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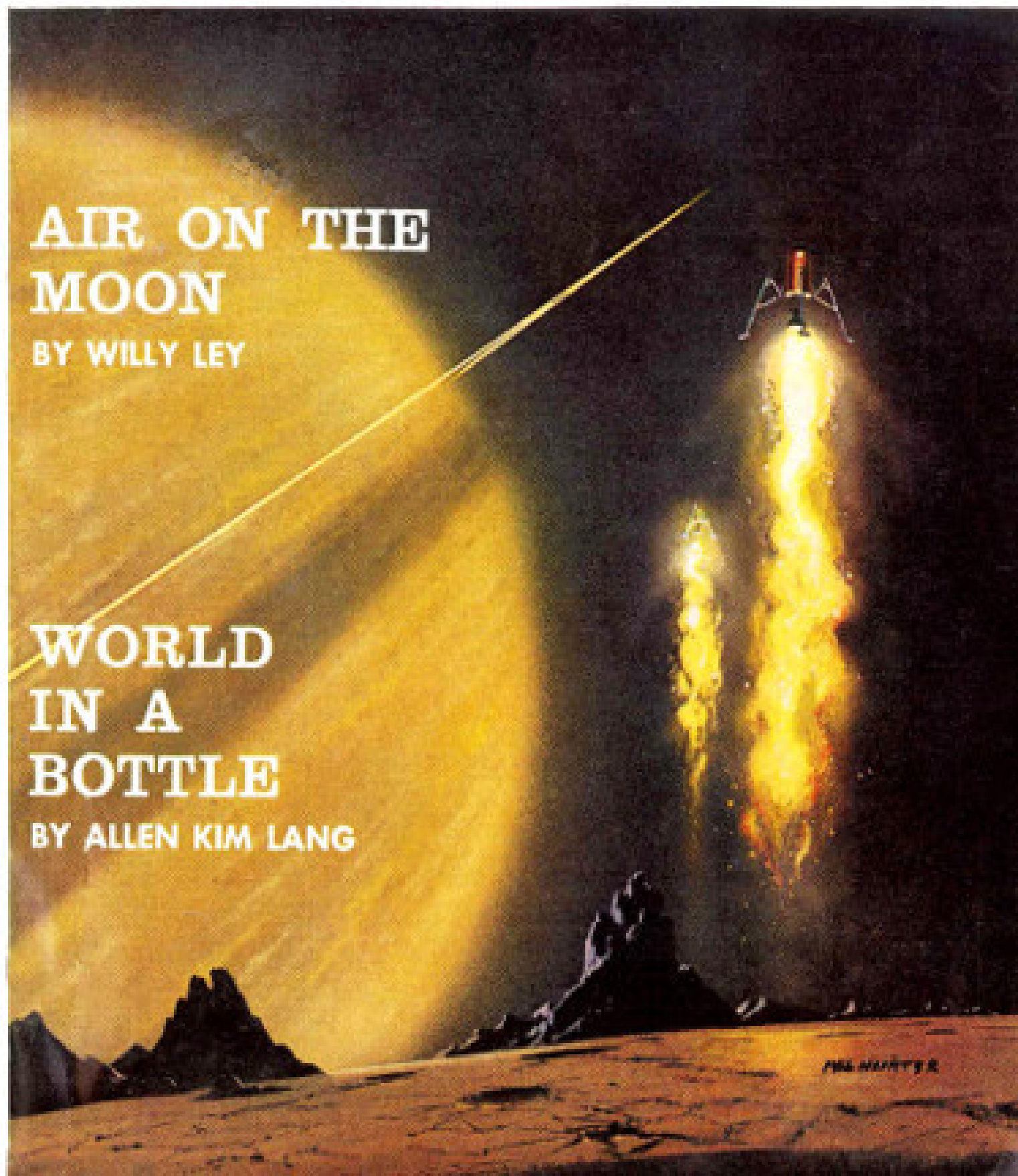
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AIR ON THE MOON

BY WILLY LEY

WORLD IN A BOTTLE

BY ALLEN KIM LANG



PHIL HUNTER

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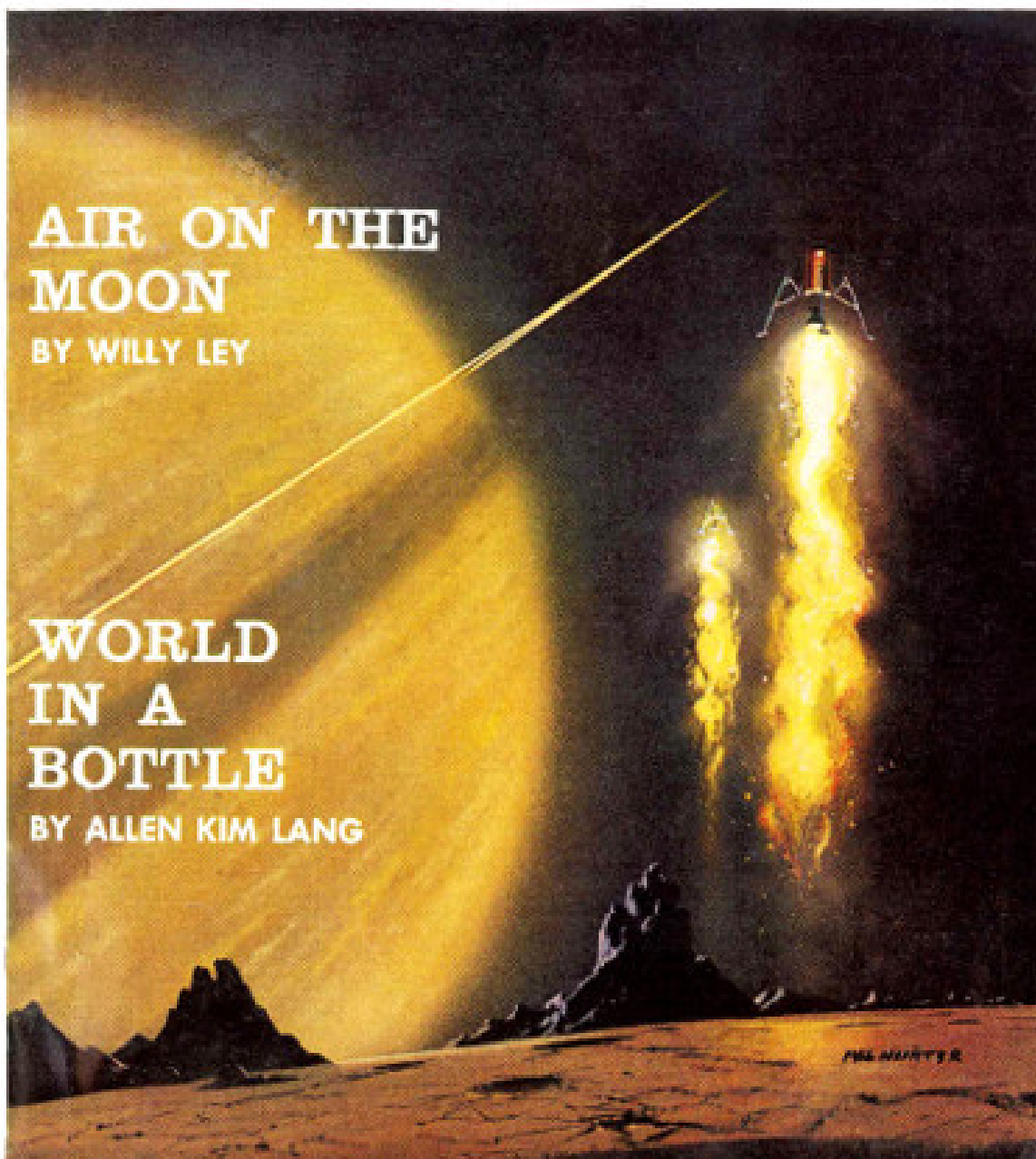
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CRY SNOOKER

Cry Snooker

By ANDREW FETLER

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

**[Transcriber's Note: This etext was produced from
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***What a wife! Pretty, smart ... and when
she cooked it was just out of this world!***

"Baby Doll," George called from the bathroom.

There was no answer.

George wrapped a towel around his rump and came into the living room. Rosy sat curled up reading a magazine.

"Do me a favor, Rosy," George said. "Put caps on bottles so your perfume won't evaporate. I paid twelve bucks for that Chanel."

Rosy looked up at him, stretching her neck a little.

"And next time close the damn Bendix so I won't have to swim through the basement to shut it off."

"I told you, the catch wouldn't catch."

"The catch would catch all right if you didn't leave Timmy's diaper hanging out."

"That's not fair," Rosy said. "Blaming little Timmy."

His hands tried to crush an invisible bowling ball. "Just a little ... presence of mind, Rosy. Okay?"

"You dropped your towel," Rosy said, looking away.

George ran into the bedroom and came back in his pajamas. "For God's sake, honey, *try* to remember what you're doing when you're doing it. Like with the power mower."

"I suppose *that* was my fault?"

"Don't you know enough to cut the engine when you're done?"

"I *wasn't* done. I had to answer the phone, didn't I?"

George threw up his hands. "So all right. So you left it running and it went right through Charlie's fence."

"Sometimes," Rosy said, putting down the magazine, "you exasperate me, George. I *told* you, I put it in neutral or whatever it is."

"You put it in high and let it run through Charlie's fence."

Rosy looked at him as at a bad tomato. "Why," she said, "do I get blamed every time something mechanical goes wrong?"

But they kissed and made up because it was the night before their third wedding anniversary.

At the breakfast table next morning George gave her the diamond cocktail ring she'd drooled over. Rosy gave him the self-winding time piece he'd slobbered over in Cellini's window. Dear girl, had the courage to get it for nothing down and thirty-six months to pay.

"Don't gulp your food," Rosy said. "It's Charlie's turn to drive you."

In his high chair, Timmy scooped up handfuls of oatmeal and heaved them over the port side.

When Charlie came to the door he had a gift-wrapped box for them. It looked heavy. He gave it to Rosy and slipped on one of Timmy's oatmeal bombs and flew headlong into the couch.

"Happy wedding anniversary, you two," Charlie said, picking himself up. "When are you going to fix my fence?"

Rosy weighed the box in her arms. "Charlie, that's real sweet of you and Beth. Let's open it now, George."

"We're late," Charlie said. He wiped his shoe on the rug. "Come on, pal."

They took the freeway out of Sunnydale. Downtown the clock on the Trojan Life & Casualty building gave them four minutes to get there.

"What was in that box you brought?" George asked.

"A pressure cooker."

"Oh, no."

"Supposed to build up terrific pressure," Charlie said. "Five thousand pounds per square inch."

George stared before him as they drove into the Park-O-Port.

He had not a moment free till his coffee break at ten. Mr. Perkins wanted the Lawndale policies cleared right away and Mr. Zungenspiel had all the juniors in for a briefing on exorbitant rates. When he got back to his desk Maude Doody waited to interview him about his wedding anniversary for her "Sweetness and Light" column in *Keep Smiling*, the company weekly.

"I hope you're always polite to Rosy," Meddlin' Maude said. "I can't stand rude men. How old is Timmy now?"

"He'll be three in September."

Maude made a quick mental calculation. She looked doubtful. "And could you tell us what you gave Rosy for her wedding anniversary?"

"A pressure cooker," George said, forgetting everything else.

"Is that all? What kind of pressure cooker, George?"

"Five thousand pounds per square inch."

"I mean the *brand*," Maude said, stabbing the air with her sharp pencil.

"Don't you think the folks would like to know the brand?"

"Uh, I guess the best."

"They're all best," Maude said. "Can't you remember the brand?"

"No," he said.

Meddlin' Maude rose to her feet. She looked down at him severely.

"George, you're slipping," she said and marched off to the *Keep Smiling* office.

George grabbed the telephone. Five thousand pounds per square inch, he thought. Whammo!

The phone rang seven times. Then he dialed Charlie's house, but Beth did not answer either. Rosy and Beth spent hours at the supermart. It was the social center of Sunnydale where the gals could gossip a little and compare brands.

George took the elevator up to the company cafeteria. On the fifth floor Mr. Perkins stepped in.

"Just got your Lawndale policies," Mr. Perkins said. "Fast work, son. Keep it up."

"Thank you, sir. I had an inquiry this morning, sir. About domestic accidents."

"Shoot the problem, son."

"Does it cover injury by pressure cooker?"

"Was it Full Coverage or Complete Coverage?"

"Complete, sir."

"Covers everything from electrocution in the bath tub to getting hit by a stray rocket from Cape Canaveral."

The elevator let them out at the cafeteria. "Mr. Perkins, I'd like to double my wife's policy."

"Mighty sensible of you, George. Can you afford it?"

"No, sir."

"That's the spirit! How about your own policy, George? Isn't it about time you went up a notch?"

"You mean it, sir?"

"I've been keeping my eye on you," Mr. Perkins said. "I'll see what I can do."

George thanked him profusely.

"Not at all, not at all," Mr. Perkins boomed. "That's what old dad Perkins is here for."

George got his coffee and joined Charlie at their corner table.

"Getting chummy with old dad Perkins?" Charlie asked.

"I just got told," George said, leaning forward, "I could increase my insurance."

"No!"

"Said it was time I moved up a notch."

Charlie clenched his fist. "We *can* make the Country Club, I tell you. I'm almost twelve thousand in the red, not counting the house and the boat. Let's celebrate, Georgie. All four of us. We can go to the Emperor Room for sixty bucks. That is, if you're still talking to your humble friends."

"Come off it."

"I've seen it happen," Charlie said bitterly. "People getting so deep in debt they start snubbing their more solvent friends."

When Arlene dropped the noon mail on George's desk he sat dreaming. More insurance, more credit; more credit, more debt; more debts, more prestige. He sat up with a start and dialed Rosy.

This time she answered and all was fine. She'd spent the morning in the supermart filling out contest entry blanks and buying a big roast for the pressure cooker.

"Oh, George, it's a wonderful pressure cooker. It looks like a space ship, with bolts and portholes and all."

"I don't want you to—"

"And it's got a remote control panel or something, with all kinds of buttons and blinkers. Timmy just loves it!"

"Is Timmy anywhere near it?"

"He's *in* it. It's a big one."

Arlene came by his desk. "Where's Charlie?" she asked. "I got a telegram for him."

George waved her away and brought the receiver close to his mouth.

"Rosy, listen," George hissed. "Put that damn thing away till I get home. We're going to the Emperor Room with Beth and Charlie."

There was a short silence. "You said you wanted a home-cooked meal," Rosy said. "To remind you how married you are."

George looked up at Maude Doody standing at his desk. "That sounds like a personal call," Meddlin' Maude said.

"It's my wife."

"You've been on that phone three minutes," Meddlin' Maude said, glancing at her watch. "You know company policy on personal calls, George."

"I'm a homemaker," Rosy was saying. "I *want* to make dinner for you and Timmy."

"Oh, go to hell!" George said.

Meddlin' Maude clutched at her heart.

Rosy gasped.

Five minutes later:

"Of course I love you, baby doll," George said weakly. In a semi-circle around him stood Meddlin' Maude, Mr. Zungenspiel, Mr. Perkins, Arlene, and an assortment of lesser office authorities. "Just don't touch that pressure cooker till I get home, dammit. It's dangerous."

"I can only do my best, George," Rosy said with hard finality. "If that's not good enough for you, darling"—she choked on a sob—"well, I'm *sorry*."

The phone clicked and the wire went dead.

A dozen faces bent over him. "George," Meddlin' Maude said, raising her sharp pencil.

"Just a minute, Miss Doody," said Mr. Zungenspiel. "Young man, would you step into my office when you have a *free* moment?"

"If you see Charlie before they fire you," Arlene said, "tell him I left a telegram on his desk."

"George," Miss Doody shrilled, her sharp pencil raised, "did you or did you not tell *me* to go to hell?"

Charlie crashed through the crowd, waving a telegram. "Look at this, George!"

George read the telegram:

OWING TO ILLITERATE SHIPPING CLERK IN WESTERN
ELECTRONICS SHIPPING DEPT YOUR MAIL ORDER
FOR PRESSURE COOKER MODEL G-19-78256D WAS
FILLED BY TOP SECRET GOVT CONTRACTED
PRESSURE SNOOKER MODEL X-13 WITH TOUCH
COMMAND CONTROL PANEL REGRET SHIPPED TO
YOU FULLY ASSEMBLED HIGHLY DANGEROUS TO
LIFE LIMB PROPERTY & PASSING AIRCRAFT NOT
SUITABLE FOR COOKING HERewith ADVISE
WESTERN ELECTRONICS CORP NOT LIABLE FOR ANY
DAMAGE TO LIFE LIMB PROPERTY & PASSING
AIRCRAFT AFTER REGISTERED RECEIPT OF THIS
TELEGRAM WESTERN SNOOKER X-13 DISMANTLING
EXPERT ON WAY BY JET SUGGEST KEEP SNOOKER IN
NICE COOL PLACE SORRY INCONVENIENCE
CORRECTED ORDER FOR YOUR PRESSURE COOKER
BEING FILLED BY NEW SHIPPING CLERK WITH
COLLEGE DEGREE HOPE SERVE YOU AGAIN T C
FRUMP V-P IN CHARGE OF SNAFU

George dropped the telegram.

"What are you waiting for, man?" Charlie said. "Call Rosy, will ya?"

"She won't answer," George said. "She thinks I don't love her."

"Come on! We better get home before she starts making dinner."

They ran down to the Park-O-Port.

"Ahm sorry, Mistuh Charlie," the snappy attendant said. "Caint git yuh cah now. It's on de top floh behind seven lines of cahs an *dey* aint comin out till five like every weekday sept Satterdays, Sunneys an holidays."

"Give him a tip and let's get a taxi," George said. He ran into the street just in time to flag a cab.

George tossed the cabbie ten dollars. "Step on it. It may be a matter of life and death."

"I could have called Beth," Charlie said.

"We'll get there almost as fast."

They zoomed through the underpass and turned onto the freeway. A cycle cop emerged from behind a Schlitz billboard and took after them, his siren wailing.

"Never mind the cop," George said.

The cabbie hunched forward and gripped the wheel. "Mister," he said, "I've been waiting for a chance like this."

The cop gained on them and as he came abreast George grew confused. He saw the cop's big sun glasses shining like the eyes of a wasp and his hat snapping in the wind. George had never broken the law in his life. He had a deep respect for the police, preservers of law and order.

The cop motioned the cabbie to pull over. The cab zoomed over a crest on the freeway and ripped down the slope with marked increase in speed.

George rolled down the window and flapped his arms. "My wife!" he yelled.

The cop cut the siren. His hand went down to his holster.

"My wife!" George yelled. "Pressure cooker."

The cop grinned and nodded to say he understood, and roaring ahead waved them to follow. The siren started up again.

They lost him when they turned off the freeway and raced past the supermarket to their street. Sunnydale looked peaceful in the afternoon. George's house came in view. He heaved a sigh of relief as the cabbie pulled to a stop.

"Rosy!" he yelled, dashing up the walk.

He flung open the door and stopped. The house was silent except for Rosy's voice in the kitchen. She was counting backwards:

"Five ... four ... three...."

"Rosy!"

"One ... zero."

A steaming hiss sounded in the kitchen. In a moment it rose to a howling pitch. There was a tremendous crash and a tremor shook the plaster from the walls.

In the settling dust Timmy crawled out of the kitchen with a pot on his head.

In the kitchen Rosy sat on the floor, clutching the instruction booklet.



"Now see what you did, George!"

"What *I* did?"

"Barging in like that," Rosy said, tears of frustration streaking her dusty cheeks. "I must have pressed the wrong button."

Beside her on the floor lay the Touch Command Control Panel. Its colored lights blinked on and off like a pinball machine.

Charlie came into the kitchen with Timmy in his arms.

"Oh my gosh!" Rosy cried, looking up at the ceiling. A hole was ripped out in the roof and through it they could see God's blue sky.

George grabbed the control panel and they ran outside. They saw the snooker describing a lovely ellipse over Sunnydale.

"My roast!" Rosy wailed.

"It seems to be waiting for orders," Charlie said.

"Have to get it down," George said, setting the control panel on the lawn.
"Before it slams into some airplane."

He pressed a large red button. The snooker wobbled for a moment, then broke its orbit and dove for Charlie's house. It smashed in at the back and came out the front. Beth ran out in a bathrobe, screaming.

"Stop it!" Charlie yelled, flinging himself at the control panel and pressing a yellow button.

The snooker resumed its orbit, then wobbled and dove into every second or third house in the street, working the houses from side to side.

Women ran out and stood dazed, clutching their children and watching the snooker.

Desperately George pressed the blue button. The snooker resumed its orbit, wobbled, flew once over the street as if to check what all needed to be hit, then slammed through the whole length of houses from end to end.

Two houses caught fire. Charlie pressed the largest button of all, the green one. The snooker righted itself and flew out over the town. Wherever it struck a small cloud of dust rose in the air.

Four fire-engines turned into the street. Three of them turned around and raced back to downtown.

They lost sight of the snooker for a while. All they saw was the clouds of dust mushrooming all over town, and here and there a fire. When the snooker came in view again, it was rising toward a jet plane circling overhead.

"It'll get hit!" Charlie said.

George pressed all four buttons.

The snooker wobbled for a moment. Then it seemed to shake off the confused commands and rose into the plane's path. The plane veered. The snooker turned after it and rose steeply. Then it dove and slammed down through the fuselage.

They all stared as the plane crashed into the supermarket. Above them the pilot floated down in a parachute. He seemed to see the blinking lights of the control panel and worked the chute calmly. He landed through the hole in Rosy's kitchen. He came out of the house eating a piece of cold chicken.

He wore an air-research uniform with a belt slanted across his chest and high shiny boots, and in his hand he carried a Rommel whip.

He strode up to George and looked down at the blinking control panel. With the toe of his boot he pushed a black button in the lower left corner and squinted up at the sky, chewing the chicken. The snooker obeyed instantly and resumed its original elliptical orbit.

"*Ja*," he said. "Very goot." He gazed out over the town, the clouds of dust and the fires burning. "Excellent," he said, tossing the chicken bone over his back. It hit Charlie in the face.

"You must be the dismantling expert," George said hopefully.

"I am more. I am the infentor of pressure snooker." He noticed Rosy and Beth. "Ladies," he said, clicking his heels and bowing. "I haf the honor to present myself. Vernher von Wissenschaft, at your serfice."

"Likewise," Rosy said. "Could you get my pressure cooker down before it does any more damage?"

"Ha ha!" Vernher von Wissenschaft laughed. "Very goot! Pressure *cooker*! Hm, goot way to deceive brutal enemy. Export five hoondred tausend pressure cookers to enemy homes. *Ja*, I like it."

"You don't understand," Rosy said. "My roast will be ruined if you don't get it down pretty soon."

"You cook rosht in my infention?"

"Biggest roast you ever saw," Rosy said. She hugged George. "You see, this is our wedding anniversary and I'm dying to know how it came out."

"Rosht?" he mused, following the snooker with his eyes and licking his fingers thoughtfully. "Why not? Maybe I make deal on side with Amerikan Kitchen Appliance Inkorporated. If rosht comes out goot." He looked at the broken houses and the firemen spraying the fires. "*Ja*," he decided, "kill two experiments mit one snooker."

He waited for the snooker to pass overhead. Then he gave the control panel a sharp kick with his heel, breaking it in two. The snooker wobbled and exploded. Bits of steel whirled out over Sunnydale. A brown cloud appeared above them and in a moment they were all drenched in a rainfall of roast beef.

By the time the gravy hit them it had cooled enough to taste.

"It's wonderful!" Rosy said.

"Chust a minute," Vernher von Wissenschaft said. "Scientific experiment not so fast." He removed a shred of roast beef from behind his ear and chewed.

"Isn't it good?" Rosy asked anxiously.

Vernher von Wissenschaft finished tasting. He thought a moment, stretched his face. "Excellent," he said.

"Do you *really* like it?"

"Ja, excellent." He held up a finger. "Perhaps," he suggested, "two more grains pepper."

Two weeks later, when all the fires in the town had been put out and the damage assessed, a great banquet was held in the Emperor Room to honor George. In the street a huge crowd of well-wishers waited to greet him as he came out. The Emperor Room could accommodate only the town's important personages; there were so many of them that some of the best families did not bribe the mayor in time to get a seat.

But George managed to get standing room for Mr. Perkins and Mr. Zungenspiel.

Beside George at the table of honor sat Charlie. Next to him Vernher von Wissenschaft in a splendid uniform, cracking his Rommel whip from time to time. Everybody who was anybody was there: the Police Commissioner, the Gambling Czar, the District Attorney, the Teamsters' Boss, Senator Smiley, Coroner Schadenfrohm, the Election Commissioner, the Slum Owner, the Housing Inspector.

"Never before," the mayor orated, "has so much damage been done by such a little man in such a short time."

Vernher cracked his whip. "Very goot," he said, turning to George. "Rhetoric, you know."

"The national economy," the mayor continued, "was in danger of imminent collapse ever since our old-fashioned P.O.—planned obsolescence—reached a point of no return. We had to produce more and more until the market was glutted. Of course we would not sell so much as a toaster to our brutal enemy." (Applause.)

Vernher cracked his whip. "Very goot."

"But now," the mayor said, smiling at George, "the solution to our economic impasse has been found! This young man had the daring vision to contribute a brilliant new concept to our economics. S. D.—Senseless Destruction!" (Applause.)

Vernher cracked his whip. "Excellent."

The mayor raised his arms for silence. "I have good news," he said. "Congress has just voted one billion dollars for Senseless Destruction research!" (Wild applause.)

Vernher cracked his whip six times.

"I can promise you, ladies and gentlemen," the mayor continued, "what happened to our town is only the beginning. As a result of the visionary experiment by this daring young man, fifty thousand idle construction workers have already been put back on the job; twenty new banks have sprung up to handle the flood of mortgages; a new steel mill will be erected in our world-famous game preserve. But I need not go on. The industries,

businesses and stock markets that will profit by Senseless Destruction can hardly be numbered. The biggest boom in history is on! And as long as we have the snooker it will never end!" (General pandemonium.)

When order was restored, the mayor turned solemnly to George and said: "In grateful recognition of your...."

After the recognition speech George accepted humbly the following sums, not listing gifts under \$10,000:

\$10,000 from Home Builders Assn.

\$12,500 from Construction Union, Local 256.

\$15,000 from Last Bank of America.

\$11,276.88 from Unified Steel Corp.

\$20,00 from Chicago Furniture Mart.

\$10,000 from Congress in Series E Bonds.

George also received the following appointments:

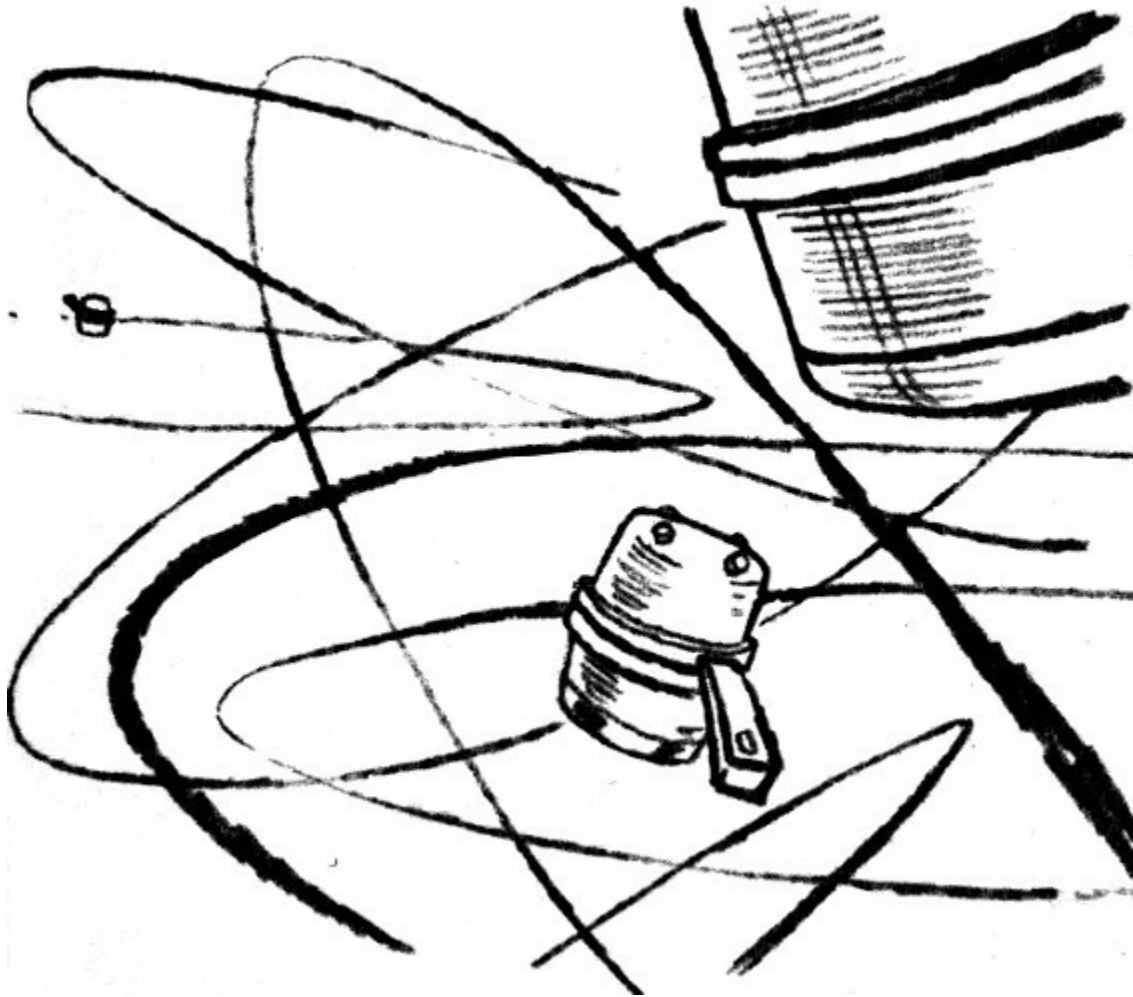
Special Adviser to Mayor on Senseless Destruction, with nominal yearly income of \$75,000 tax free.

Vice-President of Trojan Life & Casualty Co.

Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Sunnydale Game and Wood Preserve.

Honorary Supreme Commander of Juvenile Senseless Destructionists, to be organized.

A year later George sat wearily in the control room of his chateau on Indian Rock overlooking the town. Snookers buzzed over rooftops like flies. Clouds of dust rose prosperously everywhere. In the streets construction gangs raced in speed trucks.



George had begun to wonder how it would all end.

After the novelty had worn off, Senseless Destruction became more monotonous, more depressing than the Installment Way of Life before it. People worked harder than ever now and had less to show for it. Of course, it was unpatriotic to have anything to show for it. Nobody in his right senses would argue against Round-the-Clock Employment for All. And if you didn't go around grinning and saying how happy you were with your seventh mortgage, people began to suspect you.

George had talked it all over with Rosy and she agreed. Sure, it was all right for *them*—for the time being. But George had begun to despise himself.

He had to keep sharp control over the snookers. Some of them showed a tendency to sneak off course, looking for some nice fresh target—like the chateau, maybe.

The butler came in and presented a calling card on a silver platter.

"Vernher! Show him in at once."

Vernher von Wissenschaft marched in, cracking his Rommel whip. He looked worried.

"Bad news," Vernher said, shaking hands. "Chust come from the President."

"How is Charlie?"

"Goot. But too much work. And trouble. These snookers." Vernher strode to the window and looked out over the town.

"They're doing a fine job," George assured him.

Vernher turned. A grim smile slashed his face. "Too goot. Russian economy caught up with ours. They vant snookers too. Must have snookers or they go kaput."

"What's so bad about that? Let them go kaput. Cold war will be over at least."

Vernher shook his head. "They threaten atomic war if they don't get snookers. This time for real."

George gave a low whistle.

"Ja," Vernher sighed. "Charlie had secret cabinet meeting. We cannot take chance. You must go teach them how."

"Can't you go?"

"I'm leaving for Johannesburg tonight. United Africa also caught up."

"As it is our economy barely keeps ahead of the Russians!"

"Ja. But cannot be helped."

"Maybe," George said, "if you invented something bigger, better, more efficient."

"You think I haf not tried?"

George stood thinking a long moment. He said, "Vernher, is there no way out?"

"Sure," Vernher laughed. "If we go back to savage pre-civilization."

"All right," George said. "I'll go tell Rosy. Watch the control panel a moment, will you? Especially the Eastern Section."

"What's the matter with them?"

"They seem to be getting restless lately."

"Nonsense! My snookers haf no emotions."

"Just seems that way sometimes," George said, going out. Their job could even make stones feel something, he thought.

He ran down to Rosy in the kitchen. She had consented to having servants only because of her social position, but she still insisted on personally running the kitchen her own way.

George pulled her into the hallway and put his arms around her and kissed her.

"What on earth?" she said.

"You must be very brave, darling." He fixed her with his eyes. "Rosy, this is *it*."

"It?"

"E-Day."

E for Escape.

"We can't talk now," he said. "Vernher is at the controls."

"Can I change?"

"No time. Are the suitcases packed?"

"They're in the garage, behind the beer barrels."

"Go get Timmy," George said. "I'll drive the station wagon round to the back door."

At the gate to the grounds they stopped and took a last look at the chateau. They could see Vernher standing in the control window. He seemed to be enjoying the spectacle in the town below.

Rosy gripped George's arm. "Look!"

A snooker had strayed off its orbit and was hissing in toward the chateau. It came fast over the grounds, heading straight for the control window.

Vernher never saw it coming. Probably he did not even hear the glass crashing as the sharp slivers shot into the room.

By the end of May George was still chopping a small clearing in the Montana woods. George and Charlie's old campsite. It was harder work than he'd expected. But it was a good site and the tent would be replaced by a heavy log cabin before winter set in. Sometimes they'd climb one of the peaks on the Flathead Range and sit gazing at Hungry Horse Reservoir in the distance.

The trees were stubborn here, blunting the ax. But they'd make it all right. George sat down to rest.

Rosy waved to him from the potato patch. A strand of smoke rose peacefully from the stone oven. He waved back and grinned.

Timmy worked his way up bravely to where George sat. He'd gotten used to his bark shoes and had quite forgotten that he had ever worn any other kind.

"Can I help you, Daddy?"

Education too, George thought. The *real* kind. "No, thanks, son," he said. "You'd better help your mother plant the potatoes."

That evening at supper, as they sat enjoying sundown and the quiet of woods and mountains, they heard a motor far away. The wind took it away and then it sounded much nearer, grinding in low gear. George stood up as a jeep came round the mountain. In it sat a man and a woman.

The jeep came into the clearing, swaying over stones and roots.

"Charlie!"

"Hi," Charlie said. He helped Beth down.

George yanked Timmy to his feet. "Stand up, son. This is the President of the United States."

"I got a present for you, George," Charlie said.

"Not another pressure cooker!" Rosy said.

"A peace pipe," Charlie said.

Timmy's big round eyes took him in. "Are *you* the President?" he asked in a small, awed voice.

"Not any more," Charlie said.

George stared at him. "You didn't give up the White House?"

"What else could I do?" Charlie said. "I gave it back to the Indians."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CRY SNOOKER

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