

A New Story from
a Fifteen-year-old Reader
The Missing Piece

by Richard Sproat

JOE WAS perfect for Them: low intelligence, hypnodial, earned twelve pounds a week, lived in a dingy basement, had one television set and a radio which didn't work except when you thumped it several times; also had one bed and some other sticks of furniture; also had two suits, two shirts, two pairs of socks and two pairs of shoes, apart from an old one that he'd kept for years and couldn't match with anything. Yes, Joe was perfect for Them.

They came from somewhere 'up there'; it was no use trying to explain it to Joe. They 'landed' on his television aerial and moved into his set, causing white dots to appear on the screen. They could soon put that right by distributing themselves more evenly through the set. Half way through 'Thank Your Lucky Stars' the screen went blank and then weird flashes appeared. Joe swore, was hypnotized immediately and began to talk to the television set. This was rather a nuisance for Them, but not serious.

If Joe had been a scientist, or even intelligent, They might have told him the truth: that They were only vibrations which could travel through anything; intelligent vibrations, that is, not the common-or-garden sort, but vibrations that could think, reason, puzzle, compute. But since Joe was Joe, They didn't bother to explain. Instead, They told him that They were beings like himself, who were looking for a world in which to live. Joe told Them that he was drunk and that he wished now that he'd stopped at two whiskies. But so what? Who cared? He was like this most of the time, either at home or roaming the streets, and he didn't give a damn and the world knew what it could do and now there were little green men coming from Mars to save his soul or whatever he had and they could go to . . .

They decided that, out of hypnosis, Joe might come to his senses, so—Bang! Joe threw the whisky bottle at the television set and missed it; telling it not to go away, he staggered into a kitchen of sorts and gulped down aspirins and cold, black coffee. After a while he was more or less sober. Coming back to the strange, mosaic television screen, he asked Them—whoever They were—to give him the whole works: he was a mad drunkard already, They couldn't do much to alter that.

They made Their decision within microseconds, and began superimposing upon Joe's weak earth-knowledge a whole new set of ideas and theories which were Their own thoughts. Joe told Them, as a result, that there was, in many people on earth, a blind belief in an infinite being, a creator, called God; They answered that God was the laws of physics—constants which existed throughout the universe: 'The Earth was created by God' was merely another way of saying 'The Earth was created by the laws of physics'. This was the answer to the Eternal Question facing mankind and it was wasted on Joe. Yet it would stay with him. Perhaps it was better this way. The Eternal Question had been solved; the answer was known; the whole object of living had been achieved. If all the world knew, there would be no point in the world existing a minute longer. But now that Joe knew there was a place for the truth to remain, a guarantee that the Question would be answered on earth, that men would one day reach their goal and attain the eternal life that really did exist. They would become pure energy, without form or substance, free to roam the Universe. There would be no need for planets or air or food or water, for these sustain finite, physical life, no need for reproduction in a world where no one would die. Knowledge would be sought, gathered, stored, so that the physical laws would be fulfilled and God would be reunited after many aeons. Then the Universe would end. And afterwards, perhaps, another would be created: God would break Himself into an infinite number of parts to be fitted together again after many millions of years.

Joe was surprised—surprised and shocked. He swore, just for reassurance that he was really himself, and then again in awe. Yes, Joe, you must marry, so that your seed will continue, so that the truth you know will last until the end of the world and you will cease to be the missing piece in the perfect universe, the perfect Being.

'But how . . . ?'

'Don't worry, Joe,' said the television set. 'We'll help you. We've got all the time in the world. . . .'

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

SOME members may not yet know that the *Larousse Encyclopedia of Astronomy* is available as an optional book in SFBC. There is still some stock to meet late orders, and it is a magnificent book. Orders should be sent to Letchworth, giving membership number or source of supply.

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