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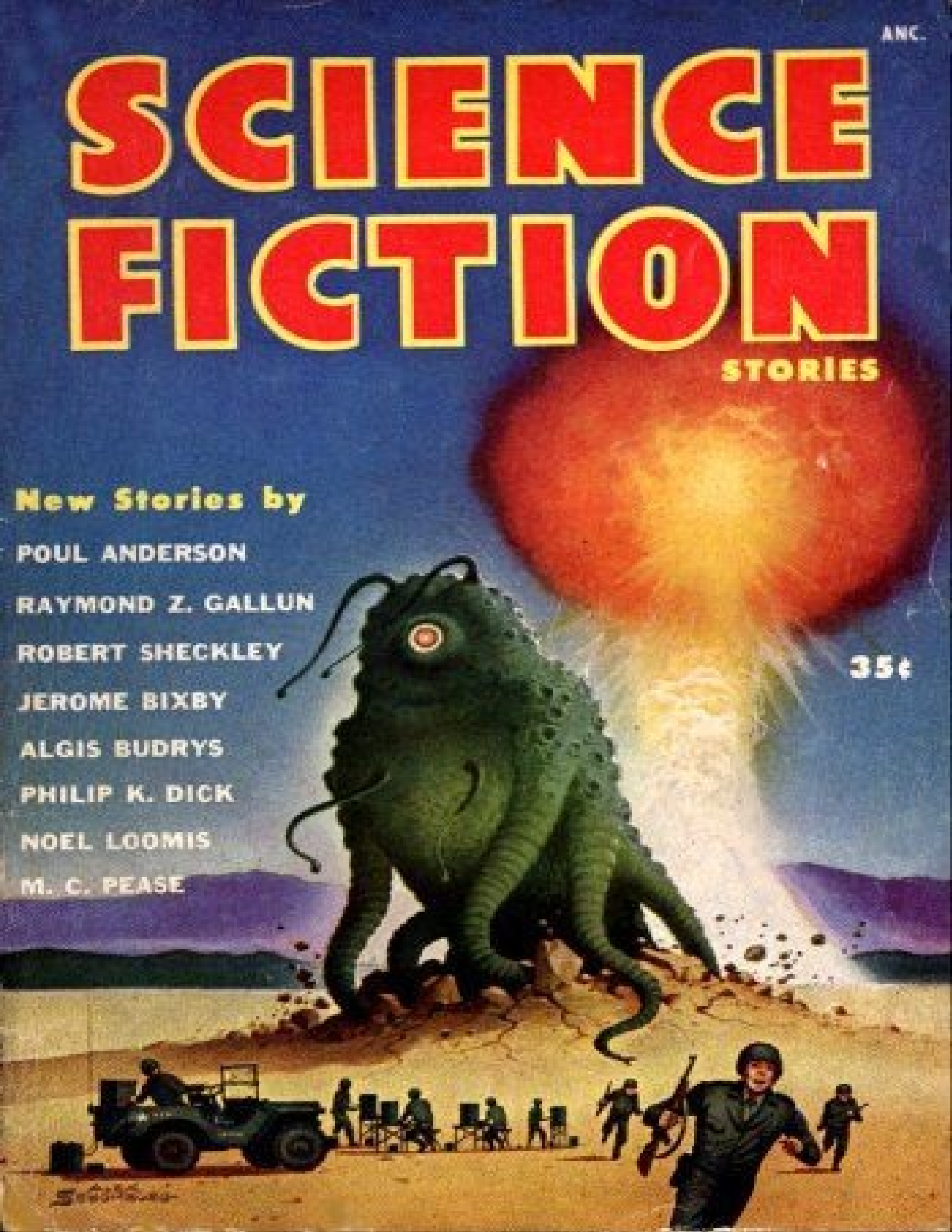

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Nine Men In Time

By NOEL LOOMIS

The idea of sending a man back in time to re-do a job he's botched, so that a deadline can still be met —added to the thought of duplicating a man so there'll be two doing the same work at the same time— adds up to a production-manager's dream. But any dream can suddenly shift into a nightmare....

The receivers, two of them lawyers, had long faces when they sat down across from my desk in the office of the Imperial Printing Company.

"Frankly, Mr. Shane," said the older one, "it is a very grave question in our minds whether we should try to continue to operate the business or whether we should close the plant and liquidate the machinery and equipment the best we can."

I was stunned. "I don't understand," I said helplessly. "We've been doing a nice business—and at a profit—in the year I've been here." It was my first big job, and I wanted to make good. I thought I had made good, but here they were jerking the floor out from under me, and I couldn't make any sense out of it.

"Well," said one, "the business isn't showing the profit we expected."

"What you need is a used-car lot," I said pointedly.

The elder man cleared his throat. "Now look, Mr. Shane, suppose we say three months."

"What do you mean—three months?"

"We'll allow you to go ahead for three months. If the business doesn't show a distinct upturn by then—" He raised his eyebrows.

I swallowed hard. So that was it, then.

They even had the date set for the execution, and I knew they intended to go through with it. Only a revolution would change that.

I wanted that job; it was my chance to make a name for myself. If they should close the plant now, I'd have a black eye. You can't go around asking for a job and saying, "But I was making money for them." They'll wonder what else was wrong.

I thought I knew why they were so willing to close the plant; it was part of an estate, and the way things were, it took a lot of their time each month for not too big a fee. But if the estate should be liquidated—well, figure it out yourself. This business was all mixed up between an administratorship and a receivership, and the attorney's fees for liquidation would be a percentage of a hundred-thousand-dollar shop. It could run to a nice sum. They'd sell out, collect their fee, and forget it. A nice clean deal for them. And no more worry.

That is what I was up against, so perhaps it was inevitable that I should find Dr. Hudson—Lawrence Edward Hudson. That was 1983, really about the beginning of the scientific age in industry, and I dug this idea up out of the back of my head where it had been for some time. Dr. Hudson was the result. I did not label him efficiency-expert, for printers have always been notoriously allergic to that title. I called him production-engineer.

He was a small, thin-faced man with a face that seemed to all flow into a point where his nose should have been, and he started talking things over with me before he got his coat off.

"Printing," he said, "is really *the* backward industry. There has been no basic advance since the invention of the linecasting machine around 1890, and possibly the development of offset printing."

"That," I said, "is why you are here—to bring out something startling."

"Well," he said, "you've heard the old one about the man who had something to do with each hand, and if you'd give him a broom he could sweep out the shop, too?" He leaned forward, his nose jutting at me, and said impressively, "Mr. Shane, we shall make that come literally true; we'll have men working in two places at once before we're through."

"Okay."

"In the meantime, there are certain old-fashioned fundamental principles on

which we shall start. I shall be here at seven-thirty in the morning."

I should have known. Man, being mass, possesses inertia, mentally as well as physically, and therefore offers a certain amount of resistance to being kicked around. That applies to printers as well as to people. But at that time I was too worried. I gave Dr. Hudson full authority.

He was there at seven-thirty the next morning, as he had said. At eight, the printers were standing around the time-clock, waiting for it to click the hour. It clicked, but the man nearest it was smoking a cigarette. He punched his card and then stood there, finishing the cigarette.

Dr. Hudson stepped up. "Gentlemen," he said, "it is now four minutes past eight. Starting-time is eight o'clock." He looked at his watch and compared it with the clock. "Please do your visiting and your smoking on your own time," he said coldly.

Well, it bothered me a little. I'd never handled them that way—and anyway, who cared about five minutes? The men would set just so much type, or do so much work. If they lost five minutes in one place, they generally made it up somewhere else. But this was Dr. Hudson's job.

It was nice that there had been no insolence—only a couple of raised eyebrows. Dr. Hudson's gesture had had its effect. They knew now who was boss.

For the next few days they kept their heads up. Production did not improve much, but I personally had not expected it to do that. I think Dr. Hudson had not expected it, either.

It was about three days after Dr. Hudson arrived, that a big job came in from the Legal Publishing Company—a three-volume, four-thousand-page record for the U. S. circuit court. They could not handle the typesetting, so they farmed that part out to us.

It had to be delivered exactly one week before the deadline that had been set by the receivers for closing the plant. I very nearly turned it down, but Dr. Hudson's eyes glittered when he saw it. "Just what we need," he said.

"That's almost two thousand galleys of type," I reminded him, "besides our

regular stuff." I was very dubious.

But Dr. Hudson was enthusiastic. "We'll make history," he promised.

Well, we did. Union or not, the men would have to learn to do things the modern way. That is what I told the chairman when he protested against having the men go back in time to set a job over. That had been my first idea, executed by Dr. Hudson.

As I said, Dr. Hudson was an experimental physicist. He was, you might say, a super-physicist, because he had specialized in finding ways to do all the things which traditionally were impossible, like traveling in time.

So when the Monotype casterman set a job in Caslon that should have been set in Century, I turned him over to Dr. Hudson. The doctor took him into the laboratory and sent him back two days in time and had him do the job over—but right. The casterman didn't like it, but he didn't know what to do about it.

There was plenty of buzzing that afternoon among the men, especially when the job, re-set in the correct face—or rather, set in the correct face, because this now was the first time it had been set—was put on the dump. I gave the boys five minutes to crowd around and look at the proof and then I broke it up. I was exultant. It didn't occur to me then that a man could be *too* ambitious.

That afternoon the chairman came in, and I was ready for him. "We are not," I pointed out, "violating our union contract."

"But you made the casterman set the job twice, and he doesn't get paid for it."

"We pay the casterman two dollars an hour for seven hours a day. When he's here more than seven hours, he'll get time and a half," I said triumphantly.

The chairman frowned, but I didn't relax; I was on top and I knew it. "He set the job wrong in the first place," I pointed out, "and he got paid for that. Is there any reason why he shouldn't correct his own mistake, if it doesn't take any of his time?"

"It does take time," he insisted.

"No. He's only re-living that four hours and doing the job right instead of wrong; you can't find any fault with that."

And he couldn't. I felt wonderful. I wanted to jump and shout, but I

compromised by taking Dr. Hudson down for a gleeful drink and planning our next tactic.

We also settled a point of strategy. We decided to confuse them with a few minor things before springing our next real item—which would be, to put it mildly, revolutionary.

Things looked pretty good. The only thing that bothered me was that we hadn't started the big job yet.

The next morning I saw a new face at the keyboard of one of our linecasting machines. I had long ago adopted democracy as a good policy, so now I stopped to introduce myself. "I'm J. J. Shane, the manager."

His hands, with incredibly long fingers, had been just flowing over the keyboard —that is the only way to describe it—with the long fingers moving down an inch or so whenever they were above the right key, and doing it all so smoothly it was hard to realize he was actually composing lines. His hands seemed to flow back and forth like the tide, and yet he was setting twenty ems eight-point and keeping the machine hung. Here, I thought right away, was a valuable man. This fellow could be a pace-setter if we would handle him right.

But when I spoke to him and held out my hand, he looked at me for a second without missing a stroke, then his hands dropped away from the keyboard and he started to unfold himself from the chair.

"You don't need to get up," I said hastily. "I don't want to take up any of your time."

But he finished unfolding himself and stood up. "I have plenty of time," he said. He was over seven feet tall, and that meant a foot and a half over me—and very thin. His clothes looked pretty weatherbeaten, as if maybe he'd been caught in a few rainstorms.

"Jones," said his booming voice from somewhere far above me. "High-Pockets Jones, sometimes known as the Dean of Barn-stormers."

I leaned back to look up at him. His face was as weatherbeaten as his clothes. I recognized the reddish tan that comes from facing a hot wind on the top of a

moving boxcar. He was obviously a bum, and probably wouldn't be with us long, but there was something almost of nobility in his eyes—calmness, gentleness, or perhaps just the knowledge of having been in many, many situations and the experience gained from getting out of them, and the self-assurance that he would always be able to get out of any situation.

I reached up to shake hands. "Yes, I've heard of you," I said. "You're sort of a throwback to the days when they needed barnstormers to correct bad working-conditions, aren't you?"

He chose to pass that remark, "I've heard of you, too," he said, that last word sounding like the low string on a bull fiddle.

I laughed quickly but efficiently—shortly, I believe they call it. "Nothing good, I hope."

High-Pockets Jones paused a moment before he answered: "Not bad, until lately."

It took me a moment or two to realize what he had said. I bent back to look at his face. He was quite sober about it.

"Okay," I said hastily. "I don't want to keep you from your work."

I worried a little about High-Pockets. I had heard a lot about him; he was a sort of mystery man in the printing business, going from place to place, wherever printers felt they were having trouble, and trying to straighten things out.

The stories about him indicated that he had some odd ways of doing that, based largely on a sort of legendary influence that he had over machinery. I remembered even the theory that all machinery was negatively charged with some sort of "personal" electricity, and that High-Pockets—having been hit by lightning—had a terrifically high charge of positive electricity of the same sort, which enabled him to do miraculous things on occasion with machinery—especially linecasting machines.

Well, I dismissed that as a bunch of talk, but what I didn't quite like was the fact that High-Pockets traditionally appeared in places where he was needed to straighten out things for the men.

I went into conference with Dr. Hudson, and he agreed with me that we should go right ahead; but we'd keep an eye on High-Pockets Jones, and at the first sign of interference Mr. Jones would find himself in a great deal of trouble. I would even, I decided, stoop to having him thrown in jail on a phony charge, if that should be necessary.

By this time we had started on the Legal Printing Company job, and we went ahead with our next offensive. Mind-reading came first. Dr. Hudson installed a black box at the water-fountain, and he explained to the men what it was for. He had a private wire to his desk, and a transformer that turned the current from the box back into thoughts. It was quite efficient. Some of the thoughts we got the first day were vituperative, some were quite obscene, and some were pretty feeble, but that didn't matter. It got the boys to worrying, and it saved us a bottle of spring water a day.

Then there was the installation of the lucite piping. Of course seeing in curves had been possible for years, but never on this scale. We piped lucite to every place where a man worked, and so we could throw a switch in the inner office and check on every man in the shop without their knowing it. That was a very clever device; it really put the men on the spot.

Once in a while, when I needed to relax, I would flip a switch and throw High-Pockets Jones' machine on the screen. The smooth rhythm of those flowing hands was more soothing than a lullaby, especially because I knew how much type they were getting up.

Then we advanced to the third step in our strategy: having a man in two places at once.

Dr. Hudson finished making his cabinet filled with coils and transformers and condensers and circuits I'd never heard of, and we set it up in the composing-room one night.

It was that night that full realization hit me that we had set only two hundred galleys of type out of the two thousand on the Legal Printing Company job, and that there were only two weeks left to get it out. Somehow or other, I had let it slip by. I thought Dr. Hudson was watching those things; I had been busy trying to make an impression for the receivers.

I was sick when I figured it all out. We had six machines. If we should run those six machines two shifts a day, our capacity was about three hundred and sixty

galleys a week. Into eighteen hundred that goes considerably more than two times. We would need five weeks of full production—and we couldn't possibly give it full production; we had other jobs, too.

The only hope was Dr. Hudson's new machine.

The next day the electricians hooked it up to a twelve-hundred-volt feed-line, and by noon it was ready to go. At twelve-thirty, as soon as the men punched in, I called them together. This was on office time, of course, so there couldn't be any squawk. Dr. Hudson was there to explain. I never had fully realized how much of him was nose before I watched him that day.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this is nothing to be afraid of. This is merely a modern device to assure continuous production in the composing-room by eliminating lost time from sickness and accidents. As you know, if a linotype operator is ill, his machine goes untouched. That day's production is lost. At a cost per man of around ten dollars an hour, that represents a considerable loss."

He opened the cabinet and showed them a comfortable leather seat inside.

"There are two compartments in this cabinet," he said. "All this machine does is to produce, temporarily, an extra man to fill the sick man's place. One of the men present steps in here; I close the door, see that the machine is charged here on the other side with plenty of linotype metal to provide the material of atomic synthesis, press the button, and lo!—the man in the chair is duplicated on the other side of the cabinet."

High-Pockets Jones stepped forward with his deep eyes fixed on Dr. Hudson. "What," High-Pockets asked, "is your theory of this machine?"

Dr. Hudson smiled. "I am glad you asked that, Mr. Jones. Very glad. This process is in no sense a separation or thinning out of the man in the chair. It is, in reality; an unusual extension of the well-known fact that nature tends to follow a pattern. If you want to make a synthetic sapphire, you start with a seed sapphire, and the artificial process builds up on that. Now, this machine, which I call an extender, is merely a far-reaching extension of the synthesis of precious stones."

"By use of a revolutionary type of three-dimensional scanner, which was invented by myself," he said modestly, "I am able to focus on a certain object from a certain distance and, if there is material at hand, synthesize an exact duplicate of the original from the scanner. It doesn't hurt the original in any way.

You merely have two where you had but one."

The men stood around bug-eyed and stared incredulously—all but High-Pockets. "Is the second one alive?" he asked. "I mean, would you say it has a soul?"

"That," said Dr. Hudson crisply, "is out of my field. I suggest you consult your spiritual adviser."

The chairman stepped up, "You have tried this thing, have you?"

"Thoroughly tested," said Dr. Hudson.

I refrained from smiling. The printers were flabbergasted; they didn't know what to do or think. The chairman was trying to get his poor fogged brain together with arguments. The only person besides myself and Dr. Hudson who seemed to be at ease was the barnstormer, High-Pocket Jones.

"In-other words," High-Pockets said, "if we are short an operator, I can walk in that cabinet and you can in a few minutes make another High-Pockets Jones, who will set type until you put him back into the cabinet and turn him back into a hundred and sixty pounds of linotype metal?"

"Precisely." Dr. Hudson smiled and showed his teeth. I could see he was losing his patience.

"Well," said High-Pockets, "I can see about nine hundred legal questions right off the bat. Who is going to draw the duplicate's pay? Is the duplicate entitled to a union card? Is he entitled to overtime? Is he a man or an automaton?"

"Sorry," said Dr. Hudson. "I am not a legal expert."

High-Pockets walked up to the cabinet and looked inside. I'd swear he looked as if he knew what all those wires were there for. His deep eyes took it all in, and then he announced in his booming voice from far above us. "You're waiting for a volunteer," he said. "I'll be first."

I practically fell over. I think even Dr. Hudson was dumbfounded; we had not expected unconditional surrender. I was elated.

High-Pockets Jones was seated in the cabinet. Dr. Hudson threw the switch.

After five minutes' humming, a relay clicked. Dr. Hudson opened the door. High-Pockets Jones, with a deep smile on his weatherbeaten face, unfolded his long legs and stepped out, holding his head down to keep from hitting the top of the door-frame.

"How do you feel?" asked Dr. Hudson.

"Excellent," boomed High-Pockets, straightening up.

The physicist went around to the other side, and though I had been watching these experiments for some time, I give you my word I very nearly choked on my own tongue when I saw High-Pockets Jones walk out of the second compartment.

The second High-Pockets produced a worn bill-fold and extracted a pink union permit.

"I protest this inhuman manipulation of a man's individuality," said the chairman indignantly; "this is outrageous."

I felt better now. I'd been waiting for that. "Let him go to work," I said. "We need an operator today, anyway; Bill Smith has the flu. I will guarantee to pay a man's wages to whomever you say, if this is found to be illegal."

Under the law, there wasn't much they could do. And I had already taken the precaution of retaining the best legal counsel in the city.

I was elated when they went to work. I pumped Dr. Hudson's hand and assured him that we had indeed made spectacular history, and together we could make millions.

The first trouble came an hour later. One of the High-Pocketses—I couldn't tell which one—came into the office. "The foreman sent me up to get some work," he said in his booming voice.

I frowned. What was going on back there? I went back, High-Pockets Jones was working on his own machine. High-Pockets Jones was also working on Bill Smith's machine. I looked up quickly. High-Pockets Jones was also standing beside me.

He smiled. "Catching, isn't it?"

I swallowed, but I knew they were playing tricks. High-Pockets Jones had

walked into the cabinet a second time, and his double had worked the controls and produced a third. Well, this could get confusing, but I stayed calm. "You're a floor-man, too, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Okay. You go back to the Monotype room and get a bunch of slugs and leads and saw them up to fill the cases. They're getting pretty low."

"Yes, sir." He turned and went away.

When I got back to the office I thought I'd just turn on the lucite and see what they might be up to next. I had an uneasy feeling.

Sure enough, a High-Pockets Jones was stepping out of the second compartment of the cabinet. I gulped and quickly checked the others. This was the fourth one.

I went back to raise hell, but High-Pockets—well, one of them—was quite calm about it. "Two men can do it faster than one," he said.

I licked my lips and beat my brains, but I didn't know the answer. I went back to think it over. I had just decided to laugh it off when three High-Pockets Joneses came into the office.

"We need something to do," they said, all in that great booming voice that seemed to come from the ceiling.

"See the foreman. Tell him to give you all the standing type that needs to be distributed."

They left. I breathed a sigh of relief and sent out for a padlock to put on the cabinet.

An hour later, with a nice, shiny new padlock, I went back to the composing-room. But I very nearly fainted when I saw the activity going on back there. The composing-room was filled with High-Pockets Joneses.

Two still were at the linecasting machines, and a whole crew of others were running around the floor.

"Where's the foreman?" I barked.

High-Pockets Jones—one of them—came to attention. "He went home. He was quite discouraged; he told us to throw in all the standing type we could find."

It didn't look good. I had the feeling that High-Pockets was laughing at me—this High-Pockets, anyway.

That reminded me. I gathered up all the High-Pocketses in the composing-room and lined them up. There were nine—exactly nine—every one of them over seven feet tall and thin as a sidestick, every one of them with a gentle, booming voice.

I wanted to tell the original High-Pockets to gather them all up and put them back together, but I didn't know how to find the original.

Well, they couldn't get me down. I fooled them. I told them all to take the rest of the day off—at full pay.

All nine of them washed up together and left together. It was the damnedest thing I ever saw offstage. Nine identical High-Pocketses—all so tall they had to weave around the neon lights instead of ducking under them. It was enough to give a man nightmares, to watch that line of High-Pockets Joneses advancing across an open composing-room.

This kind of thing went on the next day, and the next. Every day there were nine High-Pockets Joneses in the composing-room. Everybody was falling over everybody else, when they weren't standing around laughing up their sleeves.

There was nothing I could do. I had been forced to turn over all of my house to eight of the High-Pocketses, because they had to have a place to stay, and after all, I was responsible for them.

Our production went up a little, but the Legal Printing Company job was hardly touched. There was too much of that sort of festive spirit in the air; everybody was watching the High-Pocketses and waiting to see what would happen next—and hoping for something extravagant. In other words, they refused to take it seriously; to them, it was a circus.

I didn't have the nerve to ask anybody else to split. After all, High-Pockets was in nine places at once; that should have been enough. It was apparent by that time that the extender would never be anything in a printing office but a

psychological monstrosity.

I had to admit I was stymied, and I got so I didn't give a whoop. I was sunk anyway. That is the way it went that week. On Saturday night Dr. Hudson and I got beautifully soused.

On Monday morning I didn't care. The Legal Printing Company called up and said they could give us a few more days; if they could have it by Friday, they could still make the filing date. I said we'd do everything possible, and then I hung up and laughed bitterly and aloud. We couldn't get it out if we had another month. The only thing was, as soon as our plant closed up, they could ask the court for an extension because of unforeseen circumstances, and probably get it. So I laughed aloud.

I saw Dr. Hudson cleaning out his desk, and I nodded. "Sorry, Doc, we got all fouled up. Maybe some other time—"

He nodded. "Progress always encounters opposition," he said. "It just happens that we are the sacrifices in this deal."

"Yeah." I went out and had a drink.

I was pretty dazed that week. It didn't make any difference. I had already tried everything possible, and they had me hog-tied. And those nine High-Pocketses had made me a laughing-stock.

On Friday morning, I looked at the calendar and it suddenly occurred to me that this was the thirty-first and the receivers would be around this afternoon to decide whether or not to close the place.

There wasn't any doubt as to what they would do. I began to clean out my own desk. I felt terrible.

Then one of the High-Pocketses came in with a piece of copy in his hand. He looked at me queerly and then said softly, "You leaving?"

"Yes," I said bitterly, "I'm going. You got me licked; I'm through."

"I was just trying to point out to you the absurdity of some of your new devices,"

he said.

"Okay," I said, "you win. Guys like you make a business of going around the country breaking print-shops and printing-office managers."

High-Pockets' booming voice came from the ceiling. "You are mistaken. I did not try to break you."

"Well, you broke me, anyway." I blurted out the whole thing to him, how the receivers were about to close us up, how the Legal Printing Company job was weeks behind and was supposed to be delivered today. Then I apologized. "It isn't your fault," I told him. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. I just—well, I wanted to make good on this job."

High-Pockets was very thoughtful. "I feel kind of sorry for you," he said.

"Oh, you don't need to. I earned it; I've got it coming. I was just a little too ambitious, that's all. I didn't know a man could be *too* ambitious."

High-Pockets looked at me. His deep eyes were thoughtful. I could almost see the neurons buzzing around in his head.

"If I could get this job out for you on time, would that save the day?"

"Probably." I laughed—or tried to. "But it is now a physical impossibility. There isn't enough time."

High-Pockets said sharply, "Call a truck," and wheeled out of the office.

I called the delivery truck before I realized what I had done. Well, it didn't make any difference. They could start hauling out the machinery.

I finished cleaning out my desk and took a wastebasket full of papers to the back shop.

And there, I give you my word, three High-Pocketses were busy carrying galleys from the type-dump to the proof-press. And as fast as they could carry a galley of type from the dump, another galley would just materialize there. I stood and stared. Galleys of type were coming out of thin air at the rate of about four galleys a minute.

I went over to where High-Pockets—the original High-Pockets, I suppose—was sitting at his machine. "Would you please tell me what is going on?" I asked.

"Well," said High-Pockets, "it isn't so complicated. I just sent the other five back in time to set this job, that's all. They've gone back about twelve weeks; and of course there isn't much time, so I had to make them double up. I've got them split up into shifts, along with a double of the chairman there, to cover the six machines. It's a little hard to explain, whether they are split up in time, or the time-split ones are split up in place, or just what."

"It's insane," I said weakly.

"Well, at any rate, you see you have the equivalent of twelve night shifts running at once, plus twelve graveyard shifts. That's twenty-four times six—you have six machines—times twelve—that's the number of galleys a day for each machine. I think it comes out to seventeen hundred for a day's work."

I grabbed hold of the vise-locking screw to keep my knees from doubling under me. It was incredible—and yet it was true.

High-Pockets also had organized the proofreaders and copyholders, and they were reading in the past also, and sending us proofs in the present. If anybody ever tells you they can't get seventeen hundred galleys of type a day out of six linecasting machines—well, they just don't know High-Pockets Jones.

"Of course," he said apologetically, "they'll want to be paid."

I was practically hysterical by that time. "I'll see that they get overtime for every hour they put in."

High-Pockets looked at me with his deep eyes. "Me, too," he said. I laughed when I thought how there were nine of him working in twelve places at once—or was it twenty-four—or maybe forty-eight. I was too dizzy by that time to figure out anything. I only knew the job was going to be delivered. The truckers were going in a steady stream through the back door.

Maybe the receivers would close up the place; maybe they wouldn't. At least the job was being delivered.

About four-thirty, the galleys suddenly quit coming; the job was finished. Half an hour later it was out of the shop, and I had entered it on the books.

I had hardly laid down the pen when the three receivers came in. They smoked a little and talked and I held my breath while they looked at the books. I couldn't figure out what they were going to do.

One of them whistled when he saw the Legal Printing Company figures. "Well," he said, "business *has* been good."

"Fair," I said modestly.

The door to the shop opened and High-Pockets Jones walked in. I gulped; eight High-Pockets Joneses walked in behind him.

The three receivers stared. Their eyes stuck out until it was ludicrous. But it wasn't funny; I knew something was going to happen now.

By the time the last High-Pockets got in, the first receiver had seen what was going on and was trying to get out, but nine High-Pocketses in one room are a lot. For a minute it looked like a basketball game.

The elder lawyer looked at me suspiciously. "Please explain this."

I was too weak. "See for yourself," I said.

One High-Pockets spoke to me. "Sorry, Mr. Shane. Just came in to say good-bye. Never realized—"

"That's okay," I said. "You've done your part; I can't squawk."

The attorney spoke up. "Mr. Shane," he said, "I think the affairs of the Imperial Printing Company are in perilous circumstances. I do not know what is the meaning of this, but certainly there is something here without precedent." And if you know lawyers, you know that anything without precedent is very unholy.

I told what we had done, but he was interested in only one thing. "Think what a combined suit by these nine-er-twins here would do."

"Nontuplets," suggested one High-Pockets.

"Why"—the lawyer seemed to be overwhelmed by the enormity of the damages he was visualizing—"that could amount to millions."

I was desperate for an idea, but it wasn't any use. They were taking it out of my hands. I saw the righteous light in the eyes of those men, and I knew it was all over.

But High-Pockets—or one of him—spoke up. "Is it your intention," he asked me, "to keep the time-machine and the extender?"

"No," I said. "I rather thought I'd get rid of the whole business; it's much too complicated. Anyway, you boys out there came through with superhuman efforts this afternoon. I don't think I'd ask you to be in two places at once again."

High-Pockets turned to the lawyer. "If the receivers agree to let the plant operate as long as it shows a profit," he said, "we'll all go back together and then you can break up the extender and there won't be any more trouble. If you don't agree to that"—he paused—"we'll stay in nine bodies and sue you every time we get a chance."

The lawyer winced. The receivers went into conference. Finally they said, a little anxiously, "If the Messiers High-Pockets will be good enough to go back together, and if Mr. Shane will destroy the machine, we are agreeable to the plant's continuance as a printing office."

"Hooray!" I said, and nine High-Pocketses yelled hooray.

I was exultant. I shook hands with each one of the High-Pocketses as they filed into the extender. When there was only one left; he shook hands with me.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Nothing at all," said High-Pockets Jones. "Just got a call this morning from a print-shop where they're trying to make the men wear roller-skates so they can move faster. Guess they need me down there. So long, boss."

"So long," I said. I was sorry to see him go. I locked up the shop—but first I cut off all the power and got a pig and smashed up Dr. Hudson's coils and transformers. I wanted to come down in the morning without seeing double.

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