town. They were coming with axe and saw, with magic carpet and witch-beast, with boiling tar and anti-gravity—all the traditional things that so thrill the young. Nowadays, humor is more important than awe, for science progresses quickly; but the old gadgets still retain their power of suggestion. Every day now, the news quickies were showing a new set of visitors arriving from this planet or another; and right there at the space port, one of the magicians would run through a trick or two. Great publicity—natural, unrehearsed stuff that made everyone aware the magicians were having their annual get-togethering.

It wasn't too difficult getting a member of the entertainments committee to visit me. No magician can resist a guaranteed-new illusion. He was originally, I believe, a small blond man but he had grafted on extra height and taken the melanistic change.

"Well, let's see it Mr. Zoet," he said briskly.

I could see that he felt he was slumming. A Laborer, M-3, does not rate either a large kubicle or a beautiful one—especially a Laborer who does not chose to work more than three sits a week.

"This is it, sir," I said, "this locked box. I'd like you to examine it first."

He stalked about the box. I must admit it didn't look like much. It was just a squarish box, a bit larger than a feelië set, squatting on tubular legs and with a wire running to it, a switch to control the current completed the fixed equipment. I held the key and a long pole with a hooked end.

"Hum," he said, "home-made I see. Do you take things out of this or do you put them in—for the act, I mean?"

"Well, sir," I said, "I take things out—more things than what you would expect."

"Hunph, been done before, and better I daresay. Collapsible boxes, folding birds, contracted witch-beasts. Oh well, go on with your act."

He sat down on the couch and started his finger-dexteri-

ty exercises. Those professional men! Never waste a minute.

I UNLOCKED the lid and peered in. I snapped the control switch; the other space appeared, and with it my pile of books, my robe, the well-worn sandals, my cooking utensils and my cheap laboratory equipment. The gray walls seemed even more tenuous than before as they sloped away at the bottom and I wondered if my calculations showing 100 times more storage space than entrance dimensions were correct. I wished, but only momentarily, that I had the courage to descend into that dim air; but we Zoets have never been particularly brave—or foolish.

I started to haul the stuff out—the books, the clothes, and piled them beside my visitor on the couch. As the pile grew higher, he stopped testing each item and concentrated on watching me. He even forgot his place—somewhere around the fiftieth movement in his finger exercises—and he didn't bother to continue them.

"You say you've had no professional training, Mr. Zoet," he said, "but I've never seen a better illusion of a man reaching into a much deeper space than that box provides."

I smiled and started to hook stuff out with the pole. That did it. He clapped his hands happily. "Bravo, Mr.

Zoet. bravo! Why... that pole appears to be quite solid, and at least ten times the depth of the box, and yet it disappears almost completely. Might I see the pole please?"

When he handed it back to me I could see respect in his eyes and I felt within me the certainty that I would be a success.

THEN THEY appeared again—several elusive shadows that dissolved the moment I seemed to see them at the bottom of that grey space. They did appear to be a bit more solid this time, though, and I hurriedly brought up the rest of my equipment and furnishings. Then I snapped the switch and the box bottom reappeared, as solid and real as ever. Most impressive. I wished, but only slightly, that I had the technical training to understand the principle; it was embarrassing to invent something important and not know how or why it worked. All we Zoets, the whole family of us, have been blessed, however, with intuition; and what is mere mechanical knowledge compared with that? I felt, and therefore I knew, that my created space was simply an intersection with another world, or worlds. The shadows were only the inhabitants of that world.

"Well, that's it, sir," I said. "I could bring up more stuff you understand, but that's all the goods I possess."

But I had made my sale. Not for the first time I knew that the career computers had been wrong in assigning me to my lowly position. Laborer M-3, indeed!

I WAS, I freely admit, more than a little nervous when I gave my first show. The hall was only half-full, for there were many other attractions at the conference; but even so, those rows of faces were intimidating when I realized that all of them were real professionals. But my act was a success, a real buffalo as the pro's call it. The audience didn't get warmed up until I had the entire front of the stage covered with props: the portable feelie sets; the cartons of zigs (the local dealer paid me most handsomely for displaying his goods); and a score of household and sporting implements. The applause was slow in coming, but when it came it was a wave of clapping and shouting that had a peculiar effect on me—I felt light on my feet, sure of myself; I would even have put on an anti-gravity act for that perfect audience.

The bit of business at the end, when I sprayed the inside of the box with insect killer, even received applause, though there was really no point in it, so far as the crowd was concerned. And in fact there was no point in it, for the shadows merely moved back into the shifting mono-

tone walls of space. A point of minor interest was that the shadows seemed to have a more definite shape now and seemed rather too large to be affected by insect killer.

For my next performance, the hall was full of enthusiastic magicians—what the pro's call a most host—and after another buffalo of a show, a feelie agent hinted he might have an opening for me on a local hookup. He, like the audience, was a bit puzzled by my blasting the interior of the box with a ray pistol at the conclusion of the act, but I was able to think up a gag to cover my action. I had to do something, of course, for the strange space shapes were getting bolder. The ray did not, strangely enough, dissolve them. They just scuttled about in their aimless fashion and then melted again into the shifting grey walls.

I WAS A BIT worried that the things might steal my props, so for my last performance I delayed filling the space—the Zoet Space as I now called it—until the last minute; and then I first blasted the space for some minutes with my ray pistol. The stagehands were most puzzled by this seemingly preposterous act.

Ah, that last performance! I can still hear that applause; somewhere, way back, a Zoet must have been a public performer, for the sight of the

hall completely jammed with people, the sound of the applause, all affected my senses as no drink or drug ever had. I went wild, completely wild. I threw out the contents of the space box onto the stage in profusion; I made jokes; I danced with an armful of props, and I sang snatches of song. The applause grew and grew. They loved me. But then the space below was empty, there was nothing more to bring up. I could not stop the cheering drove me on—and when one of the shapes, now larger and clearer than I had ever seen, darted beneath me I hooked it and dragged it up. It was a strangely heavy thing but I strained away and the audience, sensing that I had a new surprise for them, grew respectfully silent. Then I lifted the beast—for it was something alive—out, and dropped it on the front of the stage.

The front ranks of the audience were appalled at the sight of the creature, but the rest of the crowd went mad with excitement and applause. I stepped to the front of the stage and bowed again and again. Finally I held up my hand for silence.

This was my moment. I had decided that just a simple, dignified announcement would do—a mere statement that this illusion was not an illusion but the first public demonstration of the Zoet Space. Ah, my customers

would come running now—for this last performance was on the local feelie network.

THE AUDIENCE, strangely enough, did not quiet down, and some panic showed up in the front rows where people started running for the side exits. Some of them were pointing behind me and screaming. Then I heard the shouting behind me and as I turned I saw several stagehands running at my box which I had neglected to turn off. We Zoets—ever impractical!

Perhaps you are imagining horrid monsters coming out of the box. Well, what came was worse.

It was rather a dreadful sight to see that monster—this time a much larger beast—emerging from the box. In size and shape and form so much like us (though much denser in mass, of course) and yet so alien and menacing. I kept my head admirably, if I do say so myself, and I blasted the creature with my ray pistol set at maximum force. But the ray, which would have reduced any of us Karnians to quivering jelly had no effect on the monster—the Earthmonster as they are now called. When I saw the effect, or lack of effect, of my ray pistol I flung myself over the front of the stage and hurried out a side exit. I left the hall without any panic, though I was

forced to step on and knock down several people less quick than myself.

THE REST of the story is soon told. Personally, it is a success story, though it does have sad aspects. My home planet was quickly overrun by the Earthmonsters. As I had surmised, they were quite unaffected by what our leaders had optimistically called the Ultimate Weapon. I followed the results of the struggle with considerable regret from Zura, the planet next to mine, for I had taken passage the same night the first Earthmonster had appeared. Since I had taken the precaution to sail under an assumed name, there was no unpleasantness when I landed on Zura.

More than that, with the money I had received in advance for my show I was able to persuade a zig-addicted classification clerk to upgrade me to Warehouseman, G-4, and I was able to see the storage executives of my company in less than three months. They were most enthusiastic about my invention. Luckily, the invasion of my home planet had been quickly and mercifully carried out, and reports from there were only fragmentary.

Now I am Storage Executive, C-2, on Zola, the next planet to Zura. I left Zura—wisely as it now turns out—after reports were made of things appearing in our stor-

age vaults. I fully expect, Earthmonsters, and then I
though, that on this planet or shall be able to settle down
some other, the Zoet Space and enjoy a high and well-
will not intersect that of the merited position.
