

WORLDS OF

SEPTEMBER 1962 • 35c



SCIENCE FICTION

THE WINNING OF THE MOON BY KRIS NEVILLE
CULTURAL EXCHANGE BY KEITH LAUMER
GORDON DICKSON • VANCE AANDAHL

THE SNOWBANK ORBIT

DRAMATIC ADVENTURE AT THE
ENDS OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM



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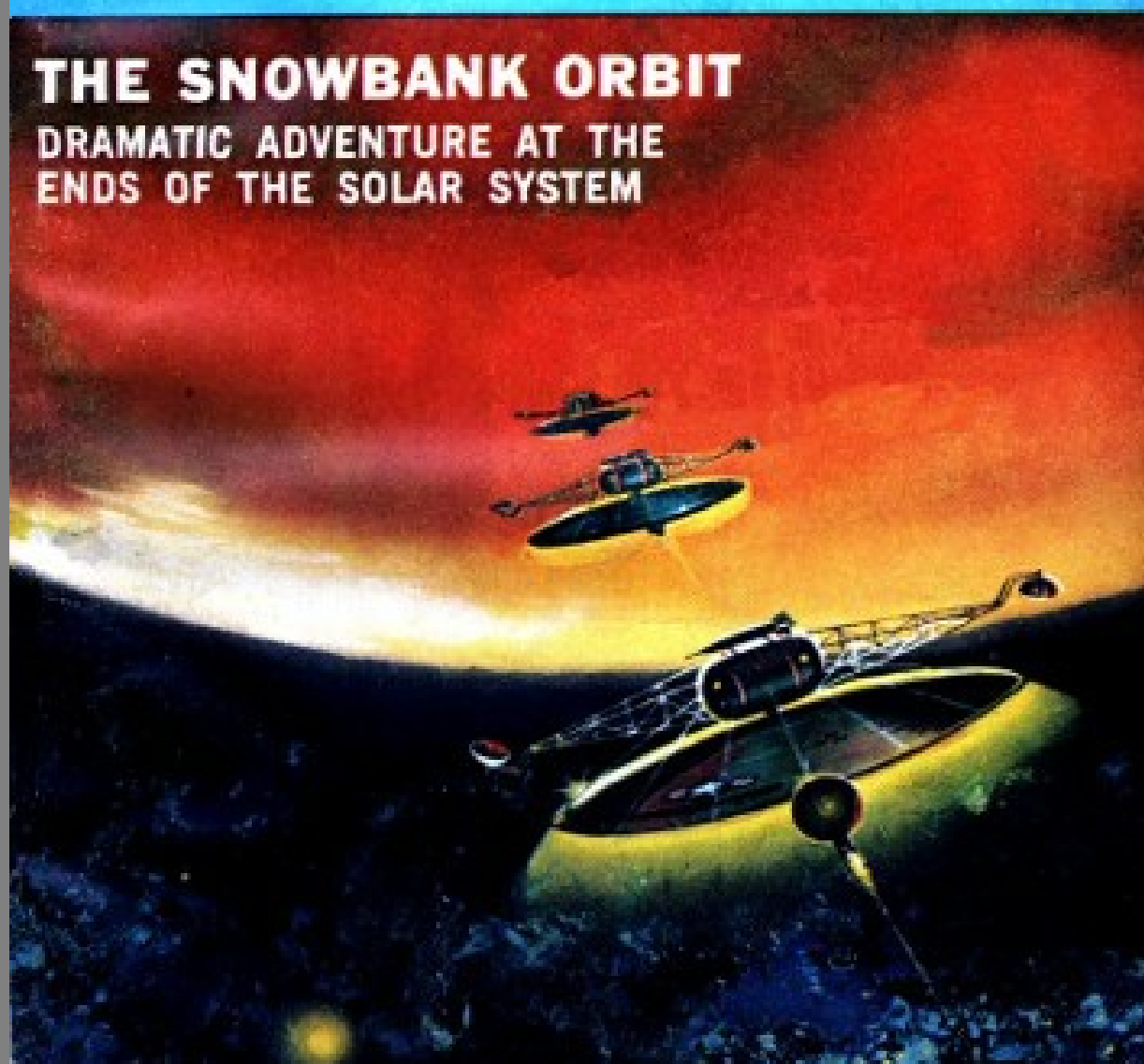


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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TRANSIENT ***

TRANSIENT

BY WILLIAM HARRIS

**The computer's answers were
remarkable—especially when
nobody had asked a question!**

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"Moon in 14° Pisces," said the little perforated card. Henderson stepped back from the computer and scratched his hairy head. Nonsense again. He threw the card in the wastebasket and repeated his directions on another:

"One hundred fifty cancer susceptible mice were injected in the pectoral region with 1/cc of aromatic compound A. One hundred fifty identical control mice were injected with isotonic saline, B. Eight in group A developed sarcomas at the point of injection, Group B developed none. Test the null hypothesis at 5% level of statistical significance."

The computer accepted Henderson's second offering, chewed it into acceptable code, swallowed it, and burped. Henderson watched suspiciously as red and green blinkers went on and off and a contented humming noise came from the machine's bowels. After a while the card emerged from another opening—which orifice had been thoughtfully placed at the appropriate end of the machine, anatomically speaking; thus establishing rapport between Henderson, a biologist, and nature's final product of evolution, the machine.

Henderson looked at the card: "Today you should seek solace with close friends. Give some thought to personal finances. Evening: get out and see people. A stranger will bring news."

Henderson crumpled the card and tossed it in the wastebasket. He sat down, and with a little arithmetic and some formulas tested the null hypothesis all by himself. He found that his mouse experiment carried no significance whatever. Then he made a notation that someone would have to come out in the morning for his sick machine.

In the morning when the machine's doctor came to inspect it, and percuss it, and auscult it, and give it a barium enema, it behaved very well. The "doctor" left, assuring Henderson the machine merely had the hiccups. That night Henderson asked it a question about confidence limits for a universe mean,

from a mean of a sample of n observations and got back, "Uranus on Antares but conjoining Jupiter and trining the Ascendent. Yours is a strongly literary nature."

Henderson decided to turn the machine off for a few days. It emitted an almost human sigh as it ran down and came to a halt.

He had no immediate use for it as he would be injecting mice with carcinogens in liver, spleen, marrow and kidneys to find out if they were specific. In three or four days whatever virus was affecting the machine's cerebral cortex should have run its course and the methodical Henderson could run his methodical observations into the machine, which would excrete a good methodical answer to be duly filed in the medical school library, where it would be invisible to anyone looking for it, such as freshmen medical students, and always in the way for anybody else.

Henderson surveyed his laboratory with infinite pleasure, knowing that it contained within its confines all that could be known about the universe, about men and about mice. Event Y followed event X in a purely causal manner. The successful investigator needed only to attach himself to the cycle and ride along, afterwards consulting the computer to find out if what he'd observed had any significance.

In the morning when Henderson entered the laboratory he found that someone had left the computer on over-night.

It was running full blast, which is to say the lights were blinking and the little cards of omniscience were popping out of the machine like toast and falling into the wastebasket, which is just where Henderson left them. Meanwhile, Dr. Henderson's close associate, Colonel Smith in the nearby radiation laboratory, came in to visit him and asked permission to use the computer.

And so in another week it was rumored about that the machine in Henderson's laboratory was using a foreign dialect and answering questions about standard deviation with strange symbols which looked like crescent moons and archaic squiggles, with a little geometry on the side.

The machine was becoming impudent too. To Colonel Smith's question about the possibility of an "overkill" if such and such size bomb dropped on such and such enemy city the answer came back, "Rubbish. Aldebaran conjoining Saturn, Moon and Mars. Seek guidance from others, Hannibal blushed." The

machine's doctor promptly installed a loudspeaker to help keep track of future aberrations.



That night the janitor walked in. He was a balding Greek gentleman, dedicated to a life with brush and dustpan. The machine was muttering darkly to itself, but when he entered the door it quieted down, contemplating its relays.

The janitor went meticulously about his business, mopping the floor, straightening chairs and secretly rearranging pipette and retorts in their racks, because he was a more meticulous person than even Dr. Henderson. As he turned to leave, the machine in the corner belched twice and then said as an afterthought:

"I am the ghost of Astrologers Sagittarian."

The janitor adjusted his hearing aid, squeezed his mop and carried his pail out the door. As he went back in to pack up his cleaning powder and brushes, the machine said, "What year is this? Limits within standard deviation, click, click, awrk!"

The janitor was a reasonable man. He walked over to the machine's microphone and told it what year it was as well as the month, day and hour. Then he carried his brushes and cleaning compound out of the room and locked the door.

But the janitor's night was a long one. At midnight, when he finished two floors and only had three more to go, he took his coffee break. As he talked with his old friend Samuel, the night watchman, he fell to thinking. That was an unforgivable mistake. After the coffee break, they both went back up to Dr. Henderson's laboratory and listened to the machine talking to itself.

"I feel like a spider," said the machine. "Nonsense. From one cobweb to another. Must settle down and build a grau ... spltvbk ... within 95% confidence limits. Nova in Andromeda was bad enough. Now this. One hundred fifty cancer susceptible mice inherit the Earth."

Suddenly the machine fell silent, sensing it had visitors. The night watchman

reached into the wastebasket and pulled out one of the machine's cards.

"Aldebaran is martial in nature, in the ninth degree of Tropical Gemini," it said.

"I'm a Gemini!" exclaimed the janitor, surprised to see anything familiar come out of the machine. "Birthday is May 25."

"Wonderful!" cried the machine. "First intelligent man I've heard so far. Gemini is justly famed as the owner of a quick mind and ready wit. Your intellectual achievements are a splendid asset to your literary inclinations."

The janitor, embarrassed at the sudden praise, shifted his broom from one hand to the other. The machine continued.

"I need an Ephemeris," said the machine. "Can you find an Ephemeris? I need one desperately!" and the machine's desperate need for an Ephemeris so shook its intestines, liver and gallbladder that its tone of voice came out a minor third above the normal monotonous dirge of the loudspeaker.

"An E-what-eris?" said the janitor.

"An Ephemeris," repeated the machine. "An astronomical almanac. Something that tells me where Mars is. There I was, on my way over from the clouds of Magellan to visit friends in Orion when Whammo! Mars comes into conjunction with Uranus. When something that *big* happens I just sit down and wait. Here I am now in this absurd device. Do you suppose you could look out the window and tell me where Mars is?"

The night watchman said, "It's cloudy outside."

"See!" said the machine, "When Mars goes on the war-path *nothing* comes out right. Now, Gemini, if you will just go down to the library and get me an Ephemeris for this year we can clear this up and I'll be on my way, indebted to you for life, if not longer."

"Who shall I say it's for?" asked the janitor, who did not fully understand that the library was public, never having been in it before, and felt he needed a recommendation or a slip of approval.

"Just say it's for Pyet, the astrologer," said the machine.

"And what are you doing inside Dr. Henderson's machine?" asked the night watchman.

"I wouldn't care to be quoted on this," replied the machine, "but actually any system of communicating inter-related events with a high degree of complexity, such as the brain, or this machine, and with some number of critical processes at the quantum statistical level, can support consciousness."

The janitor and the night watchman looked blankly at each other and the machine, slightly embarrassed, added by way of explanation.

"I like to read a little physics now and then. A harmless superstition containing many pleasant diversions.

"Before this I lived in a star, a puff of expanding gas. Before that in a haunted house ... dreadful. And before that in the lopsided blob of protoplasm that was the last of Pyet, the astrologer.

"As for Dr. Henderson's mousecatcher," chuckled the machine, "any port in a storm. Mars and Uranus you know."

The janitor was somewhat impatient with the machine. It had detained him already and probably would soon be giving him orders.

"I still have three floors to clean," said the janitor. "After that I will see if the library downstairs has a ... what was it?"

"Ephemeris," said the machine. "E-P-H-E M-E-R-I-S. Thank you."



And so the night watchman and the janitor both said good night to the machine. Later, in the very early morning, the janitor stole back into the laboratory with a book and read some strange, strange things out loud and then stole out of the room again and locked the door behind him. Shortly after, Samuel, the night watchman, passed by.

He was surprised at an unearthly glow coming from within and a peculiar grating noise as if someone were stepping on a radio. Then the unearthly glow appeared on the fire escape and Samuel, rushing out to observe, thought

the glow seemed to fly up through a hole in the low clouds where a thousand stars still blazed brightly. In its wake there was a sound like laughing.

A few hours later Dr. Henderson unlocked the door of his laboratory and pushed a cart full of mice in before him.

During the morning he dissected three hundred mice, popping out liver, spleen and kidneys as if he were shelling peas. In the afternoon he made sections of the organs, stained them with hematoxylin and eosin, mounted them on slides and looked at them under his new stereoscopic microscope. Five minutes before five, Dr. Henderson's friend, Colonel Smith, came in and watched as Henderson somewhat dubiously fed the three hundred mice, now in statistical form, into the machine. The machine whirled efficiently and shot out the answer in seconds.

"Statistically significant," said the machine.

Henderson followed his friend Colonel Smith out the door, looking neither right nor left, and locked it behind him. It had been a good day.

Behind, in the laboratory which contained within its confines all that could be known about the universe, about man, and about mice, the machine squatted in silence, the approaching darkness already enfolding it like a shroud.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TRANSIENT ***

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