

Prologue to an Analogue

Leigh Richmond



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PROLOGUE TO AN ANALOGUE

By LEIGH RICHMOND

Finnagle's Law shows that many times we don't get the effect we planned on. But ... there's an inverse to that famous law, too....

Illustrated by Schoenherr

T

he IWC program was a newscast by Bill Howard, and the news was particularly vicious that night.

Bill, his big homely face leaning across a desk toward the viewer, talked in horrified tones of the "pest-sub" that had reputedly got stuck in the Suez and spread epidemic across Cairo.

It was easy to assume, Bill told his audience, that the nations most interested in creating a crisis in the world right now had put the sub there to make an excuse to accuse us of the terror. It was undoubtedly really there, and was undoubtedly really of American make, and the epidemic was undoubtedly very real indeed, he said. The United Nations investigating team, due to go into the Canal Zone the next day and make their report to the world, would find that the epidemic was caused by laboratory-developed bacteria, carried in by an American-made sub. It would be at least as bad, if not worse, than reported.

The question before the world, Bill said, was not whether bacteriological warfare had started, but who had started it—and the fact that the sub carried United States markings and was of United States make did not at all answer the question.

Bacteriological warfare had broken out and where it would strike next was

anybody's guess.

"But let there be no mistake," Bill said. "This is war."

It was on that note that the station break came, and the thirteen witches, trademark of the International Witch Corporation, came on.

Harvey Randolph, manufacturer of the Witch line of products, leaned toward the screen intently. He had just transferred his account to Burton, Dester, Duston & Oswald, and they had dreamed up a new-type commercial for the products.

The thirteen witches were long-legged, slender dancing gals, in tall black witch caps and long black capes, crimson-lined, and very little else. Each had long hair that swirled as she danced.

Randolph chewed his lip, watching them thoughtfully.

They came on with what was almost a valkyrie cry—"Witches of the world, unite—to make it clean, clean, clean, Witch clean—NOW!"

"Hm-m-m," thought Randolph. The cry struck rather sourly at the end of that "this is war" sentence from the newscast, he thought, but then that dramatic newscast-ending was rather unusual.

The witches were singing a jingling chorus as they danced. "No task is too big, no task is too small," they sang. "Which Witch do you need? You should have them all—"

Each witch, of course, displayed her particular product from the Witch line—detergent, soap, shampoo, cleanser, cleaning fluid....

"Witch soap or detergent...."

"Witch cleanser upsurgent...."

"Which Witch do you need? You should have them all...."

This was fairly average as commercials go, thought Randolph. The big BDD&O radical innovation would be next.

It was. On the screen behind the witches appeared a map of the Suez Canal, and then a papier-maché model of the nose of a sub, and a dockside shanty, a gray pall hanging over them.

As the witches turned and began dancing towards it, the deep voice of the announcer spoke over the muted jingle. "Witches of the world, unite! If Nasser had enough Witches, he could solve the crisis which has us all in stitches...."

And the witches, in a united dance-step, approached the sub and shanty singing "Make it clean, clean, clean, Witch clean, NOW!" Each sprayed it with a Witch product, and as they sprayed the pall lifted, the sub and shanty showed shining bright, new-painted.

"Clean, clean, clean," chanted the chorus; "Witch, Witch, Witch, clean, clean, clean. Defy dirt, defy disease."

"Keep Witch clean!"



Well, thought Randolph. And then again, Well.

He wasn't quite sure, he told himself. The commercial came darn near being in poor taste, what with the crisis so near, and yet ... it wasn't something to make you forget the product. By Geoffery, no! You'd think of Witch products quite a bit, after watching that one.

He reminded himself to check the viewer reaction that would be available fairly early next day, as he switched off the TV.



It was almost noon next day before Randolph reminded himself of the call he'd planned to make to BDD&O. He got Oswald on the wire almost immediately.

"Randolph, here," he said. "I called you about that new commercial. It seems a little drastic. Are you planning to use it again tonight?"

"Use it? We're taking full credit, in a witchery sort of way!" Oswald laughed. "Never saw anything like your luck, Randolph. I've got the entire staff tied up doing the follow-up for tonight. You needn't worry about libel, either. We've got the whole legal staff turned out, going over every detail."

"It seemed pretty near the line to me," said Randolph, chewing his lip. He found

himself a little puzzled over Oswald's tone, but not too much so. Any public relations man was overenthusiastic by nature, in Randolph's estimation. Maybe it took that to make a good p.r. man. "People might resent our making hay out of sickness, even if you are preaching that cleanliness will prevent it."

"Sickness, you might have a point. I admit I'd argue it, but you might. But wellness, now, it's different. I do know that if the United Nations team reports there's no epidemic, and that the pest-sub is one of the cleanest, healthiest-crewed submarines in the business, it's safe for us to assume it's so, and to imply that Witch Products are used to keep it clean."

"Mr. Oswald," Randolph's voice took on a note of imperious prissiness. "Would you mind explaining just exactly what you are talking about?"

"Haven't you heard the news? There's no bacteriological war! I admit that puts Bill Howard way out on a limb, but there are a lot of very fine people with him. There's no epidemic in Cairo. There's not even a bad cold that the United Nations team could find. And they give that so-called pest-sub the most complete bill of health in the business.

"Now, the deal we plan for tonight...."



At the same moment, a number of very important people were closeted with the President. Their reactions to the United Nations report were quite otherwise than those Oswald was experiencing.

"It's the exact timing, and the detail of execution that scares me, Mr. President," the Undersecretary of State was saying. The Secretary himself was coming in by jet, and would join them immediately on arrival.

"It implies a technology that we can't touch even in our wildest dreams. I've talked to the CIA chief himself, and the reports from our operatives are beyond question. The epidemic was not only real, it was widespread. The pest-sub was as real as this chair I'm sitting on, and its crew near death to the man, and no question about it.

"If they can fight a bacterial war and produce an overnight cure at the same time ... we're at their mercy. There is no bomb ever developed—or that can be

developed—to touch the power of what they've just demonstrated."

The President ran his fingers through his hair. His face looked more drawn than any man had yet seen it. Yet he smiled.

"We're not suing for peace terms yet," he said, and turned to the nation's foremost biologist, sitting quiet in a nearby chair.

"What's your reaction?" he asked.

"We've always known," the answer came despondently, "that bacteriological warfare is far deadlier than any bomb—if there were any protection from its effects for the victor. We had a strain of bacteria once, for which we had an immunization course, and we developed it far enough along the line to realize that, even though you immunized every man, woman and child in this country in advance of releasing it in another part of the world, mutant strains would eventually wipe out this nation as well as those we fought."

"How about mutant strains of the Suez bacteria?" the President asked, then answered himself. "No, they've produced an antidote. An antidote, if our reports are correct, that works overnight." He shook his head slowly.

"The ultimatum should come very soon now," the President said.



"It is the timing. I do not understand the timing." The big man in the Kremlin was allowing himself an appearance of indecision that he did not often indulge before underlings.

Of course, there was but the one underling, and any audience that proved to have a later-embarrassing potential could be silenced with ease. Still, it was unusual, and the lieutenant who served as combination secretary and backstop for oratory quaked as he listened.

"The timing is all wrong, but the fact is a fact. It must be a fact, or every operative we have should be Siberianized.

"We must, of course, act. The action must be immediate. We are zeroed in...."

"No!" Vlada heard himself speak, and his whole body was outraged at the action.

He stood white, trembling. But he had spoken, and try as he would, the word could not be pulled back.

"No? My little dove, and what would you suggest, then, if we are not to defend ourselves from this capitalistic aggression? That we shall sit with our hands folded and allow them to dictate the terms of our surrender? Speak!"

"Send them a pest-sub, and see if they can handle the bacteria we have developed!" Vlada's throat was dry, and his voice was not his own. No power on earth could have made him open his mouth, but he had opened it, and he fully expected the lightning to strike him at that moment.

"Send them ... ah, of course. They can cure their own, and they have taken a so-dramatic method of saying that they can cure their own. But can they cure the products of our laboratories? Now that, we shall see.

"But we shall be as subtle—more subtle, even, than were our capitalistic friends. We shall not send our sub to them. We shall send it to a small island, and we shall see whether they wish to taste the death, the strangulation and crippling and suffering, the destruction of sanity that shall be the lot of those islanders...."



In Peiping the distress was no less acute—but the reaction was somewhat different.

The scientist being grilled had no hope left. He could answer honestly, for there was nothing that could save him from that which was in store.

"The strain was virulent. There is no known antidote—nothing could have saved that port, nor most of Africa and most of India—and there was no way for the world to know from whence came the death-dealing submarine except that it be the mighty America.

"The bombs should have come in retaliation, spreading their death and adding to the impetus of the epidemic, so that enough of the world was wiped out to give the great People of the Dragon room into which to expand. We calculated that a third of our own would be wiped out in the holocaust, which would have relieved us of many problems. The tan peoples of India and the darker peoples of Africa should have sued us to lead them in a unity of the yellow peoples, against

the insanities of the pale peoples of the west.

"There is no antidote ... yet the epidemic is destroyed. I cannot yet believe what is told me. I would go to my ancestors happily if I could go to them with the answer to this riddle."



That night Bill Howard came on the screen his big homely face wreathed in smiles, his tweed suit and shaggy blond hair looking even more informal than usual.

"It's a great day for the people of the world," he said.

"There's undoubtedly tremendous political significance in what happened at Suez, and every statesman and every politician will have statements to make, and conclusions to draw.

"Suez's obvious healthiness has been variously attributed to American technology, garnered from the experts we've sent them over the years; to Russian technology, garnered from their experts loaned to the nation involved; to Mohammed and to the God of the Christians.

"The peoples of the world," he said softly, "are concerned with these things in the abstract, but mostly, we the people are willing to leave this to the theorists, while we rejoice."

"For we the people, who thought we faced that most degrading, that most unanswerable, that most horrible fate of all, bacteriological war, find ourselves at bacteriological peace."

At the break, the thirteen witches danced on, crying their chant, and behind them as a background was the bright, clean sub-and-shanty scene.

"Witches of the world unite, to make it clean, clean, clean, Witch clean—NOW!" they chanted. "Pestilence or peril, disease or disaster, Stay clean, clean, clean, Witch clean!"

"Ah," said the deep voice of the announcer as the jingle muted, "Which witch do you really wish? Witch is the modern method of cleanliness, using the best of modern technology, and the Witch witch is witching through the world...."

Randolph watched the program skeptically. The best lawyers and the best p.r. agents to be had, he reminded himself. Still.... There was a nagging worry that this thing was going too far. It's O.K. to claim the moon, he thought, chewing his lip, but isn't it a little risky to claim peace on earth for the Witch products?

He made a mental note to call BDD&O the next morning. The audience reaction would make itself felt by then, and he could decide....



It was almost noon next day before Randolph reminded himself of the call he'd planned to make to BDD&O. He got Oswald on the wire almost immediately.

"Randolph, here," he said. "I called about that new commercial. It seems a little drastic to claim peace on earth for the Witch products. What are you planning for tonight?"

"More of the same!" Oswald's voice was jubilant. "The switchboard has been swamped, and we're on almost every program on every channel! They're taking us apart, of course. 'Witchcraft raises its head,' and 'Salem is here with a new twist and a singing commercial,' and 'Anybody got a pestilence?'—that sort of thing. But they're crediting Witch products from dawn to dawn. I sure didn't make a mistake when I tied our contract to your sales! We ought to break the bank!"

Randolph chewed the thought in silence. "Oswald," he said, "It's an old habit of the American people to make a joke out of what they can't understand. Sort of Paul Bunyan all over again. But don't overdo it. That Witches of the world unite, deal. Remember the IWW? Wasn't that sort of communistic?"

"Every time anybody talks about getting the world peacefully together, about unity, somebody starts shouting 'commie.' Since when has communism and unity got anything to do with anything? You're an international corporation, aren't you? It's in your title, IWC, isn't it? You don't just sell Witch things in the United States—you've markets in Europe and Africa and India, and all over the place, or I read the sales charts wrong. What's worrying you about using it?"

"The overseas tapes are going like a cannonball express. Our ratings have skyrocketed everywhere," Oswald said in satisfaction. "What do you mean, don't overdo it? You get the world in a hatbasket, and then you want to throw it

away?"

"Incidentally," he added in a calmer tone, "I got one crank call that's got me thinking. The guy got all the way through to me before he'd talk, and that takes some getting, what with the salaries I pay people to keep the cranks off my neck.

"He said that now we had the witches of the world united, why didn't we do some real cleanup work, like slums and insane asylums. Got me thinking, you know. A good cause never did a program any harm."

Randolph chewed his lip a while in silence, and Oswald, knowing his client, waited patiently.

"I like that a lot better than claiming peace on earth for the Witch products," Randolph said at last. "Why don't you pick a slum we can clean up for not too much, and let's see what you can work out. This cleanup theme isn't bad, it's just peace on earth that doesn't really belong to us you know.

"I tell you what. We'll go to fifty thousand dollars or so on a cleanup job, and you use that. Leave the world to the politicians and the eggheads."

After he hung up, Randolph stood by the telephone, still chewing his lip. Could you clean up something like a slum for say fifty thousand dollars? Oswald would double the figure in his own mind, of course, always did. But he'd get the sales out of it. His contract was tied to sales.

Yes, he thought, it was best to call him off the track he was on now. Lawyers or no lawyers, that sort of thing was dangerous.

It took a week, and it took every member of the staff that could be pulled off other programs, as well as the ones assigned to Witch.

The "slum" had been located—three buildings in a short block just up from the Battery, surrounded by new buildings. It was a one-privy-to-a-floor, cold-water only setup, with a family living in every room. It existed on high-value land only because the land and buildings were tied up in an estate and couldn't be sold. But they could be remodeled and thrown into one, and contracts were signed, permissions granted, the paperwork alone filled nearly a complete file cabinet.

It would take double the fifty thousand dollars, of course—maybe more. But Randolph had authorized it, hadn't he? He always named half the figure—or less—than he meant to be used. Anyhow, international ratings and sales would more

than make up the purse, because this thing would hit socko. Worry about the cash was the last thing that was bothering Oswald. He had a bear by the tail, and his contract price was tied to the gross....

The show was ballyhooed the whole week while the work went on.

"Clean, clean, Witch clean—what's the witches next big cleanup? Witches of the world, unite—let's cleanup this old world and make it livable...."

The night the new cleanup job was to show, Randolph tuned in his TV as ignorant of the details as the next viewer. It worried him a little that Oswald insisted on keeping him in the dark on everything except the fact that it would be a slum cleanup, but he had the best p.r. men and the best lawyers in the country working on it, he told himself; and certainly the sales charts for the past two weeks had been spectacular.

"We can count on the biggest TV audience of the year tonight," Oswald had told him gleefully at noon. "The buildup's been a natural, and those 'Salem with a new twist and a singing commercial' plugs have been continued on this network—the cost of that was comparatively small—and I've even gotten them onto a few of the really big shows to boot."

Bill Howard came on the screen, his big homely face leaning across the desk toward the TV audience.

"The biggest news in the country right now," Bill said in a solemn tone, "is the biggest single cleanup job in the country today.

"There's a slum," Bill said, "right here in New York that the Witches of the world will unite to cleanup—tonight."

Then he put on the full power of the personality that made him the most listened-to newscaster on the air, TV and radio. The manner that made the news sound human, like it really happened to real people. He put it on full power, and went to work.

First he showed a big map of New York, and talked about how people thought of it as a big, impersonal place, but it wasn't. He made it everybody's home town.

Then he traced the map right down to the exact spot where the buildings were. Then he turned on a movie, and he showed the back-door, garbage strewn, and a room where a family slept, seven of them, and the privy they shared with five

other families.

Then Bill turned off the movie, and he brought that family to the mike, each of them dirty and in clothes that never had amounted to much, and had seen a long life since—even the baby. One kid's shoes had a sole flapping off, another had the toes cut out so he could wear them, though he'd long outgrown them.

"We haven't added to what we found," Bill said. "This is the way the ... I've introduced them as the Jones family, let's leave it at that. This is how the Joneses have had to dress. This is how they've had to live. This is a very real part of America," he said, and his voice was choking a little, and Randolph thought, if he's putting that on, he's the best actor I've seen yet.

Randolph found himself glad he was alone, and didn't have to speak himself. His own throat felt choked.

"And now," said Bill to his audience, "It's time for the witches...."

The camera shifted, and there was a papier-maché model of the buildings, built so you could look in the curtainless windows and see the squalor, lighted with a single bulb on a string. There was a gray pall over the whole thing, and newspapers and trash blowing against the front of the building. The gray pall, Randolph had figured from the sub-scene two weeks ago, was an effect of lights on a net curtain, but the effect was really good.

The thirteen witches, slender witches, danced in waving their products and crying their chant, their crimson-lined capes swirling out to glimpse the audience their long, slender legs.

They cried their chant as they pranced toward the dilapidated building. "Witches of the world, unite to make it clean, clean, clean, Witch clean—NOW!" And each threw a spray of her product toward the building.

"Witch soap or detergent, Witch cleanser upsurgent, which Witch do you need? You should have them all...."

Then riding over the muted jingle the deep voice of the announcer saying "Tonight the Witches of the world clean a slum of the world ... a particular slum, this slum.

"Witches, unite! And clean, clean, clean, Witch clean...."

The dancing witches now threw each her ingredient on the building itself, and the gray pall began to lighten, a bright, new-painted front shone forth. Inside, the single bulbs blacked out for an instant, and then a soft light showed through curtained windows, a bright new scene dimly apparent through the curtains.

"This is not just an illusion," the deep voice of the announcer continued. "This is really happening, down near the Battery in New York City. It is happening to the Joneses and the Smiths who live there—"

The chorus rose to cover the announcer's voice, "Clean, clean, clean, Witch clean!"

The commercial and the witches faded, and Bill Howard's big, homely face came back on the screen.

"Let me introduce you again to the Jones family," Bill said. "I'll introduce you to the Joneses, but they're just one of the families who will now have a decent place to live—and the same miracle has happened to each of these families."

Now the Joneses came again on camera—clean, in new clothes, hair brushed, a miracle indeed of the costume-changers speedy art. Randolph assumed that teams of BDD&O members had been at work during the commercial, creating the miracle. From the baby up and down they shone, and their faces shone with an inner light—

When Randolph shut off the TV that night, he was chewing his lip violently. Must have been more than double that fifty thousand dollars, he thought. He reminded himself to phone BDD&O first thing in the morning.

It was still an hour before noon when Randolph's phone rang.

"Randolph, here," he said in the formality he'd adopted on an English visit and carefully kept.

"Good morning," Oswald's voice was formal. "Good morning." There was a silence, while Randolph waited for the other to continue.

Finally, Randolph said, "Good show, that. Must have cost a lot more than my price," he added. "It was good, though," he said again, thoughtfully.

"Randolph," Oswald's voice sounded wild, "I don't know what the thing cost. I

don't know—"

"Now, sir, just what do you mean, you don't know the cost? I told you to spend fifty thousand dollars, and from what I saw last night it'll cost four times that. I'll go as high as one hundred twenty-five thousand dollars, but not one cent over. And you'd better make it worth the money, for that's a pretty penny," he said.

"Look, Randolph, the cleanup job down there was supposed to start this morning. Contracts let, big crews ready to do the job fast so people could go look at the finished product. Every family was signed up to act as guides, like in Williamsburg. We moved 'em all to the country yesterday, so they'd look healthy when they came back, and the job could start at the crack of dawn today."

"Well?"

"Well, the job's already done."

"That's pretty fast. You said you started it this morning."

"Yeah. And when my man phoned me from down there I told him to get black coffee and sober up. But I went down myself—and the job's done. Exactly the job we specified, too. Done by our plans. Furnished, painted, paint dry, curtains hung, the works, new bathrooms and kitchen and plumbing and electricity. The works. It's finished.

"My best man was down there moving the families out yesterday. He swears the building hadn't been touched then. The contractor says he's going to sue, because he arrived with his crews to start the job, and somebody else had done it. You come on. You've got to meet me here and tell me the answers.

"Just what do you put in that soap of yours, anyhow?"



By afternoon it was banners in every paper, wire-serviced across the nation and the world.

Most of the stories were written tongue-in-cheek about the miracle part. It was assumed that Witch Products had done the inside job in advance, and thrown in the outside cleanup during the night.

The tenants were interviewed—Oswald had the sense to move them right back into their new apartments—and not one of them could be made to break down and admit that those buildings hadn't been slums yesterday. Well, you couldn't blame them for sticking by Witch, look what Witch had done for them was the word that went around Bleek's.

Of course the thing was a curiosity natural, and the police had so many men assigned there by nightfall it looked like a concentration camp. TV portables and news photographer's flashbulbs didn't lessen the confusion any, and the crowds were being let in and through only when there was room for more.

Bill Howard was there when Randolph went through, in earnest conversation with a group of youngsters in one room. Oswald arranged that the Witch manufacturer should have a strong police escort, and the crowds moved back to make way for him in each apartment.

The tenants answered his questions, but they did so with a sullenness that surprised Randolph. Yes, it had been a mess the day before. Yes, it had been rebuilt, obviously, during the night, while they were gone. Yes, just the one night.

"They should be saying thank you," Randolph noted to Oswald. "They're acting as though I were a suspicious character."

"It's our escort," Oswald explained suavely. "These people don't think of cops as their friends. Besides, this is pretty new to them."

Randolph chewed his lip, and decided that Oswald was probably right. But the attitude was general, and it irritated him. He left after the briefest go-through.



That night Bill Howard was conservative in recounting the big news-story of the "slum clearance." He wasn't giving it the real Howard try, Randolph thought, sitting in front of his TV. There was a quote in the story he told, too, from the father of the Jones family that had been on the program the night before. "I reckon it's pretty wonderful, Mr. Howard," Jones had told him. "But I don't rightly know that I like it. Must admit I'm scared of this stuff," he had said, and he waved his hand at the newness.

It was just a single sour note in the story, but it stuck out. The rest was a description, without any mention of the "miracle" part.

At the break, the witches played the credit line to the hilt, though.

"Witches of the world unite to make it clean, clean, clean, Witch clean—NOW!" they chanted their cry, and reenacted the scene of the night before, while the announcer's voice rode over the muted jingle to explain that Witch products had been used to make the slum clean, clean, Witch clean, even though it took carpenters and builders and contractors to remodel a slum building itself. That's better, thought Randolph, watching. No more of this "miracle" nonsense.

It was barely 10:00 a.m. next morning when Randolph's phone rang.

"Randolph, here," he said, and heard Oswald's voice without preliminary.

"They've gone."

"Who's gone?"

"The tenants of the building. Just picked up their duds and left. I've put dicks on the case, and one family has moved in with relatives in the Bronx. The others scattered, but we'll trace 'em. Here's one of the policemen that was on duty when they left. He'll tell you."

A new voice came on the phone, as Randolph chewed his lip.

"Mr. Randolph? This is what happened, near as I can figure. We roped off the area at dark, last night. Figured we'd give the families some rest, and keep out the night-thrill guys.

"Everybody in the apartments must have gotten together after we cleared out the crowds. It was pretty quiet, but the lights stayed on till about 2:00 a.m. Then they all started parading out, some even wearing their old clothes. They were carrying a few things, but nothing that looked like they hadn't had it before the change, so we figured what they were taking was theirs, probably.

"Didn't say a word. Just paraded past us. Some of the kids was crying, but otherwise they were quiet."

"Then one man came running back to me, and he said 'Get out of here. It's the devil's work. Get away from this place if you're a God-fearing man.' Then he turned and ran toward the subway with the rest.

"I couldn't figure we had any orders to stop 'em, so we didn't try. We just watched."

Oswald came back on the phone.

"Can you keep it out of the papers?" Randolph asked.

"It's already on every newscast, and the papers'll have it by noon—it's on the wires," Oswald said.

Randolph coughed nervously, but Oswald didn't wait for him to speak.

"I'm working on something to counteract this," he said. "We're being witch-hunted," Oswald said. "I'll get the whole firm to work on it and call you back."



In Washington, meantime, another conference was going on, far more intent, far more critical.

"It's more than just a pest plane that crashed in Formosa, Mr. President," the CIA Chief was saying. "It carried bacterial bombs, and they exploded.

"There's been no attempt to hide its source. It's, of course, of enemy make. No identification on the bodies aboard, they're in civilian clothes. But again, the make is Moscow.

"It shouldn't be long before we know the worst."

"Will they clean this one up as they did the last one, or will they demand surrender terms on this one?" the President asked.

The Secretary of State and the Secretary of War started to answer together, but it was State that got the first word in.

"I think they'll clean this one up," he said. "It would be a direct threat on which they'll demand surrender terms. That's just a guess, of course.

"The best teams of doctors are being organized and jetted over. The best bacteriologists the nation has at its command. Every antibiotic available is being sent."

"Will that make a dent?"

"No."

"How long can we keep it under wraps?"

"A week. Ten days, perhaps, with top security."

"Give it everything you've got. But keep it quiet until we know what the next move is. Twenty-four hour alert, of course, immediately."

"Even if the alert itself endangers the security wraps?"

"Yes. A week to ten days of security isn't enough to pay for taking a chance the other way."



By 4:00 p.m. Oswald was on the phone to Randolph. "We've got the antidote," he said jubilantly.

Randolph was quiet for a minute, chewing his lip. Then: "I'm being vilified in the press as the creator of a hoax that even those who stood to benefit by it couldn't take," he said. "The few who have decided that a real miracle occurred have also decided that I'm in league with the devil, and that witches are for burning. Mostly Witch is the butt of every joke that can be dreamed up by every cub reporter in the nation. Saxton has started laying the groundwork for making Witch a political issue. There is talk of an FCC investigation."

"I trust," he said formally, "that your antidote is an efficient one."

Oswald's voice sounded smug, and not at all disgruntled. "Try this on for size," he said. "First, Witch is known far and wide as nothing less could have made it known—"

"Yes, and if the churches ban the use of Witch, we'll wish we weren't."

"O.K., O.K. Tonight we explain carefully that the 'miracle' was a miracle of cleanliness, and that carpenters and contractors and all that did the miracle. You know, American technology and mass production in operation, something to be proud of. Tie Witch right in to the whole picture of the United States as the leader of mechanical—stress mechanical—miracles."

"Then—what's the most appealing thing in the world?" He didn't wait for an answer. "A child. A small, crippled child, for whom Witch can provide the funds to make her walk." Oswald hurried on, knowing that Randolph had to go through a bit of lip chewing before he could interrupt, and taking advantage of the fact to ride over objections.

"We've got a kid that an expensive operation will save from being a cripple. I've consulted two top surgeons already, and they say it's nearly positive.

"We don't do any hocus-pocus. We just say that Witch is going to pay for the operation. She leaves the broadcast and goes straight to the hospital. We get a movie of the operation, and we do movies on her convalescence, and we play it for weeks until she walks on stage cured—weeks later."

Now Oswald waited. It was a long wait, an unusually long wait, even for Randolph. Finally, he said:

"All right. But if anything unusual occurs you will answer for it in court."

"Nothing unusual could occur. I admit I still don't know what happened last time, but we'll find out.

"Meantime, we'll take a week to build this one up," Oswald continued. "The buildup will stress that this is a cure being bought by money. No miracle, except the miracle of American medical know-how. No miracles meantime. Just keep Witch clean and stay well, and Witch buys the operation the kid needs. She's pretty, too," he added as an afterthought. "Ten years old."



That night Bill Howard leaned across the desk toward the TV audience, and tiny droplets of sweat stood on his forehead. His voice was calm, though. A big map of New York City hung on the wall behind him.

The big news that night was a dope raid. He described the dope traffic in the nation, the efforts of the FBI and every law enforcement body in the country, to track it down, clean it out. He described what it did to the young, who got caught and were slaves for life, unless they could be cured—and he spoke of the meagerness of the cures that were known.

Then he described the raid. He took a pointer from his desk and he outlined how the raid had been staged, and he pointed out the location of the building where it had occurred. Then he followed with his pointer the route to the precinct jail where the victims were being held.

"Cannot our best researchers find a cure for this addiction?" he asked in his husky voice. "Cannot our best law-enforcement agencies find the real perpetrators of these crimes? The perpetrators are the fiends who import dope and create addicts to peddle it for them. These who are confined are the victims. If no way can be found to cure them, they must be confined again and again and again, for that addiction will force them to ever-increasing crime to satisfy it.

"If no way can be found to cure them, these are potential slaves for life—"

As he ended the station break came, and the camera shifted to the Witches, dancing on stage, crying their chant.

"Witches of the world, unite to make it clean, clean, clean, Witch clean—NOW!

"Which soap or detergent, Witch cleanser upsurgent—"

The announcer's voice, when it came in over the muted jingle "explained" the miracle of the slum-clearance again—a miracle of American technology. Then he outlined the next "miracle" the Witch Corporation would promote. This, he said, would be a miracle of American Medical know-how. Witch would pay for the expensive operation needed to make a little girl walk again after a crippling disease several years before. Bone would be grafted, new muscles would be grafted, American medical know-how in its full extent would be put at her service.

Keep healthy by keeping clean with Witch, the announcer suggested. Witch would pay for the expensive operation to undo the effects of one disease. Meanwhile, Witch's customers could use the preventive medicine of cleanliness to help them in their fight against disease, while the researchers of American medicine "seek to find you real protection."



It was 10:30 the next morning when the doorbell rang.

A big man was standing outside in a topcoat, hat in hand. Randolph stood in the

door, waiting.

The man silently held out a badge, and Randolph moved aside, gesturing him in.

"I didn't look at your badge close enough," Randolph said as he closed the door behind his visitor. "Who are you?"

"Narcotics squad," the man said briefly. "I was on the raid last night."

"Oh? The one Bill Howard was talking about in his newscast?"

"Yes. That one. I don't figure there's any connection, and my boss just laughed when I suggested there was a connection."

"Connection?"

"You see, I took a break from questioning those boys we pulled in. Trying to get a lead to the higher-ups. They were doped to the ears, and sometimes you can get info from them right quick. I took a break for a cup of coffee across the street, and there was a TV in the place, and I watched your Bill Howard.

"I left just when your witches came on, shouting that thing about make it clean NOW. I went right back and started in on the questioning again, but the guy they brought in for me to question next was—not dopey. He was ... well, there's a difference between boys with the monkey on their back, and when there's no monkey. There was no monkey, but the kid began giving me everything he knew would take us to the higher-ups. It was being taped, of course, and I asked him when he'd had his last shot. Not twenty minutes before the raid, he said, calm as you please.

"I had the guys brought back that I'd talked to before and they were—different. Only way I can describe it is, no monkey. The monkey had been there before. I don't know. They each gave us all they had in leads—they'd been stubborn before, but they sang like canaries.

"I checked and nobody'd done anything to 'em to bring 'em off their jazz. If there's anything can be done to pull a guy out of a jazz, anyhow, I've never heard of it, and I've been in the narcotics squad since the year One. I couldn't figure it. I'd been hearing stories about Witch Products and that miracle at the Battery, sort of as a joke, and I thought, just maybe, just possibly, you know....

"Anyhow, I took the tapes to my boss, and spoke my bit, but he just laughed.

"Maybe you'll just laugh, too, but I thought I'd ask."



At the same time in Washington, the cabinet was in full session. Reports coming in from Formosa were worse than even the most pessimistic had dreamed. The bacteria hit at the nerves and the brain, and the victims—excruciating was a word being used.

"It's hit everywhere on the island at once. I assume it is contagious as well as having been broadcast from whatever bombs or broadcast methods were used," the CIA chief reported.

"Any word from their embassy?"

State answered that one. "No word at all. Phone calls to the Ambassador only elicit reports that he is not available. I can't reach anybody higher than a fourth assistant undersecretary."

"At least it's not been on the air or in the press."

"I don't know how long we can hold them in leash. Most of your leading papers know there's a twenty-four hour alert on—that was bound to leak—but I've kept them quiet. We'll have to give them something soon, though. They won't take a muzzle too long without at least knowing why."

"Could you give them the story and trust them, when it's this important, and the consequences of leakage this apparent?"

"I'd thought of that. You can convince some newsmen—but there's always a Joe somewhere who figures the American people have a right to know their destiny before it's decided, no matter what the effect—and no matter if their most highly elected officials feel it would not be good for them."

"Keep it top security as long as possible. Let me know before it breaks."

"If I can. I'm not a witch. I might not know when it was breaking." The CIA chief grinned sourly at his own allusion.

The next night, the big news was the countdown in process at Canaveral to put a functioning "dome" on the moon. If the dome could be landed successfully,

complete with live animals, a man would follow shortly. That was foregone. The question was landing the dome, just a small spaceship body, but completely equipped to keep a man alive for two years, in case anything went wrong with plans to bring him back pronto.

Bill Howard's voice was excited, and he ran his fingers through his hair, pushing it back as he leaned across the desk, the map of Florida behind him.

"To the statesmen, this is a question of who is first and who is second, and perhaps who will control the spaceways," he said after describing the countdown in process.

"But to the peoples of the world, this is mankind, reaching for the stars.

"It is not known," he said solemnly, "whether the failure of many of our shots has been human error or sabotage. Human error is a frailty of the race. Sabotage is a frailty of statesmanship, that the world is still divided as it reaches for the stars. Yet each is possible.

"Is there a mechanical error built in by human frailty in tonight's shot? Is there a saboteur at work?

"Or, as the countdown reaches zero, one hour from now, will the dome tear through the atmosphere of Earth in man's first real step to the stars successfully? Is our bird perfect this time?" he asked, as the break came.

The witches danced on crying their chant ... "Witches of the world, unite to make it clean, clean, clean, Witch clean,—NOW!"



Randolph was chewing his lip still as he went to bed that night. The man from the Narcotics Squad had left peaceably. There were answers to all the questions, and it wasn't his worry anyway. He'd be glad when the little girl had her operation. Grafting bones and muscles might be miraculous, but they were explicable and everybody understood them. Talk of the FCC investigation had died aborning, but talk like that was enough to upset anybody. Everything had been upsetting recently, even though the up-curve on Witch products was holding steady.



The American dome landed on the moon the morning of the day that the crippled child was scheduled to come on the Witch program.

For the American people it was a day of celebration comparable to the Fourth of July. In the White House gloom hung like a palpable shroud.

"They'll have to move fast now," the Secretary of War was reporting to his chief. "They can't afford to let us get our man up there. Even if we could shoot him off successfully."

"We can't shoot a man up there until we've proved in at least two more successful shots that we can get him there," Security declared forcefully. "The threat from our enemies is as nothing to the threat from the vote-wielding public if we tried and failed when a human life is at stake."

"Formosa is leaking," admitted the CIA chief. "We can't hold it more than three days now at the outside."

The President rested a hand on his desk. "Two more shots mean at least six months before a man is up there, armed. Three days means Formosa is in the news this week. When the news breaks, credit our doctors and bacteriologists with being on the way to a cure. Fix it so that if they clean up their epidemic, the way they did Suez, we get the credit.

"That's the best we can do right now. Besides looking for a miracle. But miracles are popular these days," he added ruefully.



It was Bill Howard who stood outside when Randolph answered his doorbell next morning. He let the big, homely, almost shambling figure in without a word.

"I came to ask you a question I don't think you can answer," Howard said morosely, not moving farther than the foyer.

"I came to ask you what it is about the witches?"

Randolph chewed his lip, standing there beside his much-larger guest, conscious

of his own prim—almost prissy—neatness as it contrasted to the other's shaggy look. Shaggy dog, thought Randolph. Big, unkempt, shaggy St. Bernard.

"What about the witches?" he asked finally.

"Well ... there have been some funny things. That slum, of course. I was there, of course. I saw it. And I talked to the small-fry. It was a tenement the day before, I'd stake a lot on it."

There was a silence before Randolph answered.

"Well?"

"Well, then a few little things. A narcotics man came to see me. Just personal. Just curious. They've been pulling in the higher-ups in the dope traffic, by the way—on info from the guys caught in that raid.

"Then that Canaveral deal? Were you listening that night?"

"I always tune you in. It seems to me that today is one of celebration. The dome landed."

"Yeah Yeah, celebration. I'm a newsman, and I get stories that don't go out. There's one that just an hour before zero—a man suddenly died of a heart attack. The technician who took his place—you don't stop a countdown like that for a heart attack—checked his work and found an error that would have misfired the thing. There was also one circuit that had been changed, but they left that because it was changed to be more accurate. They figured the dead guy had done it."

"So?"

"So ... well, nothing. I just wanted to ask you. The witches don't touch anything real these days, of course, so even if ... they were ... well, magic somehow, they couldn't have been involved."

There wasn't even a pause for lip-chewing this time.

"Are you trying to insinuate that Witch products—"

The question was left hanging, but Bill Howard stood there looking his sponsor in the eye.

"Mr. Randolph, I'm not trying to insinuate one damn thing. I'm not even saying

anything to anybody, and if I did say anything I'd be laughed off the air, not by you, but by whoever I said it to.

"I'm just telling you what twos and twos have been setting themselves in front of my everlasting consciousness, and asking if you know anything to add to them?"

The lip-chewing started again, and the two stood there. Then Randolph said quietly, "Mr. Howard, I have been manufacturing Witch products for twenty-five years. They have been improved steadily since I first started with a very good formula. They are the best cleaning products available in the world today, I most sincerely believe. They are that exactly, and nothing more than that exactly. So you will have to find another explanation for your twos and twos, which I admit are a rather spectacular run of coincidence, though not beyond the bounds of credibility.

"Myself, I suspect BDD&O with perpetrating some sort of hoax in the first instance. If any more hoaxes are perpetrated, I plan to switch agencies, switch programs, and call for an FCC investigation of BDD&O to clear the Witch name, which never has and never would condone any hoax of any sort, much less one of the magnitude of whatever occurred, which I profess I do not understand, but which I expect the FCC can trace to its source.

"Good day to you, sir," Randolph ended the unprecedentedly long speech, turned on his heel and left Bill Howard to find his own way out.



That night, as Bill Howard ended his newscast, the camera did not switch to the witches. Instead it switched to the announcer.

"Tonight, Witch Products would like you to meet a little girl," the announcer said in a soft voice that contrasted well with Howard's just ended powerful one.

As he spoke the camera backed away to broaden its scope and include in its picture, beside the announcer, a small blond child in a wheel chair. Her hair was shoulder-length and carefully combed. Her eyes were downcast shyly. Her hands gripped the arms of the wheel chair as though for security. Her legs were covered with a shawl.

"This is Mary," said the announcer, then leaned toward her. "Will you speak to

the audience, Mary?"

She lifted deep blue eyes briefly to the camera, then dropped them quickly. "Hello," she said in a voice barely audible.

"Mary is not used to many people, or to audiences," the announcer said. "Mary has been sitting in this wheel chair for almost three years, since a crippling disease twisted her limbs.

"We hope that Mary can be made to walk. The finest surgeons in the country have been consulted, and they believe an operation can give her back her legs, that were twisted when the disease struck. International Witch Corporation has arranged for that operation.

"Tomorrow Mary will go to the hospital. She will have the operation soon. In a few weeks, perhaps Mary will walk.

"Will you like that, Mary? Will you like walking?" he asked, leaning toward the child.

Again the eyes lifted for the briefest instant. Again they dropped shyly.

"Yes," Mary said in that barely audible voice.

"Then you shall have it, if it can be done," the announcer said, and the camera moved even farther back to include a stage onto which the witches danced.

The witches came onto the stage, not toward Mary, but stage center, chanting—their cry.

"Witches of the world, unite to make it clean, clean, clean, Witch clean,—NOW!"

At the corner of the screen, the child-body in the wheel chair shuddered suddenly. Mary took a deep breath, went white and then red. With a forceful gesture she threw off the shawl and looked at her legs. Her hand reached down to touch them.

On the stage itself, one witch stopped dancing to watch. The others noticed, stopped. The jingle died, half through....

And Mary stood up, looking at her legs. She took a step towards the camera, and another. Her blue eyes lifted to the camera, widening.

In the absolute quiet, as everyone on stage stood frozen, Mary walked towards

the camera, her eyes like saucers looking into it. Her voice, barely above a whisper, spoke.

"I'm ... I'm walking," said Mary.

The papers called it the cruelest hoax of all.

They carried the story side by side with the withdrawal of the Witch program from the network, both by network and by International Witch Corporation order.

The carried the statement of FCC officials that an investigation would be made.

They carried the statement by Randolph that he would sue BDD&O.

They carried the statement by Oswald that he would sue Witch Products.

But mostly they carried the story of a little girl, who had been whisked from sight and couldn't be located. Who had probably been given an operation to make it possible for her to walk, but had been forced to pay for the operation by taking part in a cruel hoax of unbelievable magnitude.

Bill Howard stayed with the network, on the same time, sponsorless. He'd been cleared of any implication in the hoax by all parties concerned, and his reputation had always been good. He was asked to stay in town and be available to appear as a witness, but the network gambled that he was clear, and kept him on. He was one of the biggest draws in newscasting, his personality that made the news seem to belong to the people, to be a continuing story of their lives, was unique. The network decided the gamble of keeping him on was warranted.

By the next night the Formosa crisis had broken into the news, and it was the news.

The details were horrible, and they were uncovered aplenty. Finally ungagged, those who had been holding off gave the story the works.

The effects of the pest plane, of the pest bombs, were the most vicious that could be developed in the laboratories of bacterial war—and they put to shame the naturally-occurring epidemics that have scourged mankind throughout his history.

And the effects were spreading with the speed of a prairie fire before a high wind.

The entire area was quarantined, and daily the quarantine was extended. No plane could land and take off again. No ship could enter and leave. An airlift of supplies dropped by parachute was being organized.

Bacteriologists and doctors jetted to the area were dying with the rest, caught in disease for which there was no answer.

The propaganda attempts to make it seem as though cures were near were flatly not believed. Suez was remembered, but was remembered as a hoax—and the country had had its complete fill of hoaxes.

Randolph had a number of what he referred to—and reported—as "crank calls," asking Witch to try its might. He arranged for every call that reached him to be traced immediately. He remained in seclusion.

Oswald had a few of the "crank calls" and reported them as such.

Bill Howard had a number of calls, and didn't report them.

Bill Howard worried, and added two and two, and sweated, and reported the details of Formosa each night. The details giantized in gruesomeness until their very content was too much for the airways, and he had to censor them as he gave them out.

Bill Howard sweated in the cold January weather, and each day he ferreted further, seeking out the realities behind the censorship that lay heavy now even over the wires. By phone, by gossip, by hearsay and by know-how he got the stories behind the story—the real horrors that he couldn't broadcast.

Sometimes he rebelled at the censors and himself as one of them, but he knew better than to rebel. It's facing us all, he thought. We each have the right to know.

This is the way the world ends, he thought. With a whimper that comes after the agony, when agony is too great.

And he kept remembering a little girl walking towards a camera with big eyes.

If I were a physicist, he told himself, if I were a physicist instead of a newshawk, I could get a computer to tell me the probability ratio of whether I hold an answer.

That probability ratio is probable ten billion to one, he told himself.

That probability ratio is zero.

Witches are for burning, he told himself.

He told himself a lot of things, and he sweated through the cold January weather.



It had been two weeks since the world heard the first details of Formosa, and the details were so grim now that you couldn't use them at all. Just a blanket story.

That night, the map of the world behind his desk, Bill Howard leaned toward his audience.

He told them the human side of the story of Formosa.

He spoke of the people there, the pawns in a game of international suicide, real people, not just statistics.

He described a family, and he made them the family next door. Mother, father, children, watching one another die, not prettily but with all the torture that the laboratories of the world could dream and put together. A family that watched each other go insane, knowing what was happening. A family that watched each other die, writhing and unknowing in insanity.

He took his pointer and he showed the growing perimeter of the quarantine. He traced the location of the center of the disaster.

Then he leaned again toward his audience. "Listen, now," he said, "for the world cannot sustain this torture."

He took a deep breath and he put the full force of his being into his words.

"Witches of the world, unite," he said, "to make it clean, clean, clean, Witch clean—NOW!"

The final word was out before the network censor reached the cut-off switch.



The President and his cabinet put the country on a double alert. Russia had cleaned up Formosa, they knew, and would hit the United States with disease and ultimatums next.

The people of the world took the story with an unexpected calm. Like Hiroshima, it was too unexpected, too big, too unimaginable. There was a hooker somewhere, and they went about their business annoyed, angry, worried, but quiet.

The papers editorialized on the question of who cleaned up Formosa—who had the answers?—and left the subject of what the possession of such a clean-up force could mean to the world, to the statesmen. They turned as quickly as possible to other matters, for nobody was sure what to think, and nobody told them what to think.

Bill Howard was off the air, of course. It didn't bother him. He had a real problem now.

We've bought a little time, he thought. A little time to grow in.

We've bought a little time from the fanatics and their statesmen, from the eggheads and their politicians, from the military and the industrial and the just generally foolhardy.

We, the people of the world, have a little time now that we didn't have yesterday.

How much? He didn't know.

On this one, there'd been time to get together. On this one, there'd been weeks, while the crisis built and the world faced a horrible death. This crisis had been a lengthy one. There'd been time for a man to make up his mind and try a solution.

The next one might be different. There might be a satellite up there waiting, with a button to be pushed. There were an awful lot of buttons waiting to be pushed, he told himself, buttons all over the world, controlling missiles already zeroed in on—well, on the people of the world.

The next one might occur in hours, or even minutes. The next one, the bombs might be in the air before the people even knew the buttons were for pushing.

Bill Howard got out his typewriter.

You've got a problem, you talk to a typewriter, if that's the only thing that will listen.

What's the problem? he asked himself, and he wrote it down. He started at the beginning and he told the story on the typewriter. He told it the way it had been happening.

Now, he thought, you've got to end the story. If you leave it just "to be continued," it'll be continued, all right. Somebody will push a button one day, and that will write 30 at the end for you. Conclusion.

The problem was, in essence, quite simply stated in terms of miracles.

The way things were stewing, it'd be a miracle if the world held together long enough for unity to set in. It'd take a miracle to bring about the necessary self-restraint, which was the only possible substitute for the imposed restraint of war.

The witch power was, quite clearly, a power of the people—of the people who needed that protection, needed those miracles. And it was the power that had worked miracles.

We'll never know who does the job, he told himself. It's better that way. Like table-tipping. You can say "I didn't do it." You can even be sure you didn't do it, if you want to. But the table tips if you get enough people around the table. Ouiji writes, if at least two people have their fingers on it, so that they each can say "I didn't do it."

Who are the witches? Why, they're the people, and they're not for burning. The fanatics and their statesmen, the eggheads and their politicians, the brains and the brain trusts and the world-weary—they're for burning, but not the witches. Which witch is a witch? Doesn't matter.



An hour later, Bill Howard sat down to the typewriter again. He'd stated the general problem—but now he had a specific problem, and, for a man in his line

of business, it was a fairly straightforward problem.

He need only plot out the necessary moves so that he could call on that witch power just one more time. Just once. Just long enough to clean out the violent, rooted resistance to the idea that people had powers—and could work miracles!

THE END

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