

# fantastic

SEPT.-OCT. 1953

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 5

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY  
Editorial and Executive Offices  
366 Madison Avenue  
New York 17, New York

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# WILD TALENTS, INC.

By ROBERT SHECKLEY

*One always feels sorry for the misfits of life — the poor bewildered lads and lasses with talents nobody has any use for. Now take that girl over there. She can start a fire at the drop of a hat — by merely staring intently at an inflammable object. But who wants fires started at the drop of a hat?*

*Take it from Robert Sheckley, the young man who wrote this story, things are going to get worse along that line long before they get better. Mankind is sharpening and improving every day. Weird talents are blooming faster than the need for them. So Bob extrapolated — a thing they do in science-fiction — and came up with Sidney Eskin. Gad! Fresh out of a nut-house, Sidney was a mess indeed. He had a talent, though. One that made fair ladies blush crimson, strong men turn white, and everyone head for the exits. Bob tells about it here.*

GLANCING at his watch, Waverley saw that he still had ten minutes before the reporters were due. "Now then," he said in his best interviewing voice, "What can I do for you, sir?"

The man on the other side of the desk looked startled for a moment, as though unaccustomed to being addressed as "sir." Then he grinned, suddenly and startlingly.

"This is the place, isn't it?" he asked. "The place of refuge?"

Waverley looked intently at the

thin, bright-eyed man. "This is Wild Talents, Incorporated," he said. "We're interested in any supernatural powers."

"I knew that," the man said, nodding his head vigorously. "That's why I escaped. I know you'll save me from them." He glanced fearfully over his shoulder.

"We'll see," Waverley said diplomatically, settling back in his chair. His young organization seemed to hold an irresistible

fascination for the lunatic fringe. As soon as he had announced his interest in psi functions and the like, an unending stream of psychotics and quacks had beat a path to his door.

But Waverley didn't bar even the obvious ones. Ridiculously enough, you sometimes found a genuine psi among the riffraff, a diamond in the rubbish. So —

"What do you do, Mr. —"

"Eskin. Sidney Eskin," the man said. "I am a scientist, sir." He drew his ragged jacket together, assuming an absurd dignity. "I observe people, I watch them, and note down what they are doing, all in strict accordance with the best scientific methods and procedure."

"I see," Waverley said. "You say you escaped?"

"From the Blackstone Sanitarium, sir. Frightened by my investigations, secret enemies had me locked up. But I escaped, and have come to you for aid and sanctuary."

Tentatively, Waverley classified the man as paranoid. He wondered if Eskin would become violent if he tried to call Blackstone.

"You say you observe people," Waverley said mildly. "That doesn't sound supernatural —"

"Let me show you," the man said, with a sudden show of panic. He stared intently at Waverley. "Your secretary is in the recep-

tion room, seated at her desk. She is, at the moment, powdering her nose. She is doing it very delicately, applying the strokes with a circular motion. Now she is reaching forward, the powder box in her hand — ah! She has inadvertently spilled it against the typewriter. She says 'Damn!' under her breath. Now she —"

"Hold it," Waverley said. He hurried over and opened the door to the reception room.

Doris Fleet, his secretary, was mopping up spilled powder. Some of it had dusted her black hair a creamy white, giving her the appearance of a kitten that had rolled in flour.

"I'm sorry, Sam," she said.

"On the contrary," Waverley said. "I'm grateful." He didn't bother to explain, but closed the door and hurried back to Eskin.

"You will protect me?" Eskin asked, leaning over the desk. "You won't let them take me back?"

"Can you observe like that all the time?" Waverley asked.

"Of course!"

"Then don't worry about a thing," Waverley said, calmly, but with a pulse of excitement rising within him. Lunatic or not, Eskin wasn't going to waste his talents in any sanitarium. Not if Waverley had anything to do about it.

The intercom on his desk



EMSH-



buzzed. He flipped the switch, and Doris Fleet said, "The reporters are here; Mr. Waverley."

"Hold them a moment," Waverley said, smiling to himself at her "official" tone of voice. He ushered Eskin to a little room adjoining his office. "Stay here," he told him. "Don't make any noise, and don't worry."

He closed the door, locked it, and told Doris to let the reporters in.

There were seven of them, pads out, and Waverley thought he could detect a certain grudging respect in their faces. Wild Talents, Inc., wasn't a back-page filler any more. Not since Billy Walker, Waverley's star psi, had aided the flight of the Venture to Mars with a terrific telekinetic boost. Since then, Wild Talents had been front page news.

Waverley had played it for all it was worth, holding back until he felt the maximum point of interest had been reached.

This was the point. Waverley waited until they were all quiet.

"Wild Talents, Incorporated, gentlemen," he told them, "is an attempt to find the occasional person among the general population who has what we call psi powers."

"What is a psi power?" a lanky reporter asked.

"It's difficult to define," Waverley said, smiling with what he hoped was perfect candor. "Let

me put it to you this way —"

"*Sam!*" He heard Doris Fleet's voice in his head as clearly as though she were standing beside him. Although she might not be the best of secretaries, Doris *was* a telepath. Her ability worked only about twenty percent of the time, but that twenty percent sometimes came in useful.

"Sam, two of the men in your office. They're not reporters."

"What are they?" he thought back.

"I don't know," Doris told him. "But I think they might mean trouble."

"Can you get a line on what sort of trouble?"

"No. They're the ones in the dark suits. They're thinking —" Her thought died out.

Telepathy is lightning fast. The entire exchange had taken perhaps a second. Waverley spotted the two men, sitting a little apart from the rest, and taking no notes. He went on.

"A psi, gentlemen, is a person with some form of mental control or development, the true nature of which we can only guess at. Today, most psi's are to be found in circuses and sideshows. They lead, for the most part, unhappy, neurotic lives. My organization is trying to find the work that their special talents equip them for. Next we hope to discover why and how it works, and what makes

it so erratic. We want —”

He continued, laying it on thick. Public acceptance was a big factor in his work; a factor he had to have on his side. The public, stimulated by atomic power and enormously excited by the recent flights to the Moon and Mars, was prepared to accept the idea of psi, if it were made sufficiently understandable for them.

So he painted the picture in rosy colors, skipping over most of the stumbling blocks. He showed the psi, capable of dealing with his environment on a direct mental level; the psi, not a deviation or freak, but mankind fully realized.

He almost had tears in his eyes by the time he was through.

“To sum up,” he told them, “our hope is that, someday, everyone will be capable of psi powers.”

After a barrage of questions, the conference broke up. The two men in dark suits remained.

“Was there some further information you wanted?” Waverley asked politely. “I have some brochures —”

“Have you got a man named Eskin here?” one of the men asked.

“Why?” Waverley countered.

“Have you?”

“Why?”

“All right, we’ll play it that way,” one of the men sighed. They showed their credentials.

“Eskin was confined in Blackstone Sanitarium. We have reason to believe he came here, and we want him back.”

“What’s wrong with him?” Waverley asked.

“Have you seen him?”

“Gentlemen, we’re getting nowhere. Suppose I had seen him — and mind you, I’m not admitting it. Suppose I had a means of rehabilitating him, making a decent, worthy citizen out of him. Would you still insist on having him back?”

“You can’t rehabilitate Eskin,” one of the men told him. “He’s found a perfectly satisfactory adjustment. Unfortunately, it’s one that the public cannot countenance.”

“What is it?” Waverley asked.

“Have you seen him?”

“No, but if I do, I’ll get in touch with you,” Waverley said pleasantly.

“Mr. Waverley. This attitude —”

“Is he dangerous?” Waverley asked.

“Not especially. But —”

“Has he any supernormal powers?”

“Probably,” one of the men said unhappily. “But his method of using them —”

“Can’t say I’ve ever seen the chap,” Waverley said coolly.

The men glanced at each other. “All right,” one of them said, “if you’ll admit having him we’ll

sign him over to your custody."

"Now you're talking," Waverley said. The release was quickly signed, and Waverley ushered the two men out. As they reached the door, Waverley saw what he thought was a wink pass between them. He must have imagined it, he decided.

"Was I right?" Doris asked him.

"Perfectly," Waverley said. "You've still got powder in your hair."

Doris located a mirror in her cavernous shoulder bag, and started dusting.

"Forget it," Waverley said, leaning over and kissing the tip of her nose. "Marry me tomorrow."

Doris considered for a moment. "Hairdresser tomorrow."

"Day after, then."

"I'm swimming the English Channel that day. Would next week be all right —"

Waverley kissed her. "Next week is not only all right, it's obligatory," he said. "And I'm not fooling."

"All right," Doris said, a little breathlessly. "But is this *really* it, Sam?"

"It is," Waverley said. Their wedding date had been postponed twice already. The first time, the problem of Billy Walker had come up. Walker hadn't wanted to go on the Venture to Mars, and

Waverley had stayed with him day and night, bolstering his courage.

The next delay had been when Waverley found a wealthy backer for Wild Talents, Inc. It was 'round the clock work at first, organizing, contacting companies that might be able to use a psi, finding psis. But this time —

He bent over her again, but Doris said, "How about that man in your office?"

"Oh yes," Waverley said with mild regret. "I think he's genuine. I'd better see what he's doing." He walked through his office to the anteroom.

The psi had found pencil and paper, and was busy scribbling. He looked up when Waverley and Doris walked in, and gave them a wild, triumphant grin.

"Ah, my protector! Sir, I will demonstrate my scientific observations. Here is a complete account of all that transpired between A, you, and B, Miss Fleet." He handed them a stack of papers.

Eskin had written a complete account of Waverley's conversation with Doris, plus a faithful anatomical description of their kisses. He appended the physical data with a careful description of the emotions of both, before, during, and after each kiss.

Doris frowned. She had a love of personal privacy, and being observed by this ragged little man

didn't please her.

"Very interesting," Waverley said, suppressing a smile for Doris' sake. The man needed some guidance, he decided. But that could wait for tomorrow.

After finding Eskin a place to sleep, Waverley and Doris had dinner and discussed their marriage plans. Then they went to Doris' apartment, where they disregarded television until one o'clock in the morning.

Next morning the first applicant was a sprucely dressed man in his middle thirties, who introduced himself as a lightning calculator. Waverley located a book of logarithms and put the man through his paces.

He was very good. Waverley took his name and address and promised to get in touch with him.

He was a little disappointed. Lightning calculators were the least wild of the wild talents. It was difficult to place them in really good jobs unless they had creative mathematical ability to go with their computing skill.

The morning shipment of magazines and newspapers arrived, and Waverley had a few minutes to browse through them. He subscribed to practically everything, in hopes of finding little-known jobs that his psi's might fill.

An elderly man with the purple-veined face of an alcoholic came in next. He was wearing a good

suit, but with ragged, torn cuffs. His new shirt was impossibly filthy. His shoes, for some reason, were shined.

"I can turn water into wine," the man said.

"Go right ahead," Waverley told him. He went to the cooler and handed the man a cup of water.

The man looked at it, mumbled a few words, and, with his free hand, made a pass at the water. He registered astonishment when nothing happened. He looked sternly at the water, muttered his formula again, and again made a pass. Still nothing happened.

"You know how it is," he said to Waverley. "We psi's, our power just goes off and on. I'm usually good about forty percent of the time."

"This is just an off-day?" Waverley asked, with dangerous calm.

"That's right," the man said. "Look, if you could stake me for a few days, I'd get it again. I'm too sober now, but you should see me when I'm really —"

"You read about this in the papers, didn't you?" Waverley asked.

"What? No, certainly not!"

"Get out of here," Waverley said. It was amazing, how many frauds his business attracted. People who thought he was dealing in some sort of pseudo-magic, people who thought he would be

an easy mark for a sad story.

There were entirely too many of them.

The next applicant was a short, stocky girl of eighteen or nineteen, plainly and unattractively dressed in a cheap print dress. She was obviously ill at ease.

Waverley pulled up a chair for her and gave her a cigarette, which she puffed nervously.

"My name's Emma Cranick," she told him, rubbing one perspiring hand against her thigh. "I— are you sure you won't laugh at me?"

"Sure; go on," Waverley said, sorting a batch of papers on his desk. He knew the girl would feel better if he didn't look at her.

"Well, I — this sounds ridiculous, but I can start fires. Just by wanting to. I *can*!" She glared at him defiantly.

A poltergeist, Waverley thought. Stone-throwing and fire-starting. She was the first one he had seen, although he had long been aware of the phenomenon. It seemed to center mostly in adolescent girls, for some unknown reason.

"Would you care to show me, Emma?" Waverley asked softly. The girl obliged by burning a hole in Waverley's new rug. He poured a few cups of water over it, then had her burn a curtain as a check.

"That's fine," he told the girl, and watched her face brighten. She had been thrown off her Un-

cle's farm. She was "queer" if she started fires that way, and her Uncle had no place for anyone who was "queer."

She was rooming at the YWCA, and Waverley promised to get in touch with her.

"Don't forget," he said as she started out. "Yours is a valuable talent — a very valuable one. Don't be frightened of it."

This time her smile almost made her pretty.

A poltergeist, he thought, after she had gone. Now what in hell could he do with a poltergeist girl? Starting fires . . . A stoker, perhaps? No, that didn't seem reasonable.

The trouble was, the wild talents were rarely reasonable. He had fibbed a bit to the reporters about that, but psi's just weren't tailor-made for the present world.

He started leafing through a magazine, wondering who could use a poltergeist.

"Sam!" Doris Fleet was standing in the door, her hands on her hips. "Look at this."

He walked over. Eskin had arrived, and was standing beside the reception desk, a foolish smile on his face. Doris handed Waverley a sheaf of papers.

Waverley read through them. They contained a complete account of everything he and Doris had done, from the moment he had walked into her apartment until he had left.

But complete wasn't the word. The psi had explored their every move and action. And, as if that wasn't bad enough, Waverley saw now why Eskin had been locked up.

The man was a voyeur, a peeping tom. A supernormal peeping tom, who could watch people from miles away.

Like most couples on the verge of marriage, Waverley and Doris did considerable smooching, and didn't consider themselves any the worse for it. But it was something else again to see that smooching written down, dissected, analyzed.

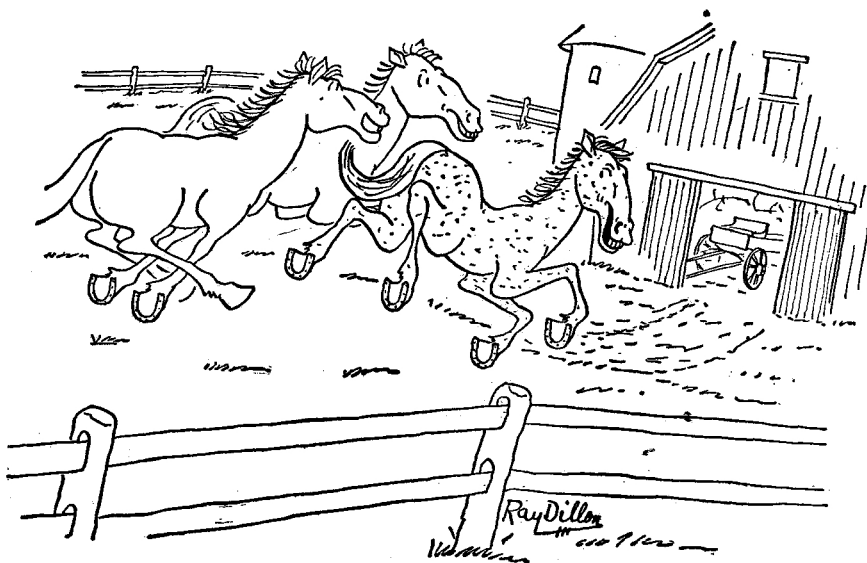
The psi had picked up a complete anatomical vocabulary

somewhere, because he had described every step of their courtship procedure in the correct terms. Diagrams followed, then a physiological analysis. Then the psi had probed deeper, into hormone secretions, cellular structures, nerve and muscle reactions and the like.

It was the most amazing bit of pornography-veiled-as-science that Waverley had ever seen.

"Come in here," Waverley said. He brought Eskin into his office. Doris followed, her face a study in embarrassment.

"Now then. Just what do you mean by this?" Waverley asked. "Didn't I save you from the asylum?"



"Last one in is . . ."

"Yes sir," Eskin said. "And believe me, I'm very grateful."

"Then I want your promise that there'll be no more of this."

"Oh, no!" the man said, horrified. "I can't stop. I have my research to consider."

In the next half hour Waverley discovered a lot of things. Eskin could observe anyone he came in contact with, no matter where they went. However, all he was interested in was their sex life. He completely rationalized this voyeurism by his certainty that he was serving science.

Waverley sent him to the ante-room, locked the door and turned to Doris.

"I'm terribly sorry about this," he said, "but I'm sure we can resubliminate him. It shouldn't be too difficult."

"Oh, it shouldn't?" Doris asked.

"No," Waverley said, with a confidence he didn't feel. "I'll figure it out."

"Fine," Doris said. She put the psi's papers in an ashtray, found a match and burned them. "Until we do, I think we had better postpone the wedding."

"But why?"

"Oh, Sam," Doris said, "how can I marry you and know that slimy little *thing* is watching every move we make? And writing it all down?"

"Now calm down," Waverley said uncomfortably. "You're perfectly right. I'll go to work on

him. Perhaps you'd better take the rest of the day off."

"I'm going to," Doris said, and started for the door.

"Supper this evening?" Waverley asked her.

"No," she said firmly. "I'm sorry, Sam, but one thing'll lead to another, and not while that peeping tom is loose." She slammed the door shut.

Waverley unlocked the ante-room door.

"Come in here, Sidney," he said. "You and I are going to have a fine long talk."

Waverley tried to explain, slowly and patiently, that what Eskin did wasn't truly scientific. He tried to show that it was a sexual deviation or overintensification, rationalized as a scientific motive.

"But Mr. Waverley," Eskin said, "if I was just peeking at people, that would be one thing. But I write it all down, I use the correct terms; I classify and define. I hope to write a definitive work on the sexual habits of every human being in the world."

Waverley explained that people have a right to personal privacy. Eskin replied that science came above petty squeamishness. Waverley tried to batter at his fortifications for the rest of the day. But, paranoid-like, Eskin had an answer for everything, an answer which fit completely into his view of himself and the world.

"The trouble is," he told Waverley, "people aren't scientific. Not even scientists. Would you believe it, in the Sanitarium the doctors kept me locked in solitary most of the time. Just because I observed and wrote down their sexual habits at home? Of course, being in solitary couldn't stop me."

Waverley wondered how Eskin had lived as long as he had. It would have been little wonder if an irate doctor slipped him an overdose of something. It probably required strong self-discipline not to.

"I didn't think that *you* were against me," the psi said sorrowfully. "I didn't realize that you were so old-fashioned."

"I'm not against you," Waverley said, trying to think of some way of dealing with the man. Then, in a sudden happy burst of inspiration, he had it.

"Sidney," he said, "I think I know of a job for you. A nice job, one you'll like."

"Really?" the voyeur said, his face lighting up.

"I think so," Waverley said. He checked the idea in a recent magazine, located a telephone number and dialed.

"Hello? Is this the Bellen Foundation?" He introduced himself, making sure they knew who he was. "I hear that you gentlemen are engaged in a new survey on the sexual habits of males

of Eastern Patagonian descent. Would you be interested in an interviewer who can *really* get the facts?"

After a few more minutes of conversation, Waverley hung up and wrote out the address. "Go right over, Sid," he said. "I think we have found your niche in life."

"Thank you very much," the psychotic said, and hurried out.

The next morning Waverley's first appointment was with Bill Symes, one of Waverley's brightest hopes. Symes had a fine psi talent placed in a clear, intelligent mind.

This morning he looked confused and unhappy.

"I wanted to speak to you first, Sam," Symes said. "I'm leaving my job."

"Why?" Waverley wanted to know. He had thought that Symes was as well placed and happy as a psi could be.

"Well — I just don't fit in."

Symes was able to "feel" stresses and strains in metal. Like most psi's, he didn't know how he did it. Nevertheless, Symes was able to "sense" microshrinkage and porosity faster and more accurately than an X-ray machine, and with none of the problems of interpretation that an X-ray inspection leaves.

Symes talent was on an all-or-nothing basis; either he could do it, or he couldn't. Therefore he didn't make mistakes. Even



though his talent completely shut off forty percent of the time, he was still a valuable asset in the aircraft engine industry, where every part must be X-rayed for possible flaws.

"What do you mean, you don't fit in?" Waverley asked. "Don't you think you're worth the money you're getting?"

"It's not that," Symes said. "It's the guys I work with. They think I'm a freak."

"You knew that when you started," Waverley reminded him.

Symes shrugged his shoulders. "All right, Sam. Let me put it this way." He lighted a cigarette. "What in hell am I? What are any of us psi's? We can do something, but we don't know how we do it. We have no control over it, no insight into it. Either it's there, or it isn't. We're not supermen, but we're also not normal human beings. We're — I don't know what we are."

"Bill," Waverley said softly, "it's not the other men worrying you. It's you. *You* are starting to think you're a freak."

"Neither fish nor fowl," Symes quoted, "nor good red meat. I'm going to take up dirt farming, Sam."

Waverley shook his head. Psi's were easily discouraged from trying to get their talents out of the parlor-trick stage. The commercial world was built — theoretic-

cally — along lines of one hundred percent function. A machine that didn't work all the time was considered useless. A carry-over of that attitude was present in the psi's, who considered their talents a mechanical extension of themselves, instead of an integral part. They felt inferior if they couldn't produce with machine-like regularity.

Waverley didn't know what to do. Psi's would have to find themselves, true. But not by retreating to the farms.

"Look, Sam," Symes said. "I know how much psi means to you. But I've got a right to some normality also. I'm sorry."

"All right, Bill," Waverley said, realizing that any more arguments would just antagonize Symes. Besides, he knew that psi's were hams, also. They liked to do their tricks. Perhaps a dose of dirt-farming would send Bill back to his real work.

"Keep in touch with me, will you?"

"Sure. So long, Sam."

Waverley frowned, chewed his lip for a few moments, then went in to see Doris.

"Marriage date back on?" he asked her.

"How about Eskin?"

He told her about Eskin's new job, and the date was set for the following week. That evening they had supper together in a cozy little restaurant. Later they

returned to Doris' apartment, to resume their practice of ignoring television.

The next morning, while leafing through his magazines, Waverley had a sudden idea. He called Emma Cranick at once and told her to come over.

"How do you feel about traveling?" he asked the girl. "Do you enjoy seeing new places?"

"Oh, I do," Emma said. "This is the first time I've been off my Uncle's farm."

"Do you mind hardships? Bitter cold?"

"I'm never cold," she told him. "I can warm myself, just like I can start fires."

"Fine," Waverley said. "It's just possible . . ."

He got on the telephone. In fifteen minutes he had made an appointment for the poltergeist girl.

"Emma," he said, "have you ever heard of the Harkins expedition?"

"No," she said. "Why?"

"Well, they're going to the Antarctic. One of the problems of an expedition of that sort is heat for emergencies. Do you understand?"

The girl broke into a smile. "I think I do."

"You'll have to go down and convince them," Waverley said. "No, wait! I'll go down with you. You should be worth your weight in gold to an expedition like that."

It wasn't too difficult. Several women scientists were going on the expedition, and, after seven or eight demonstrations, they agreed that Emma would be an asset. Strong and healthy, she could easily pull her own weight. Self-warmed, she would be able to function in any weather. And her fire-making abilities . . .

Waverley returned to his office at a leisurely pace, a self-satisfied smile on his lips. Girls like Emma would be useful on Mars, someday when a colony was established there. Heat would be difficult to conserve in Mars' thin air. She was a logical choice for a colonist.

Things like that reaffirmed his faith in the future of psi. There was a place for *all* psi talents. It was just a question of finding the right job, or creating one.

Back in the office, a surprise was waiting for him. Eskin, the voyeur, was back. And Doris Fleet had a wrathful look in her eyes.

"What's wrong, Sid?" Waverley asked. "Back to pay us a visit?"

"Back for good," Eskin said unhappily. "They fired me, Mr. Waverley."

"Why?"

"They're not real scientists," Eskin said sadly. "I showed them my results on their test cases, and they were shocked. Can you

imagine it, Mr. Waverley? Scientists — shocked!"

Waverley suppressed a grin. He, had always had a feeling that surveys of that sort uncovered about a sixteenth of the truth.

"Besides, they couldn't keep their scientific detachment. I ran a series of studies on the scientists' home lives for a control factor. And they threw me out!"

"That's a pity," Waverley said, avoiding Doris Fleet's look.

"I tried to point out that there was nothing wrong in it," Eskin said. "I showed them the series I've been running on you and Miss Fleet —"

"What?" Doris yelled, standing up so suddenly she knocked over her chair.

"Certainly. I keep my reports on all subjects," the psi said. "One must run follow-up tests —"

"That does it," Doris said. "I never heard such a — Sam! Throw him out!"

"What good will that do?" Waverley asked. "He'll just go on observing us."

Doris stood for a moment, her lips pressed into a thin line. "I won't stand for it!" she said suddenly. "I just won't!" She picked up her handbag and started toward the door.

"Where are you going?" Waverley asked.

"To enter a nunnery!" Doris shouted, and disappeared through the door.

"She wasn't the girl for you anyhow," the psi said. "Extremely prudish. I've been observing your sexual needs pretty closely, and you —"

"Shut up," Waverley said. "Let me think." No answer sprang into his mind, full-blown. No matter what job he found for Eskin, the man would still go on with his observations. And Doris wouldn't marry him.

"Go into the other room," Waverley said. "I need time to think."

"Shall I leave my report here?" the psi said, showing him a stack of papers two inches thick.

"Yeah, just drop it on the desk." The psi went into the anteroom, and Waverley sat down to think.

Over the next few days, Waverley gave every available minute to the voyeur's problem. Doris didn't come back to work the next morning, or the morning after that. Waverley called her apartment, but no one answered.

The poltergeist girl left with the Antarctic expedition, and was given a big fanfare by the press.

Two telekinetic psi's were found in East Africa and sent to Wild Talents.

Waverley thought and thought.

A man dropped into the office with a trained dog act, and was very indignant to hear that Wild Talents was not a theatrical

agency. He left in a huff.

Waverley went on thinking.

Howard Aircraft called him. Since Bill Symes had left, Inspection had become the plant's worst bottleneck. Production had been geared to the psi's methods. When he was going good, Symes could glance at a piece of metal and jot down his analysis. The part didn't even have to be moved.

Under the older method of X-ray inspection, the parts had to be shipped to Inspection, lined up, put under the machine, and the plates developed. Then a radiologist had to read the film, and a supervisor had to pass on it.

They wanted Symes back.

The psi returned. He had his fill of farming in a surprisingly short time. Besides, he knew now that he was needed. And that made all the difference.

Waverley sat at his desk, reading over the voyeur's reports, trying to find some clue he might have missed.

The man certainly had an amazing talent. He analyzed right down to hormones and microscopic lesions. Now how in hell could he do that, Waverley asked himself. Microscopic vision? Why not?

Waverley considered sending Eskin back to Blackstone. After all, the man was doing more harm than good. Under psychiatric care, he might lose his compulsion

— and his talent, perhaps.

But *was* Eskin insane? Or was he a genius, with an ability far beyond his age?

With a nervous shudder, Waverley imagined a line in some future history book: — "*Through his stupidity and rigidity in dealing with the genius Eskin, psi research was held up for* —" Oh, no! He couldn't chance that sort of thing. Let's see now, there had to be a way.

A man who could — of course!

"Come in here, Eskin," Waverley said to the potential genius.

"Yes sir," the psi said, and sat down in front of Waverley's desk.

"Sid," Waverley said, "how would you like to do a sexual report that would really aid science? One that would open a field never before explored?"

"What do you mean?" the psi asked dubiously.

"Look, Sid. Straight sexual surveys are old stuff. Everybody does them. Maybe not as well as you, but they still do them. Now would you like it if I could introduce you to an almost unexplored field of science? A field that would really test your abilities to the utmost?"

"I'd like that," the psi said. "But it would have to do with sex."

"Of course," Waverley said. "But you don't care what aspect of sex, do you?"

"I don't know," Eskin said.

"If you could do this — and I don't know that you can — your name would go down in history. You'd be able to publish your papers in the best scientific journals. No one would bother you, and you could get all the help you want."

"It sounds wonderful! What is it?"

Waverley told him, and watched Eskin closely. The psi considered. Then he said, "I think I could do that, Mr. Waverley. It wouldn't be easy, but if you really think that science —"

"I know so," Waverley said, in a tone of profoundest conviction. "You'll need some texts, to get some background on the field. I'll help you select them."

"I'll start right now!" the psi said, and closed his eyes for greater concentration.

"Wait a minute," Waverley said. "Are you able to observe Miss Fleet now?"

"I can if I want to," the psi said. "But I think this is more important."

"It is," Waverley told him. "I was just curious if you could tell me where she is."

The psi thought for a moment. "She isn't doing anything sexual," he said. "She's in a room, but I don't know where the room is. Now let me concentrate."

"Sure. Go ahead."

Eskin closed his eyes again.

"Yes, I can see them! Give me pencil and paper!"

Waverley left him as Eskin began his preliminary investigations.

Now where had that girl gone? Waverley telephoned her apartment again, to see if she had come back. But there was no answer. One by one, he called all her friends. They hadn't seen her.

Where? Where in the world?

Waverley closed his eyes and thought: — *Doris. Can you hear me, Doris?*

There was no reply. He concentrated harder. He was no telepath, but Doris was. If she was thinking of him . . .

*Doris!*

*Sam!*

No message was necessary, because he knew she was coming back.

"Where did you go?" he asked, holding her tightly.

"To a hotel," she said. "I just waited there and tried to read your mind."

"Could you?"

"No," she said. "Not until the last, when you were trying, too."

"Just as well," Waverley said. "I'd never have any secrets from you. If you ever try anything like that again — I'll send the goblins out looking for you."

"I wouldn't want that," she said, looking at him seriously.

"I guess I'd better not leave again. But Sam — how about —"

"Come on in and look."

"All right."

In the other room, Eskin was writing busily on a piece of paper. He hesitated, then started scribbling again. Then he drew a tentative diagram, looked at it and crossed it out, and started another.

"What is he doing?" Doris asked. "What's that supposed to be a picture of?"

"I don't know," Waverley said. "I haven't studied their names. It's some sort of germ."

"Sam, what's happened?"

"Resublimation," Waverley said. "I explained to him that there were other forms of sex he could observe, that would benefit mankind and science far more, and win him endless prestige. So he's looking for the sex-cycle of bacteria."

"Without a microscope?"

"That's right. With his drive, he'll devour everything ever written about bacterial life. He'll find something valuable, too."

"Resublimation," Doris mused.

"But *do* germs have a sex life?"

"I don't know," Waverley said.

"But Eskin will find out. And there's no reason why he can't do some perfectly good research in the bargain. After all, the line between many scientists and peeping toms is pretty fine. Sex was

really secondary to Eskin after he had sublimated it into scientific observation. This is just one more step in the same way." He cleared his throat carefully.

"Now would you care to discuss dates and places?"

"Yes — if you're sure it's permanent."

"Look at him." The psi was scribbling furiously, oblivious to the outside world. On his face was an exalted, dedicated look.

"I guess so." Doris smiled and moved closer to Waverley. Then she looked at the closed door. "There's someone in the waiting room, Sam."

Waverley kept back a curse. Telepathy could be damnably inconvenient at times. But business was business. He accompanied Doris to the door.

A young girl was sitting on a chair. She was thin, delicate, frightened-looking. Waverley could tell, by the redness of her eyes, that she had been crying recently.

"Mr. Waverley? You're the Wild Talents man?"

Waverley nodded.

"You have to help me. I'm a clairvoyant, Mr. Waverley. A real one. And you have to help me get rid of it. You must!"

"We'll see," Waverley said, a pulse of excitement beating in his throat. A clairvoyant!

"Suppose you come in here and tell me all about it."