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Stories
Complete**

**THE ORIGINAL
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FICTION**

STORIES

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NOVELETS

- BEYOND THE SNAKE PLANET** *Bill Wesley* 31
There was no woman for Captain Dave Norwood on this ship, and there'd be no going back to Earth for him, either. But if, say, Colonist Lor Halvorsen met with an accident, and his blonde wife became a widow . . . well . . .
- HEAP BIG MEDICINE** *Robert Silverberg* 75
Behold the brave, virtuous Earthmen! Do they repeat the wickedness of their forebears who corrupted natives with whiskey, to steal their lands? Nope; the natives feed the Earthmen powerful hooch instead!

SHORT STORIES

- THE BARE FACTS** *George H. Smith* 6
It was a serious problem for April Dawn, popular strip-tease artist. What was she going to do in a society where no one—but no one at all—ever wore clothes?
- NIGHT OF THE ROBOTS** *Allen Wilder* 16
Either Rand found the leader of the robots tonight, or he became a robot himself. . .
- TWIST OF THE CENTURY (A Fable of Futurity)**
..... *Donald Franson* 62
- BUILDING NINE** *J. Martin Graetz* 99
Young Miller couldn't believe his eyes; suddenly he was in a part of the University no one he knew had ever seen before—a section where they taught Spells, Necromancy, and Magic!
- ALIEN CORNUCOPIA (A Vignette of Tomorrow)**
..... *Walter Liebscher* 113

DEPARTMENTS

- THE LAST WORD and THE RECKONING** 114
- SOMETHING HAPPENS (editorial)** .. *Robert A. W. Lowndes* 117
- READERS' PREFERENCE COUPON (The Reckoning is
based on your votes!)** 130

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TWIST OF THE CENTURY

by Donald Franson

A Fable of Futurity

SORTING through the junk mail one Friday afternoon, I found a letter from Ivoribean, sandwiched in among the new car deals and loan company offers. It said, *"If you want to make a trip through time to the year two thousand, come to my house Saturday morning at ten o'clock, dressed suitably."*

Now this was straight-out-of-1930 science fiction, and it intrigued me. Dressed suitably? What would be suitable wear in the year 2000? That was the first question that popped into my mind, oddly enough. *Not*, how could it be

possible to make a trip through time? For I was well acquainted with my old science instructor's flair for inventions, some of which had to be suppressed for the good of the human race.

Not that Professor Ivoribean was misanthropic—quite the contrary—he was only extremely objective. One time while dabbling in entomology, he became so interested in the struggle between insect and man that he inadvertently gave the termites in his laboratory a chemical that improved their digestion, forgetting momentarily which side he was on.



"Every year, we'd outlaw another weapon — so the ones left kept getting more primitive..."

However, this was soon remedied—out of the tent erected on the site of his laboratory came a new anti-termite spray, one that made sawdust taste like food and so unappetizing to termites.

So when Ivoribean talked about going to the future, it didn't sound so fantastic as if someone else had said it.

THE NEXT morning, I walked over to the professor's house, wearing a casual outfit of slacks and sport coat, loafer shoes, and no hat or tie, decided on as being the least conspicuous, in case we were going to stroll down the moving-sidewalks of the future metropolis. It was only a guess, of course, as Ivoribean hadn't given any suggestions as to what would be suitable.

Walking up the path, I met an old friend, Mel Ames, who had also been invited. Mel was wearing an old Marine combat uniform, complete with boots, helmet, cartridge belt, and pendant grenades. He had a pack on his back and several pieces of war surplus artillery slung over his shoulders, giv-

ing the impression of having just come in from a patrol on an old TV movie.

"I know your opinion of the future is pessimistic," I said, "but this is ridiculous."

"Civilization as we know it won't exist," replied Mel. "We'll have to rough it. These weapons aren't for war, they'll protect us against wild animals, and wilder men."

PROFESSOR IVORIBEAN met us at the door, and he was wearing a Roman toga and sandals. Apparently he had a different idea of the culture awaiting us at the turn of the century.

As we went in, I noticed against one wall of the living room, opposite the atomic piano, a complex apparatus that looked like a robot brain or thinking machine. In fact, it resembled one of Ivoribean's previous inventions.

When I mentioned this, he said, "Oh, you mean **HYPONDRIAC**, the thinking machine that diagnosed all possible diseases from all possible complaints. This is the original machine, altered for solving scientific problems. I

sold the plans for HYPOCHONDRIAC to the medical world for one dollar. They haven't paid me yet."

"Where's this time machine?" demanded Mel.

"Now, I really haven't got the thing worked out yet," said Ivoribean apologetically. "But I had such confidence in HYPOCHONDRIAC—I guess I ought to call it ZODIAC now, because it deals with the future—that I expected it to have the time machine figured out by this morning, so I invited you over. I have a time-car built, and all that, and as soon as the brain discovers the underlying principle, it would be only a matter of minutes to apply it to gadgets I have here in my laboratory."

MEL FROWNED. "You mean to say you haven't even got a time machine yet?" he complained, lowering his tommy-gun to the floor. "What does *this* silly thing do, anyway?" he asked angrily.

"Watch out," I warned, edging away from the machine.

"Don't worry, it can't hear you," said Professor Ivoribean. "It's nothing but an ordinary

punched-card computer, although much more intricate than most. The main improvement is that I can feed papers directly into it; I don't have to translate them into codes, or punch the cards. So if I want to add to its store of information, I insert a paper, a sheaf of papers, even a whole book, into this 'in' chute. Like so," and he stuffed a copy of *Scion, the Magazine of Abridged Science Fiction* into the chute.

"Why is there no 'out' chute?" asked Mel, forgetting his irritation in the wonder at this marvel.

"It digests them. You noticed I put in a science fiction magazine? That's only because there's a time travel story in it. I'm trying to put all possible ideas on time into the machine, and something must come of it." He jammed in a copy of a famous news magazine. "I'm getting desperate," he said. "You two don't happen to have any literature about time on you? It may need only one additional idea to turn the trick."

I REACHED in my coat pocket and brought out a couple paperback novels, which I had brought along as reading matter, in case we got stranded in time.

Ivoribean put the books into the chute. There was a shredding noise, the sound of gears grinding and cards being shuffled, and then a bell pinged. A new slot opened in the side of the machine, a blueprint flipped out and dropped into a tray, then another; soon blueprints were pouring out rapidly, not stopping until there was a large pile of them.

"Just watch," said Ivoribean, motioning us back. A conveyor picked up the tray of blueprints and transported it to another room, which we could see through the open door was a large and cluttered laboratory. Here an automatic factory sprang into life, and roared for a minute. Then another bell rang. Ivoribean dashed through the door and jumped into the completed time-car. Mel and I followed more unsurely, and climbed in beside him.

THE PROFESSOR started warming up the time machine, which made a noise like a small foreign automobile. "How does it operate? I don't know," he said. "Automation is wonderful, isn't it?"

"Just a minute," said Mel. "I read in a story once, where the scientist and his friends use an invention and then they destroy it, so the world doesn't get the benefit of it. Is this one of these cases? Why not invite the public or newsmen or someone, so we can be believed when we come back, and are not deemed mad, by those whose business it is to deem mad? Aren't most of your inventions given to the public?"

"Oh, no," said Ivoribean emphatically. "Most of the inventions *you* have heard of have been made public. But you haven't been let in on some of the things the public doesn't know about. There are some I wish *I* didn't know about." He shuddered. "Some others, seemingly innocuous, would be harmful to the world at large.

"Time travel is one of these. This is one thing I will *not*

give to mankind. It would be too disruptive. Oh, I know, you and I will have fun with time travel—learn about the different eras and so on, and come back to the present happier, sadder, but at least wiser. That's the use we would make of time travel—education.

"But not the public. They would make a big thing of it. They would run it into the ground."

HE SHOOK his head. "I don't have to tell you how—you've read enough stories. Time travel for everybody? It would be like alcoholism. People who drink to forget their troubles, sober up to find their troubles are still there waiting for them. If time travel became popular, too many people would go to the future in search of utopia, and find the future no more advanced than the present, because those who didn't go weren't interested in progress at all, so they didn't change anything.

"So here we go to 2000—I picked that year as the romantic goal of all the early twentieth century writers. Of course it will be different from all the

stories. I hope it will not be as bad as you seem to think, Mel. Did you bring a Geiger counter?"

Mel opened his pack and showed it. He also had a woodcraft handbook, and seemed annoyed when he noticed that it didn't tell how to live in the woods, but how to make shelves and bookcases.

"Never mind," said Ivorian. "I'm sure that civilization will not have fallen." He put his hand on the lever. "Are you ready?" We were, and he slowly moved the lever forward, watching the dials.

NOW THE laboratory grew dark around us, then light, then dark, flickering faster as the days flew by, and I watched the dial that looked like a revolving desk calendar, the days a blur now, the months turning over rapidly, and the years slowly changing. 1970—the building disappeared, and Mel whispered, "Atomic destruction?" But the next moment, ghosts of cars hurtled at us and through us, and we realized the building had only been removed for a freeway. Now the years rolled

faster. 1980—we watched with tension as the dial came up to 1984—then relief as it passed. 1990— Ivoribean pulled back on the lever to slow us down again, and through the flickering I saw we were on an open plain, with tall buildings in the distance—*intact* buildings, I noted with a thrill.

Ivoribean said, "We'll come back to solidity in an open spot at least—I hope it isn't a parking lot." He brought us to a stop as the dial registered December 31, 1999, and then slid over to January 1, 2000. He shut off the motor and quiet returned.

It was night, of course. We stepped out upon a hard, paved surface, like the runway of an airport. It was silent, except for a few faraway whistles blowing. The whistles stopped. *New Year's Eve*—what accuracy in those dials, I thought. There were moving lights in the sky, many lights, and I wondered if they were aircraft, or spacecraft. What if this were a landing field, and something came down? But it was lucky we *were* in an open space, and hadn't materialized inside of anything, like the vil-

lain in "Time Out for Time".

A TRAP DOOR opened in the pavement, which turned out to be a roof, and the man-who-greets-time-visitors came up. "I am the man-who-greets-time-visitors," he said. "Methinks ye are strangely dressed." he began, then scratched his head through the transparent hood he wore. His clothing was different from any of ours, though it somewhat resembled the Marine uniform without the hardware. It looked like something he could go to a Washington diner in, or crawl through a pipe in, with equal ease.

"Come down into my house," he invited. "Your time-car will be taken to a garage. It's too dangerous to stay out here on the sidewalk. Kids with their jet roller skates— Come in, and make yourselves comfortable. I'll get refreshments—do you like hooch? Or perhaps a horn of mead? I don't know what era you're from."

We came down in and settled ourselves. Mel, with all his armament, looked out of place in this comfortable living

room. Even I felt self-conscious in my ordinary clothes. Professor Ivoribeau, in his toga and sandals, seemed to fit in perfectly.

"Tell me," said Ivoribeau when our host returned with a tray on which were cups of sack, "How did the war end, or did it ever get started? It's wonderful to see that you are at peace, but I admit my friend here is not the only one who feared atomic destruction—I worried about it myself. What happened? Or didn't it happen yet? How about Russia, China, India, Britain? Are they enemies or friends?"

THE MAN said, "Yes they are. As to your other question, we are not at peace. But we are not exactly at war either, as you think of it. We go on as always, business as usual, and don't let such things as wars interfere with our lives too much. We don't encourage them, of course, we try to stop them. But we don't try so hard that the world must come to an end as the result. We are restrained. We have rules to fight by—deplorable, it may seem to you, but a better thing

than complete destruction, since we can't have peace."

"Oh, I'm beginning to see," said Mel, looking almost disappointed. "You have outlawed atomic bombs, hydrogen and cobalt, planet smashers and universe wreckers, gas, and other things more horrible."

"More than that," said the man of 2000. "We have outlawed guns, swords, bows and arrows, any weapons at all. Perhaps by the year 2100 we will have outlawed war completely. But now it is not so bad, and another weapon is outlawed by the United Nations every year; not like in the old days when a new one was invented almost every year. Now we automatically forbid the military use of anything that's been invented since 1980, and in addition get rid of an old weapon, or method of fighting, every October 24th, United Nations Day. It's getting hard now to find something to outlaw. Last year we outlawed the flying wedge. We're probably going to outlaw either fire hoses, or fighting at night, this year. Two thousand may be the last year for potato throwing."

IVORIBEAN looked puzzled. "What did you mean when you said 'yes' to my question of whether those nations were enemies or friends?"

"They are. All the nations you named. As well as many others. I see you need orientation. I gather you're from the year 1960, or thereabouts—those are mid-century haircuts you have. Don't tell me—I don't want to know the exact date, because if I knew I would be affected by the paradox of talking to men who are existing perhaps before I was born, and my mentality would get tangled up and I would need a psychiatrist, and I can't get one reasonable these days—even Jivaro head-shrinkers charge a dollar a head. But I suppose a dollar a head means nothing to you—it's a day's wages, now, for an average working man. No, we didn't have a deflation. Somebody just got the bright idea, not a new one, of calling a hundred dollars a new dollar and letting it go at that.

"Anyway, I know your general era, so I won't slip and mention something to worry you. Suppose you had come

from 1913, and I talked about World War One? Of course there is nothing like that to mention, but I might describe something minor but close to you that might spoil your fun."

THE MAN sighed. "But that's the picture—we've outlawed the worst weapons, but we still have wars. They're not fought by brawn or numbers alone, but require generalship, daring, luck, and so on. Men are killed too, sometimes, but not a fraction as many as would be if we didn't keep outlawing more weapons each year. We're waiting for the day when everyone will grow up just enough to stop fighting about every little thing. In the meantime, the people of all countries are behind this outlawing. Trouble is, they agree on little else—that's why we continue to have wars. Conferences don't seem to get anywhere. Maybe it's because wars are less frightful that they are hard to end.

"I suppose it seems inconsistent to you that some nations are both our enemies and friends. It shouldn't. Didn't you think of Germans, Italians

and Japanese, as relentless enemies at one time, staunch allies at another? Those inconsistencies were in series, not in parallel—you understand the electrical figure of speech. *Now* we have inconsistencies going on at the same time.

“For example, the war in Formosa. Oops—you haven’t had it yet? That was a slip. Don’t tell anyone. Oh, well, I might as well tell you everything, as long as I’m at it. Promise you won’t breathe it to a soul, or a typing robot? Okay.

“**T**HE CHINESE communists had been threatening Formosa for years, and America promised to help defend it. So when the invaders struck, in a tentative way, a sort of war started. At the same time, the U. S. didn’t want to use atomic weapons against the mainland of Asia, and the first step toward outlawing was taken. (No, it wasn’t the first either—it was the failure to use poison gas in World War II.) You see, it isn’t any good when something is outlawed only by the recipient, or by a third party.

It’s when the *possessor* doesn’t use it, that it’s really outlawed.

“Still, we were at war with Red China, which finally came to a declaration of war (we had to first recognize the communist government before we could declare war on it) which stands to this day.”

“Which stands to this day?”. interrupted Mel, clinking his grenades. “Couldn’t this thing be decided in forty years?”

“No, it became a stalemate, especially when more and more weapons were outlawed. They had to be fair, you see. If we outlawed atomic artillery, they had to outlaw their bugle attacks, or human waves. Infiltration was their chief weapon, so it was quickly outlawed. The communists turned out to be semi-communists, and they had a falling-out with Russia, a few years later. A big war started in Outer Mongolia, and the local people were happy to choose sides. Any side, as long as it was a side. Simple, happy people.

“But the main result of this war was the establishment of the zealous Outlaw Department of the United Nations, which seemed to have every-

one's backing, regardless of other differences. So the race began, each nation trying to outdo one another in this piecemeal disarmament, this being the latest propaganda pitch to keep their leaders in power. And they all really did what they promised and agreed to, because wherever the U. N. couldn't watch them, their own people could.

“SO NOW WE were technically allied with Russia, because they were fighting China, and we were fighting that particular government of China, too. But soon fighting broke out in Czechoslovakia, where a semi-communist uprising had been going on against Russia, and Yugoslavia which was already semi-communist joined in. We didn't go for semi-communism, and we couldn't pronounce 'Arms for Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia Committee', so we didn't get into this one. So we were neutral toward Russia in Europe, while remaining their ally in Asia.

“Then other European countries joined in the fighting, and we had treaties or

honor or something that made us go to their aid—not all-out, of course, but with actual military and manpower aid. By this time many weapons had been outlawed and war was not so bad, but we and all the others were still afraid to spread the conflict too far by connecting the various wars.

“So now we were fighting Russia, were neutral toward Russia, and were allied with Russia at the same time.

“THEN THE Arabs and Israel started fighting again, and we found ourselves helping both sides and also the United Nations troops who were trying to break it up. India wanted to promote universal peace, but was too busy fighting Pakistan. Britain was recapturing her former glory, if not her former empire, by getting involved everywhere. France and Germany went at it, just like old times, and the Germans in the French Foreign Legion distinguished themselves at foot-wrestling (by now, wars had become quite mild) with the French-Canadians who were helping Britain help Germany fight France.

"Meanwhile, back at the United Nations Building, outlawing went relentlessly on. The Scottish Highlanders were deprived of their bagpipes at a critical moment, and were only saved in the nick of time by the arrival of the U. S. Cavalry, which was composed of foot-soldiers, horses having long been outlawed for military use.

"Now a lot of these wars have simmered down since, but it's almost impossible to declare peace these days; and so legally, and in some cases actively, we are at war with almost every nation in the world. We haven't yet interfered in the war between Liberia and Libya, although coconuts have been almost exhausted, because of a newly-discovered technicality in the 118th Amendment.

"Let's see— I can quote this one verbatim: *'If belligerent nations are both under our protective treaty, and both ask for aid at the same time, and we are technically at war with all their enemies and friends, and are therefore already at war, legally, for and against them; it is at the discretion of*

the Congress whom to aid, provided, that whenever it becomes self-evident that this aid is contrary to existing aid given to any ally or enemy of the United States or any other government whomsoever, this article is inoperative.' Maybe war will be outlawed after all, by technicalities."

THE man-who-greets-time-visitors rose. "Well, it's been nice knowing you. Give my regards to George the Second, or whoever's your latest king. Oh, that's right, you're from the mid-twentieth century. I keep mixing you up with that Franklin fellow. Your time machine has been greased and serviced, so you can go now. Say, will you take this gold back and invest it in—no, I mustn't ask you to do that. I'm not telling you any secrets, so you must do nothing for me. We must be civilized about this time travel thing. I'll look you up, in some old book, some time."

"But why must we go?" protested Ivoribean. "We've hardly begun to find out about your civilization. Do you have interplanetary travel? What

are your cars and planes and things like?"

"You won't enjoy them when they come if you find out too much about them now. Just say they are much advanced, and be satisfied with that. Would you admire a new model car if you knew exactly what the next forty models were going to be like? You'll look at your satellite rockets and say, what tiresome things they are. In 1999 they got—but I won't tell you." He led the way to the roof.

"WELL, ANYWAY, we appreciate your hospitality," said Ivoribean. "It was interesting to hear about the war situation, and how you are getting along in spite of it. I guess if you can't get rid of a thing right away, you have to learn to live with it for a while. Still, it's nice to know that war has been kept away

from America, after all." We piled into the time-car.

"Who said so? I didn't say that." The man of the future looked off toward the horizon. "Here they come."

Professor Ivoribean started the time machine, warmed it up. A mob of angry men was approaching, along the roof, some of them brandishing slapsticks and seltzer bottles.

The man of the turn of the century rolled up his sleeves. "Well, you'd better go now," he said cheerfully. "Just tell them that you saw 1999. Oh, I forgot. I meant 2000. Happy New Year."

We went back to our own time, Ivoribean destroyed the time machine, blueprints and punched cards (the last was a terrific job), and everybody went home and wrote science fiction. This is the story. Only the facts have been changed, to protect the innocent.

