

The Inhabited

Richard Wilson

The image features a vibrant green background with several thick, blue geometric shapes. These shapes include vertical bars, a horizontal bar, a curved line, and a diagonal line, all arranged in a way that suggests a stylized architectural or abstract composition. The text 'Project Gutenberg' is positioned in the lower right area, overlaid on the green background.

Project Gutenberg

The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Inhabited, by Richard Wilson

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org

Title: The Inhabited

Author: Richard Wilson

Illustrator: Ashman

Release Date: February 25, 2010 [EBook #31392]

Language: English

*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE INHABITED ***

Produced by Sankar Viswanathan, Greg Weeks, and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

Transcriber's Note:

This etext was produced from Galaxy Science Fiction January 1953. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.

Containing a foe is sound military thinking—unless it's carried out so literally
that everybody becomes an innocent Trojan Horse!

**Containing a foe is sound military thinking—unless it's carried out so literally that everybody
becomes an innocent Trojan Horse!**

The Inhabited

By

RICHARD WILSON

Illustrated by ASHMAN

T

wo slitted green eyes loomed up directly in front of him. He plunged into them immediately.

He had just made the voyage, naked through the dimension stratum, and he scurried into the first available refuge, to hover there, gasping.

The word "he" does not strictly apply to the creature, for it had no sex, nor are the words "naked," "scurried," "hover" and "gasping" accurate at all. But there are no English words to describe properly what it was and how it moved, except in very general terms. There are no Asiatic, African or European words, though perhaps there are mathematical symbols. But, because this is not a technical paper, the symbols have no place in it.

He was a sort of spy, a sort of fifth-columnist. He had some of the characteristics of a kamikaze pilot, too, because there was no telling if he'd get back from his mission.

Hovering in his refuge and gasping for breath, so to speak, he tried to compose his thoughts after the terrifying journey and adjust himself to his new environment, so he could get to work. His job, as first traveler to this new world, the Earth, was to learn if it were suitable for habitation by his fellow beings back home. Their world was about ended and they had to move or die.

He was being discomfited, however, in his initial adjustment. His first stop in the new world—unfortunately, not only for his dignity, but for his equilibrium—had been in the mind of a cat.

I

t was his own fault, really. He and the others had decided that his first in a series of temporary habitations should be in one of the lower order of animals. It was a matter of precaution—the mind would be easy to control, if it came to a contest. Also, there would be less chance of running into a mind-screen and being trapped or destroyed.

The cat had no mind-screen, of course; some might even have argued that she didn't have a mind, especially the human couple she lived with. But whatever she did have was actively at work, feeling the solid tree-branch under her claws and the leaves against which her tail switched and seeing the half-grown chickens below.

The chickens were scratching in the forbidden vegetable garden. The cat, the runt of her litter and thus named Midge, often had been chased out of the garden herself, but it was no sense of justice which now set her little gray behind to wriggling in preparation for her leap. It was mischief, pure and simple, which motivated her.

Midge leaped, and the visitor, who had made the journey between dimensions without losing consciousness, blacked out.

When he revived, he was being rocketed along in an up-and-down and at the same time side-ward series of motions which got him all giddy. With an effort he oriented himself so that the cat's vision became his, and he watched in distaste as the chickens scurried, scrawny wings lifted and beaks achirp, this way and that to escape the monstrous cat.

The cat never touched the chickens; she was content to chase them. When she had divided the flock in half, six in the pea patch and six under the porch, she lay down in the shade of the front steps and reflectively licked a paw.

The spy got the impression of reflection, but he was baffledly unable to figure out what the cat was reflecting on. Midge in turn licked a paw, rolled in the dust, arched her back against the warm stone of the steps and snapped cautiously at a low-flying wasp. She was a contented cat. The impression of contentment came through very well.

The dimension traveler got only one other impression at the moment—one of

languor.

The cat, after a prodigious pink yawn, went to sleep. The traveler, although he had never known the experience of voluntary unconsciousness, was tempted to do the same. But he fought against the influence of his host and, robbed of vision with the closing of the cat's eyes, he meditated.

He had been on Earth less than ten minutes, but his meditation consisted of saying to himself in his own way that if he was ever going to get anything done, he'd better escape from this cat's mind.

He accomplished that a few minutes later, when there was a crunching of gravel in the driveway and a battered Plymouth stopped and a man stepped out. Midge opened her eyes, crept up behind a row of stones bordering the path to the driveway and jumped delicately out at the man, who tried unsuccessfully to gather her into his arms.

Through the cat's eyes from behind the porch steps, where Midge had fled, the traveler took stock of the human being it was about to inhabit:

Five-foot-elevenish, thirtyish, blond-brown-haired, blue-summer-suited.

And no mind-screen.

The traveler traveled and in an instant he was looking down from his new height at the gray undersized cat. Then the screen door of the porch opened and a female human being appeared.

W

With the male human impressions now his, the traveler experienced some interesting sensations. There was a body-to-body togetherness apparently called "gimmea hug" and a face-to-face-touching ceremony, "kiss."

"Hmm," thought the traveler, in his own way. "Hmm."

The greeting ceremony was followed by one that had this catechism:

"Suppareddi?"

"Onnatable."

Then came the "eating."

This eating, something he had never done, was all right, he decided. He wondered if cats ate, too. Yes, Midge was under the gas stove, chewing delicately at a different kind of preparation.

There was a great deal of eating. The traveler knew from the inspection of the mind he was inhabiting that the man was enormously hungry and tired almost to exhaustion.

"The damn job had to go out today," was what had happened. "We worked till almost eight o'clock. I think I'll take a nap after supper while you do the dishes."

The traveler understood perfectly, for he was a very sympathetic type. That was one reason they had chosen him for the transdimensional exploration. They had figured the best applicant for the job would be one with an intellect highly attuned to the vibrations of these others, known dimly through the warp-view, one extremely sensitive and with a great capacity for appreciation. Shrewd, too, of course.

The traveler tried to exercise control. Just a trace of it at first. He attempted to dissuade the man from having his nap. But his effort was ignored.

The man went to sleep as soon as he lay down on the couch in the living room. Once again, as the eyes closed, the traveler was imprisoned. He hadn't realized it until now, but he evidently couldn't transfer from one mind to another except through the eyes, once he was inside. He had planned to explore the woman's mind, but now he was trapped, at least temporarily.

Oh, well. He composed himself as best he could to await the awakening. This sleeping business was a waste of time.

There were footsteps and a whistling noise outside. The inhabited man heard the sounds and woke up, irritated. He opened his eyes a slit as his wife told the neighbor that Charlie was taking a nap, worn out from a hard day at the office, and the visitor, darting free, transferred again.

But he miscalculated and there he was in the mind of the neighbor. Irritated with himself, the traveler was about to jump to the mind of the woman when he was caught up in the excitement that was consuming his new host.

"Sorry," said the neighbor. "The new batch of records I ordered came today and I thought Charlie'd like to hear them. Tell him to come over tomorrow night, if he wants to hear the solidest combo since Muggsy's Roseland days."

The wife said all right, George, she'd tell him. But the traveler was experiencing the excited memories of a dixieland jazz band in his new host's mind, and he knew he'd be hearing these fantastically wonderful new sounds at first hand as soon as George got back to his turntable.

They could hardly wait, George and his inhabitant both.



H

is inhabitant had come from a dimension-world of vast, contemplative silences. There was no talk, no speech vibrations, no noise which could not be shut out by the turning of a mental switch. Communication was from mind to mind, not from mouth to ear. It was a world of peaceful silence, where everything had been done, where the struggle for physical existence had ended, and where there remained only the sweet fruits of past labor to be enjoyed.

That had been the state of affairs, at any rate, up until the time of the Change, which was something the beings of the world could not stop. It was not a new threat from the lower orders, which they had met and overcome before, innumerable times. It was not a threat from outside—no invasion such as they had turned back in the past. Nor was it a cooling of their world or the danger of imminent collision with another.

The Change came from within. It was decadence. There was nothing left for the beings to do. They had solved all their problems and could find no new ones. They had exhausted the intricate workings of reflection, academic hypothetica and mind-play; there hadn't been a new game, for instance, in the lifetime of the oldest inhabitant.

And so they were dying of boredom. This very realization had for a time halted the creeping menace, because, as they came to accept it and discuss ways of meeting it, the peril itself subsided. But the moment they relaxed, the Change started again.

Something had to be done. Mere theorizing about their situation was not enough. It was then that they sent their spy abroad.

Because they had at one time or another visited each of the planets in their solar system and had exhausted their possibilities or found them barren, and because they were not equipped, even at the peak of their physical development, for intergalactic flight, there remained only one way to travel—in time.

Not forward or backward, for both had been tried. Travel ahead had been discouraging—in fact, it had convinced them that their normal passage through the years had to be stopped. The reason had been made dramatically clear—they, the master race, did not exist in the future. They had vanished and the lower forms of life had begun to take over.

Travel into the past would be even more boring than continued existence in the present, they realized, because they would be reliving the experiences they had had and still vividly remembered, and would be incapable of changing them. It would be both tiresome and frustrating.

That left only one way to go—sideways in time, across the dimension line—to a world like their own, but which had developed so differently through the eons that to visit it and conquer the minds of its inhabitants would be worth while.

In that way they picked Earth for their victim and sent out their spy. Just one spy. If he didn't return, they'd send another. There was enough time. And they had to be sure.

G

George put a record on the phonograph and fixed himself a drink while the machine warmed up.

The interdimensional invader reacted pleasurably to the taste and instant warming effect of the liquor on George's mind.

"Ahh!" said George aloud, and his temporary inhabitant agreed with him.

George lifted the phonograph needle into the groove and went to sit on the edge of a chair. Jazz poured out of the speaker and the man beat out the time with his

heels and toes.

The visitor in his mind experimented with control. He went at it subtly, at first, so as not to alarm his host. He tried to quiet the beating of time with the feet. He suggested that George cross his legs instead. The beating of time continued. The visitor urged that George do this little thing he asked; he bent all his powers to the suggestion, concentrating on the tapping feet. There wasn't even a glimmer of reaction.

Instead, there was a reverse effect. The pounding of music was insistent. The visitor relaxed. He rationalized and told himself he would try another time. Now he would observe this phenomenon. But he became more than just an observer.

The visitor reeled with sensation. The vibrations gripped him, twisted him and wrung him out. He was limp, palpitating and thoroughly happy when the record ended and George got up immediately to put on another.

Hours later, drunk with the jazz and the liquor, the visitor went blissfully to sleep inside George's mind when his host went to bed.

He awoke, with George, to the experience of a nagging throb. But in a few minutes, after a shower, shave and breakfast with steaming coffee, it was gone, and the visitor looked forward to the coming day.

It was George's day off and he was going fishing. Humming to himself, he got out his reel and flies and other paraphernalia and contentedly arranged them in the back of his car. Visions of the fine, quiet time he was going to have went through George's mind, and his inhabitant decided he had better leave. He had to get on with his exploration; he mustn't allow himself to be trapped into just having fun.

But he stayed with George as the fisherman drove his car out of the garage and along a highway. The day was sunny and warm. There was a slight wind and the green trees sighed delicately in it. The birds were pleasantly vocal and the colors were superb.

The visitor found it oddly familiar. Then he realized what it was.

His world was like this, too. It had the trees, the birds, the wind and the colors. All were there. But its people had long since ceased to appreciate them. Their existence had turned inward and the external things no longer were of interest. Yet the visitor, through George's eyes, found this world delightful. He reveled in

its beauty, its breathtaking panorama and its balance. And he wondered if he was able to appreciate it for the first time now because he was being active, although in a vicarious way, and participating in life, instead of merely reflecting on it. This would be a clue to have analyzed by the greater minds to which he would report.

Then, with a wrench, the visitor chided himself. He was allowing himself to identify too closely with this mortal, with his appreciation of such diverse pursuits as jazz and fishing. He had to get on. There was work to be done.

George waved to a boy playing in a field and the boy waved back. With the contact of their eyes, the visitor was inside the boy's mind.



T

he boy had a dog. It was a great, lumbering mass of affection, a shaggy, loving, prankish beast. A protector and a playmate, strong and gentle.

Now that the visitor was in the boy's mind, he adored the animal, and the dog worshiped him.

He fought to be rational. "Come now," he told himself, "don't get carried away." He attempted control. A simple thing. He would have the boy pull the dog's ear, gently. He concentrated, suggested. But all his efforts were thwarted. The boy leaped at the dog, grabbed it around the middle. The dog responded, prancing free.

The visitor gave up. He relaxed.

Great waves of mute, suffocating love enveloped him. He swam for a few minutes in a pool of joy as the boy and dog wrestled, rolled over each other in the tall grass, charged ferociously with teeth bared and growls issuing from both throats, finally to subside panting and laughing on the ground while the clouds swept majestically overhead across the blue sky.

He could swear the dog was laughing, too.

As they lay there, exhausted for the moment, a young woman came upon them. The visitor saw her looking down at them, the soft breeze tugging at her dark

hair and skirt. Her hands were thrust into the pockets of her jacket. She was barefoot and she wriggled her toes so that blades of grass came up between them.

"Hello, Jimmy," she said. "Hello, Max, you old monster."

The dog thumped the ground with his tail.

"Hello, Mrs. Tanner," the boy said. "How's the baby coming?"

The girl smiled. "Just fine, Jimmy. It's beginning to kick a little now. It kind of tickles. And you know what?"

"What?" asked Jimmy. The visitor in the boy's mind wanted to know, too.

"I hope it's a boy, and that he grows up to be just like you."

"Aw." The boy rolled over and hid his face in the grass. Then he peered around. "Honest?"

"Honest," she said.

"Gee whiz." The boy was so embarrassed that he had to leave. "Me and Max are going down to the swimmin' hole. You wanta come?"

"No, thanks. You go ahead. I think I'll just sit here in the Sun for a while and watch my toes curl."

As they said good-bye, the visitor traveled to the new mind.



W

With the girl's eyes, he saw the boy and the dog running across the meadow and down to the stream at the edge of the woods.

The traveler experienced a sensation of tremendous fondness as he watched them go.

But he mustn't get carried away, he told himself. He must make another attempt to take command. This girl might be the one he could influence. She was doing nothing active; her mind was relaxed.

The visitor bent himself to the task. He would be cleverly simple. He would have her pick a daisy. They were all around at her feet. He concentrated. Her gaze traveled back across the meadow to the grassy knoll on which she was standing. She sat. She stretched out her arms behind her and leaned back on them. She tossed her hair and gazed into the sky.

She wasn't even thinking of the daisy.

Irritated, he gathered all his powers into a compact mass and hurled them at her mind.

But with a swoop and a soar, he was carried up and away, through the sweet summer air, to a cloud of white softness.

This was not what he had planned, by any means.

A steady, warm breeze enveloped him and there was a tinkle of faraway music. It frightened him and he struggled to get back into contact with the girl's mind. But there was no contact. Apparently he had been cast out, against his will.

The forces of creation buffeted him. His dizzying flight carried him through the clean air in swift journey from horizon to horizon, then up, up and out beyond the limits of the atmosphere, only to return him in a trice to the breast of the rolling meadow. He was conscious now of the steady growth of slim green leaves as they pressed confidently through the nurturing Earth, of the other tiny living things in and on the Earth, and the heartbeat of the Earth itself, assuring him with its great strength of the continuation of all things.

Then he was back with the girl, watching through her eyes a butterfly as it fluttered to rest on a flower and perched there, gently waving its gaudy wings.

He had not been cast out. The young woman herself had gone on that wild journey to the heavens, not only with her mind, but with her entire being, attuned to the rest of creation. There was a continuity, he realized, a oneness between herself, the mother-to-be, and the Universe. With her, then, he felt the stirrings of new life, and he was proud and content.

He forgot for the moment that he had been a failure.



T

he soft breeze seemed to turn chill. The Sun was still high and unclouded, but its warmth was gone. With the girl, he felt a prickling along the spine. She turned her head slightly and, through her eyes, he saw, a few yards away in tall grass, a creeping man.

The eyes of the man were fixed on the girl's body and the traveler felt her thrill of terror. The man lay there for a moment, hands flat on the ground under his chest. Then he moved forward, inching toward her.

The girl screamed. Her terror gripped the visitor. He was helpless. His thoughts whirled into chaos, following hers.

The eyes of the creeping man flicked from side to side, then up. The visitor quivered and cringed with the girl when she screamed again. As the torrent of frightened sound poured from her throat, the creeping man looked into her eyes. Instantly the visitor was sucked into his mind.

It was a maelstrom. A tremendous conflict was going on in it. One part of it was urging the body on in its fantastic crawl toward the young woman frozen in terror against the sky. The visitor was aware of the other part, submerged and struggling feebly, trying to get through with a message of reason. But it was handicapped. The visitor sensed these efforts being nullified by a crushing weight of shame.

The traveler fought against full identification with the deranged part of the mind. Nevertheless, he sought to understand it, as he had understood the other minds he'd visited. But there was nothing to understand. The creeping man had no plan. There was no reason for his action.

The visitor felt only a compulsion which said, "You must! You must!"

The visitor was frightened. And then he realized that he was less frightened than the man was. The terror felt by the creeping man was greater than the fear the visitor had experienced with the girl.

There were shouts and barking. He heard the shrill cry of a boy. "Go get him, Max!"

There was a squeal of brakes from the road and a pounding of heavy footsteps coming toward them.

With the man, the visitor rose up, confused, scared. A great shaggy weight hurled itself and a growling, sharp-toothed mouth sought a throat.

A voice yelled, "Don't shoot! The dog's got him!"

Then blackness.

M

ersey." The voice summoned the visitor, huddling in a corner of the deranged mind, fearing contamination.

The eyes opened, looked up at the ceiling of a barred cell.

"Dr. Cloyd is here to see you," the voice said.

The visitor felt the mind of his host seeking to close out the words and the world, to return to sheltering darkness.

There was a rattle of keys and the opening of an iron door.

The eyes opened as a hand shook the psychotic Mersey by the shoulder. The visitor sought escape, but the eyes avoided those of the other.

"Come with me, son," the doctor's voice said. "Don't be frightened. No one will hurt you. We'll have a talk."

Mersey shook off the hand on his shoulder.

"Drop dead," he muttered.

"That wouldn't help anything," the doctor said. "Come on, man."

Mersey sat up and, through his eyes, the traveler saw the doctor's legs. Were they legs or were they iron bars? The traveler cringed away from the mad thought.

A room with a desk, a chair, a couch, and sunlight through a window. Crawling sunlit snakes. The visitor shuddered. He sought the part of the mind that was clear, but he sought in vain. Only the whirling chaos and the distorted images remained now.

There was a pain in the throat and with Mersey he lifted a hand to it. Bandaged—gleaming teeth and a snarling animal's mouth—fear, despair and hatred. With the prisoner, he collapsed on the couch.

"Lie down, if you like," said Dr. Cloyd's voice. "Try to relax. Let me help you."

"Drop dead," Mersey replied automatically. The visitor felt the tenseness of the man, the unreasoning fear, and the resentment.

But as the man lay there, the traveler sensed a calming of the turbulence. There was an urgent rational thought. He concentrated and tried to help the man phrase it.

"The girl—is she all right? Did I...?"

"She's all right." The doctor's voice was soothing. It pushed back the shadows a little. "She's perfectly all right."

The visitor sensed a dulled relief in Mersey's mind. The shadows still whirled, but they were less ominous. He suggested a question, exulted as Mersey attempted to phrase it: "Doctor, am I real bad off? Can...?"

But still the shadows.

"We'll work together," said the doctor's voice. "You've been ill, but so have others. With your help, we can make you well."

The traveler made a tremendous effort. He urged Mersey to say: "I'll help, doctor. I want to find peace."

But then Mersey's voice went on: "I must find a new home. We need a new home. We can't stay where we are."

T

he traveler was shocked at the words. He hadn't intended them to come out that way. Somehow Mersey had voiced the underlying thoughts of his people. The traveler sought the doctor's reaction, but Mersey wouldn't look at him. The man's gaze was fixed on the ceiling above the couch.

"Of course," the doctor said. His words were false, the visitor realized; he was humoring the madman.

"We had so much, but now there is no future," Mersey said. The visitor tried to stop him. He would not be stopped. "We can't stay much longer. We'll die. We must find a new world. Maybe you can help us."

Dr. Cloyd spoke and there was no hint of surprise in his voice.

"I'll help you all I can. Would you care to tell me more about your world?"

Desperately, the visitor fought to control the flow of Mersey's words. He had opened the gate to the other world—how, he did not know—and all of his knowledge and memories now were Mersey's. But the traveler could not communicate with the disordered mind. He could only communicate through it, and then involuntarily. If he could escape the mind ... but he could not escape. Mersey's eyes were fixed on the ceiling. He would not look at the doctor.

"A dying world," Mersey said. "It will live on after us, but we will die because we have finished. There's nothing more to do. The Change is upon us, and we must flee it or die. I have been sent here as a last hope, as an emissary to learn if this world is the answer. I have traveled among you and I have found good things. Your world is much like ours, physically, but it has not grown as fast or as far as ours, and we would be happy here, among you, if we could control."



T

he words from Mersey's throat had come falteringly at first, but now they were strong, although the tone was flat and expressionless. The words went on:

"But we can't control. I've tried and failed. At best we can co-exist, as observers and vicarious participants, but we must surrender choice. Is that to be our destiny—to live on, but to be denied all except contemplation—to live on as guests among you, accepting your ways and sharing them, but with no power to change them?"

The traveler shouted at Mersey's mind in soundless fury: "Shut up! Shut up!"

Mersey stopped talking.

"Go on," said the doctor softly. "This is very interesting."

"Shut up!" said the traveler voicelessly, yet with frantic urgency.

The madman was silent. His body was perfectly still, except for his calm breathing. The visitor gazed through his eyes in the only possible direction—up at the ceiling. He tried another command. "Look at the doctor."

With that glance, the visitor told himself, he would flee the crazed mind and enter the doctor's. There he would learn what the psychiatrist thought of his patient's strange soliloquy—whether he believed it, or any part of it.

He prayed that the doctor was evaluating it as the intricate raving of delusion.

S

lowly, Mersey turned his head. Through his eyes, the visitor saw the faded green carpet, the doctor's dull-black shoes, his socks, the legs of his trousers. Mersey's glance hovered there, around the doctor's knees. The visitor forced it higher, past the belt around a tidy waist, along the buttons of the opened vest to the white collar, and finally to the kindly eyes behind gold-rimmed glasses.

Again he had commanded this human being and had been obeyed. The traveler braced himself for the leap from the tortured mind to the sane one.

But his gaze continued to be that of Mersey.

The gray eyes of the doctor were on his patient. Intelligence and kindness were in those eyes, but the visitor could read nothing else.

He was caught, a prisoner in a demented mind. He felt panic. This must be the mind-screen he'd been warned about.

"Look down," the visitor commanded Mersey. "Shut your eyes. Don't let him see me."

But Mersey continued to be held by the doctor's eyes. The visitor cowered back into the crazed mental tangle.

Gradually, then, his fear ebbed. There was more likelihood that Cloyd did not

believe Mersey's words than that he did. The doctor treated hundreds of patients and surely many of them had delusions as fanciful as this one might seem.

The traveler's alarm simmered down until he was capable of appreciating the irony of the situation.

But at the same time, he thought with pain, "Is it our fate that of all the millions of creatures on this world, we can establish communication only through the insane? And even then to have only imperfect control of the mind and, worse, to have it become a transmitter for our most secret thoughts?"

It was heartbreaking.

Dr. Cloyd broke the long silence. Pulling at his ear, he spoke calmly and matter-of-factly:

"Let me see if I understand your problem, Mersey. You believe yourself to be from another world, from which you have traveled, although not physically. Your world is not a material one, as far as its people are concerned. Your civilization is a mental one, which has been placed in danger. You must resettle your people, but this cannot be done here, on Earth, except in the minds of the mentally ill—and that would not be a satisfactory solution. Have I stated the case correctly?"

"Yes," Mersey's voice said over the traveler's mental protests. "Except that it is not a 'case,' as you call it. I am not Mersey. He is merely a vehicle for my thoughts. I am not here to be treated or cured, as the human being Mersey is. I'm here with a life-or-death problem affecting an entire race, and I would not be talking to you except that, at the moment, I'm trapped and confused."

T

he madman was doing it again, the traveler thought helplessly—spilling out his knowledge, betraying him and his kind. Was there no way to muffle him?

"I must admit that I'm confused myself," Dr. Cloyd said. "Humor me for a moment while I think out loud. Let me consider this in my own framework, first, and then in yours, without labeling either one absolutely true or false."

"You see," the doctor went on, "this is a world of vitality. My world—Earth. Its people are strong. Their bodies are developed as well as their minds. There are some who are not so strong, and some whose minds have been injured. But for the most part, both the mind and the body are in balance. Each has its function, and they work together as a coordinated whole. My understanding of your world, on the other hand, is that it's in a state of imbalance, where the physical has deteriorated almost to extinction and the mind has been nurtured in a hothouse atmosphere. Where, you might say, the mind has fed on the decay of the body."

"No," said Mersey, voicing the traveler's conviction. "You paint a highly distorted picture of our world."

"I theorize, of course," Dr. Cloyd agreed. "But it's a valid theory, based on intimate knowledge of my own world and what you've told me of yours."

"You make a basic error, I think," Mersey said, speaking for the unwilling visitor. "You assume that I have been able to make contact only with this deranged mind. That is wrong. I have shared the experiences of many of you—a man, a boy, a woman about to bear a child. Even a cat. And with each of these, my mind has been perfectly attuned. I was able to share and enjoy their experiences, their pleasures, to love with them and to fear, although they had no knowledge of my presence.

"Only since I came to this poor mind have I failed to achieve true empathy. I have been shocked by his madness and I've tried to resist it, to help him overcome it. But I've failed and it apparently has imprisoned me. Whereas I was able to leave the minds of the others almost at will, with poor Mersey I'm trapped. I can't transfer to you, for instance, as I could normally from another. If there's a way out, I haven't found it. Have you a theory for this?"

In spite of his distress at these revelations, the traveler was intrigued, now that they had been voiced for him, and he was eager to hear Dr. Cloyd's interpretation of them.

The psychiatrist took a pipe out of his pocket, filled it, lighted it and puffed slowly on it until it was drawing well.

"Continuing to accept your postulate that you're not Mersey, but an alien inhabiting his mind," the doctor said finally, "I can enlarge on my theory without changing it in any basic way.

"Your world is not superior to ours, much as it may please you to believe that it is. Nature consists of a balance, and that balance must hold true whether in Sioux City, or Mars, or in the fourth dimension, or in your world, wherever that may be. Your world is out of balance. Evidently it has been going out of balance for some time.

"Your salvation lies not in further evolution in your world—since your way of evolving proved wrong, and may prove fatal—but in a change in course, back along the evolutionary path to a society which developed naturally, with the mind and the body in balance. That society is the one you have found here, in our world. You found it pleasant and attractive, you say, but that doesn't mean you're suited to it.

"Nature's harsh rules may have operated to let you observe a way of life here that you enjoy, but to exclude you otherwise—except from a mind that is not well. In nature's balance, it could be that the refuge on this world most closely resembling your needs is in the mind of the psychotic. One conclusion could be that your race is mentally ill—by our standards, if not by yours—and that the type of person here most closely approximating your way of life is one with a disordered mind."

D

r. Cloyd paused. Mersey had no immediate reply.

The traveler made use of the silence to consider this plausible, but frightening theory. To accept the theory would be to accept a destiny of madness here on this world, although the doctor had been kind enough to draw a distinction between madness in one dimension and a mere lack of natural balance in another.

Mersey again seized upon the traveler's mind and spoke its thoughts. But as he spoke, he voiced a conclusion which the traveler had not yet admitted even to himself.

"Then the answer is inescapable," Mersey said, his tone flat and unemotional. "It is theoretically possible for all of our people to migrate to this world and find refuge of a sort. But if we established ourselves in the minds of your normal people, we'd be without will. As mere observers, we'd become assimilated in

time, and thus extinguished as a separate race. That, of course, we could not permit. And if we settled in the minds most suitable to receive us, we would be in the minds of those who by your standards are insane—whose destiny is controlled by the others. Here again we could permit no such fate.

"That alone would be enough to send me back to my people to report failure. But there is something more—something I don't think you will believe, for all your ability to synthesize acceptance of another viewpoint."

"And what is that?"

"First I must ask a question. In speaking to me now, do you still believe yourself to be addressing Mersey, your fellow human being, and humoring him in a delusion? Or do you think you are speaking through him to me, the inhabitant of another world who has borrowed his mind?"

T

he doctor smiled and took time to relight his pipe.

"Let me answer you in this way," he said. "If I were convinced that Mersey was merely harboring a delusion that he was inhabited by an alien being, I would accept that situation clinically. I would humor him, as you put it, in the hope that he'd be encouraged to talk freely and perhaps give me a clue to his delusion so I could help him lose it. I would speak to him—or to you, if that were his concept of himself—just as I am speaking now.

"On the other hand, if I were convinced by the many unusual nuances of our conversation that the mind I was addressing actually was that of an alien being—I would still talk to you as I am talking now."

The doctor smiled again. "I trust I have made my answer sufficiently unsatisfactory."

The visitor's reaction was spoken by Mersey. "On the contrary, you have unwittingly told me what I want to know. You'd want your answer to be satisfactory if you were speaking to Mersey, the lunatic. But because you'd take delight in disconcerting me by scoring a point—something you wouldn't do with a patient—you reveal acceptance of the fact that I am not Mersey. Your rules

would not permit you to give him an unsatisfactory answer."

"Not quite," contradicted Dr. Cloyd, still smiling. "To Mersey, my patient, troubled by his delusion and using all his craft to persuade both of us of its reality, the unsatisfactory answer would be the satisfactory one."

M

Mersey's voice laughed. "Dr. Cloyd, I salute you. I will leave your world with a tremendous respect for you—and completely unsure of whether you believe in my existence."

"Thank you."

"I am leaving, you know," Mersey's voice replied.

The traveler by now was resigned to letting the patient be his medium and speak his thoughts. Thus far, he had spoken them all truly, if somewhat excessively. The traveler thought he knew why, now, and expected Mersey to voice the reason for him very shortly. He did.

"I'm leaving because I must report failure and advise my people to look elsewhere for a new home. Part of the reason for that failure I haven't yet mentioned:

"Although it might appear that I, the visitor, am manipulating Mersey to speak the thoughts I wished to communicate, the facts are almost the opposite. My control over either Mersey's body or mind is practically nil.

"What you have been hearing and what you hear even now are the thoughts I am thinking—not necessarily the ones I want you to know. What has happened is this, if I may borrow your theory:

"My mind has invaded Mersey's, but his human vitality is too strong to permit him to be controlled by it. In fact, the reverse is true. His vitality is making use of my mind for its own good, and for the good of your human race. His own mind is damaged badly, but his healthy body has taken over and made use of my mind. It is using my mind to make it speak against its will—to speak the thoughts of an alien without subterfuge, as they actually exist in truth. Thus I am

helplessly telling you all about myself and the intentions of my people.

"What is in operation in Mersey is the human body's instinct of self-preservation. It is utilizing my mind to warn you against that very mind. Do you see? That would be the case, too, if a million of us invaded a million minds like Mersey's. None of us could plot successfully against you, if that were our desire—which, of course, it is—because the babbling tongues we inherited along with the bodies would give us away."

The doctor no longer smiled. His expression was grave now.

"I don't know," he said. "Now I am not sure any longer. I'm not certain that I follow you—or whether I want to follow you. I think I'm a bit frightened."

"You needn't be. I'm going. I'll say good-by, in your custom, and thank you for the hospitality and pleasures your world has given me. And I suppose I must thank Mersey for the warning of doom he's unknowingly given my people, poor man. I hope you can help him."

"I'll try," said Dr. Cloyd, "though I must say you've complicated the diagnosis considerably."

"Good-by. I won't be back, I promise you."

"I believe you," said the doctor. "Good-by."

Mersey slumped back on the couch. He looked up at the ceiling, vacantly.



F

or a long time there was no sound in the room.

Then the doctor said: "Mersey."

There was no answer. The man continued to lie there motionless, breathing normally, looking at the ceiling.

"Mersey," said the doctor again. "How do you feel?"

The man turned his head. He looked at the doctor with hostility, then went back to his contemplation of the ceiling.

"Drop dead," he muttered.

—**RICHARD
WILSON**

End of the Project Gutenberg eBook of The Inhabited, by Richard Wilson

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE INHABITED ***

***** This file should be named 31392-h.htm or 31392-h.zip *****
This and all associated files of various formats will be found in:
<http://www.gutenberg.org/3/1/3/9/31392/>

Produced by Sankar Viswanathan, Greg Weeks, and the Online
Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

Updated editions will replace the previous one--the old editions
will be renamed.

Creating the works from public domain print editions means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for the eBooks, unless you receive specific permission. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the rules is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and

research. They may be modified and printed and given away--you may do practically ANYTHING with public domain eBooks. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

*** START: FULL LICENSE ***

THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg-tm mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase "Project Gutenberg"), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg-tm License (available with this file or online at <http://gutenberg.org/license>).

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. "Project Gutenberg" is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation ("the Foundation" or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is in the public domain in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg-tm mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg-tm works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg-tm name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg-tm License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement

before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg-tm work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country outside the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg-tm License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg-tm work (any work on which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" appears, or with which the phrase "Project Gutenberg" is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is derived from the public domain (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase "Project Gutenberg" associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg-tm License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg-tm License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg-tm.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg-tm License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg-tm work in a format other than "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg-tm web site (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg-tm License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg-tm works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works provided that

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg-tm works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg-tm License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg-tm works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and Michael Hart, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread public domain works in creating the Project Gutenberg-tm collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH F3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR

INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS' WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg-tm work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg-tm work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg-tm

Project Gutenberg-tm is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need, are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg-tm's goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg-tm collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg-tm and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation web page at <http://www.pgla.org>.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit

501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Its 501(c)(3) letter is posted at <http://pglaf.org/fundraising>. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is located at 4557 Melan Dr. S. Fairbanks, AK, 99712., but its volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887, email business@pglaf.org. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and official page at <http://pglaf.org>

For additional contact information:
Dr. Gregory B. Newby
Chief Executive and Director
gbnewby@pglaf.org

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg-tm depends upon and cannot survive without wide spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit <http://pglaf.org>

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: <http://pglaf.org/donate>

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart is the originator of the Project Gutenberg-tm concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For thirty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as Public Domain in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our Web site which has the main PG search facility:

<http://www.gutenberg.org>

This Web site includes information about Project Gutenberg-tm, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.