

THE GREAT ELECTRON-PEDANTIC PROJECT

BY CARL KOHLER

I ALMOST made it.

Sneaking from the car to the workshack, my arms loaded with stacks of books borrowed from the public library, I was doing just fine until one of the larger, heavier tomes toppled—hitting the pavement with an echoing smack.

Friend Wife, Peggy, immediately peered out the back door, hearing the sound and spotting me going tippytoe lugging the books. She came through that doorway and was upon me before I could stagger another step. So I stood stockstill, deciding to play it totally cool.

"What's with all the books?" she demanded.

"Going to do a little reading," I murmured from behind the wavering stacks I was balancing. "Just going to do a little reading, that's all."

Her face appeared around one of the unstable stacks, sheer disbelief gleaming in her eyes, complete suspicion quirked her mouth. I stared back with what I hoped was the most innocent and appealing expression this side of that overweight infant on the babyfood tins.

"You always do your reading in the house," she said flatly. "How come you aren't bringing them into the house?"

"Uh... not *this* time."

"What are they—dirty novels?"

"Certainly not!" My voice trembled with indignation. "Why, these represent some of the most profound concepts that the finest minds of mankind ever sustained long enough to put on paper!"

"Oh, yeah?" Her eyes roved over several titles. "Hm...m. They look dull

enough to be as high-brow as you claim. *First Principles*—" she read aloud, "*Abstract Mathematics—History Of Philosophy—Grey's Anatomy—The Natural Sciences—Profiles Of Classical Artists.*" She glanced at me with a tight little smirk. "Isn't all this stuff slightly over your head? I always figured you were more a 'MAD' magazine buff!"

I sighed. A long, shuddering sigh of defeat.

"All right," I muttered dully. "Tote some coffee out to the workshack and I'll wire you in to the whole plan. You'll find out sooner or later, anyway."

While she went sprinting away to bring the requested brew, I carried the teetering towers of books into the workshack, letting them spill to the floor. Restacking them neatly alongside all the other books earlier sorties had produced, I bitterly meditated upon my fond and chronic illusion of secrecy. Sometimes I actually managed to bring a project pretty well along before she chanced upon it. Once, I even came within twenty minutes of completing a project in delicious secrecy. But a malicious fate sent her blundering into the workshack while I was still bolting a chassis into its casing.

"Ah, well," I sighed again. "At least I'm gifted with a glorious verbal-defensive ability. Things *could* be worse. I could be slow-spoken. Or have the handicap of a stammer."

She waltzed into the workshack, holding the tray skillfully aloft. It bore a pot of coffee and two cups. She lowered it with a flourish, not spilling a drop.

"Exhibitionist!" I sneered.

"Now," she chirped brightly, "tell me all about what's going on! Why you're suddenly bringing books in here by the ton."

I gestured at the books. "Those gems of knowledge," as I gestured again at the nearby object covered with a dust-sheet, "are to be fed painstakingly and efficiently into *that* veritable jewelbox of scintillating information."

Her face followed my gestures, swinging back and forth with an expression of immense bewilderment.

"Let's have that again?" she giggled.

I inhaled deeply enough to get slightly dizzy with the intake of oxygen. "Here we go again," I thought tensely, "all my defensive resources gathering against the onslaught I knew was coming. If she doesn't recognize the instrument immediately, one of us is slipping."

I yanked the dust-sheet from the computer.

"I'm going to feed the contents of those books and more into the memory banks of this sensitive, superbly conceived and constructed instrument." My chin went a trifle higher. "In short, sister, I intend to transfer all known facts and theories and reasoning into this newly modified digital computer."

Recognition oozed over her face as she stared transfixed with happy derision at the bulk of the computer which had been disconnected and hidden from the world for a long, long time. But not long enough for her to forget what it *had* been when I originally built it.

"Ooh, I know *that* crazy gismo!" she trilled. "Sure! *That's* the nutty *thingamuhcallit* you were so positive was going to make us wealthy beyond our wildest dreams because it would be able to *analyze* the future! Or *something* like that!"

I nodded grimly, pouring scalding-hot coffee down a throat constricted with humiliation. "Go ahead," I thought glumly. "Go ahead and get every last grain of salt into the wound! Really squeeze it for all it's worth. Have a ball!"

She spewed merry laughter all over me, the books, and the computer. "Oh, I never thought you'd *ever* have the gall to bring that costly flop out of hiding!"

"It's not the same instrument," I murmured softly. "Not the *same* at all. Been modified. Brought up to date. Completely

redesigned, except for the housing, to do something entirely different. Something practical. Functional. *Patriotic* even."

"Oh, *go ahead* and make it clack out that wonderful 'Cross my palm with silver line!' Please make it do that again! The last time I laughed until I thought I'd split! All that hokey science talk—about a gadget that turned out to be nothing more than a greedy, metal Gypsy fortune-teller!"

Bile rose to meet the descending scorch of the coffee. I swallowed with difficulty. "It simply can't *do* that again!" I desperately assured her. "The whole computer has been revamped and rewired. Wholly new circuits. Integrated circuits that give it a brand new purpose. A *splendid* function that—scoff if you like—could just very well make me a most wealthy man, at least, and possibly even save the country from a generation of imbeciles, cretins and savages!"

"Huh?"

I patted the dully gleaming casing of the computer fondly. "UNiversity, here, will replace all archaic notions of formal education."

"Uni-what?"

"UNiversity. That's its name and its purpose! To be a complete university! Why, the impact of this advance in the



"What are they—dirty novels?" she asked, as the stack began to waver.

educational field will probably be felt around the globe!"

"Eh?"

"Certainly! By merely replacing the old fashioned college campus—that has proved to be so terribly vulnerable to student violence—UNiversity will enable serious, ambitious students to achieve a full and enriched formal education without being subjected to the vagaries and disruptions currently found on university campuses everywhere!"

"Wait a minute!" she protested, jerking a thumb at the computer. "Are you trying to tell me that this reformed gypsy is going to dispense education?"

Head held high, nostrils flared with pride, I looked down my nose at her, but smilingly, and I accorded her a brief nod. A firm, confident nod.

"How?" she demanded.

"Simplicity itself! Once I demonstrate this prototype model to colleges and universities—showing how the best minds of all eras have been locked within its memory banks, how every possible subject is completely recorded, how the arts, the sciences, business, the humanities and even theoretical research in every imaginable field have been captured, needing only selective operation to deliver as fine an education as has ever been available anywhere—those higher institutions of learning will *beg* to buy them in carload lots. Educational history will be made! The serious students will be assigned one instrument to an individual or perhaps even a small class. No longer will there be a need for huge campuses, expensive buildings and the fantastic overhead necessary to maintaining a full university!"

"You gonna give 'em away?"

A sly smile played about my mouth which had gone thin-lipped with resolution. "Absolutely not. I'll lease hundreds of thousands of Universities. Oh, the jolly profits will flood in! I'll be a multimillionaire many times over!" I tweaked her cheek roguishly. "I may even spend a few dollars on you!"

"Where's all these millions coming from?"

I shook my head sadly at her. "Don't you know that almost every university in the country receives Federal aid as well as state and private funds? No need to worry about the *money*! It'll pour into

the coffers of Universities, Unlimited in torrents of fat, lovely sums. I may even have to buy one of the smaller foreign countries for a tax write-off!" I yawned elaborately. "Why, there will probably be millions in gratitude gifts from the parents of University-taught pupils who have saved considerable sums of money by not having their children write asking for money from distant campuses!"

"How do you figure that?"

"Easy. University can be installed and operated just as efficiently in the home as anywhere else." I assumed a humble posture. "Think of all the innocent youth who will be spared the riotous living and sinful ways of dwelling far from their native hearths. Yes, I can see a definite moral fiber in this plan. The world will eventually get around to bestowing its honors upon University and me for bringing back a stout moral tenor to its precious younger generations."

She stared hard at me. "You really believe all this guff you been handing me?"

I cleared my throat, ignoring the jibe. "You'll have to excuse me now. I must contact all of the electronics schools and institutes, and the trade schools, of course. Mustn't delete *any* form of knowledge once I begin programming it into the instrument. I may even include some frivolities for comic relief. Just for *balance*, you understand!"

"Yeah," she yawned, heading for the doorway. "I *knew* you'd dream up an excuse to read a few issues of "MAD" into that screwy machine!"

"Not a bit," I retorted, drawing myself up with frosty dignity. "Actually, I was thinking of something with *more* humor—such as the *Congressional Record* or the minutes from a few meetings of the D.A.R. This is a *class* operation, y'know!"

"Puns yet!" she wailed, departing swiftly.

The months that followed were exhausting ones as I proceeded to work my way methodically through subject after subject—basing my programming upon standard college texts—until I'd concisely read hundreds of books, pamphlets, essays and technical papers aloud into University who smoothly filed all the material away into its memory banks, diverting it according to classification with my help at the master control panel.

Finally, I realized this was a somewhat larger task than I had originally estimated. Even so, I figured it was about time to make a demanding test of UNIVERSITY—to find out if it could indeed give information—both literally and analytically—when selected playbacks were delved from its memory banks. This being a rather awesome moment, I felt the need for company, graciously inviting Friend Wife to be a witness at the first lectures and seminars delivered by my brainchild.

"Well, this is it!" I announced in a voice hoarse and thickened from hours of reading educational facts into the computer aloud. "How would you like the honor of selecting a test subject?"

"It ain't gonna work anyways," she stated sourly. "None of your gadgets do what they're supposed to do. So I guess it don't matter what I pick, huh?"

I favored her with a tired, condescending smile that made a shambles of her jibe.

"Just choose a subject—any subject," I suggested patiently. "Never mind all the sunshiny thoughts and utterly blind faith in my meager genius."

She thought intensely, her face working with the effort of her mental straining. "Okay, have it tell me all about Mars!"

"The mythological god or the planet?"

"Huh?"

"Let it pass. I assume you mean the planet Mars."

"That's what I said!"

I sighed. "So you did, and that's what you shall have—a comprehensive lecture upon every known aspect of that red and mysterious planet!" Deftly making a few simple adjustments upon the Master Control Panel, UNIVERSITY glowed into activity—muted bleepings, minor clickings and sequences of flashing lights indicating that the instrument was ready to function.

"How come it ain't going *clack-clack-clack* and popping out those little pieces of paper?" she asked, nervously stepping back from the light patterns now sparkling madly across the computer's traceboard. "It looks like it's gonna blow-up!"

"Relax. This baby is a far cry indeed from that admittedly crude and ineffectual item that preceded it." I peered intently at the Control Panel, making sev-

eral more corrections with the cold mien of the true scientist, murmuring incoherently to myself for added dramatic impact. "Actually, UNIVERSITY not only absorbs facts but has been designed to draw *meaningful conclusions* from all programmed data. Additionally, UNIVERSITY can recognize human voice patterns."

"Why?"

"Well, each of the kids has a differing mental capacity. I figured if UNIVERSITY could instantly recognize each kid by his



"Listen!" I roared. "I demand that you select college level delivery of data pertaining to Mars!"

or her voice, it could immediately channel a vocabulary understandable to each child's mental-level—and I had the foresight to program all data in various age-range vocabularies which was a chore mildly comparable to inscribing a decade of income tax information on the head of a very small pin."

"Gee!" she said in an awed tone. "Then, this thingie is really pretty smart, huh?"

"Not really but almost."

"I AM READY," announced UNIVERSITY in a cultured tone with undeniably refined accents. "KINDLY GIVE YOUR CHRONOLOGICAL AGE AND PRESENT GRADE IN SCHOOL."

"Holy Solid State!" whispered Friend Wife. "It talks real *classy* yet!"

"Odd," I muttered. "Doesn't sound like me but I distinctly recall—oh, well, per-

haps I'm too tired to recognize my own recorded voice. Possibly some of that economy priced tape accounts for the tonal difference."

"Go ahead—talk *back* to it!" she urged delightedly.

"My age is forty-five. I no longer attend any institution of learning, having completed—"

"SUBJECT DESIRED?" invited UNiVersity smoothly.

"Uh—the planet Mars," I stated.

"MARS IS A PLANET. MARS IS IN SPACE. SEE THE PRETTY RED PLANET IN SPACE. SEE THE PRETTY RED PLANET IN ORBIT! ORBIT, MARS, ORBIT!"

There was a terrible moment of silence.

"What the old hell is *happening* here?" I croaked, frantically checking everything and finding nothing wrong. "I just cannot understand—"

"I *knew* it!" she howled merrily. "I just *knew* that crazy pile of blabber-mouthy parts would *hassle* you! Oh, this is marvy! Your brain of a machine reading primer-level facts to you!"

"MARS IS FAR, FAR AWAY," droned UNiVersity in clipped precision. "MARS IS TOO FAR, FAR—"

I snapped a recycling-switch, cutting into the taped dissertation and bringing the instrument back to "Initial Communication."

"KINDLY GIVE YOUR CHRONOLOGICAL AGE AND—"

"Listen!" I roared. "I demand that you select college level delivery of data pertaining to Mars! I may be only a high school graduate but I read a lot and I've programmed enough material into—"

"YOU DO NOT QUALIFY FOR COLLEGE-LEVEL DATA," it informed me flatly. "HOWEVER, A SUGGESTED ALTERNATIVE IS OBTAINING A MINIMUM OF FOUR YEARS AT ANY ACCREDITED—"

That's when I pulled the plug.

"Can't understand it!" I stared dazedly at my happily smirking wife. "I was so *careful*! Why, I even included each of the kids' voice-patterns and a plethora of essential statistics that should have prevented anything like *this* from—"

"I was sure *wrong* about this thinga-majig!" she yawped joyously.

"Wrong? In *what* way?"

"It can't be *all* bad," she gasped, between disgusting fits of vulgar laughter, "if it's *smarter* than *you*—and it is!"

She was still shrieking with nauseating hilarity when I sulked away to consult a dictionary. I doubted that I would find the word 'overteach' in it, having just contributed that nefarious term to the English language in the form of an academically snobbish computer. But I thought I'd look anyway. -50-

NASA TO LAUNCH AUSTRALIS-OSCAR 5

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), in a letter to the Radio Amateur Satellite Corporation (AMSAT), has agreed to launch the Australis OSCAR-A satellite as a secondary payload on the TIROS-M mission scheduled for January 9, 1970. The amateur satellite will be ejected into orbit from the second-stage engine compartment of the Thor-Delta launch vehicle in the same manner as previous Delta secondary payloads have been launched.

The planned orbit will be nearly polar at an inclination of 101.56 degrees to the earth's equator, at an altitude of approximately 790 nautical miles (910 statute miles). This will result in an orbital period of about 114 minutes.

Australis OSCAR-A, which is to be known as Australis-OSCAR 5 once it is in orbit, is a 12" x 17" x 6", 39-pound spacecraft constructed by a group of

amateur radio operators at Melbourne University in Australia.

This will be the first launch for AMSAT, which was formed in March 1969 to foster radio amateur participation in space search projects. AMSAT is preparing the satellite for launch, performing the necessary tests for proper functioning, conducting liaison with NASA and assisting in the collection of data.

Australis-OSCAR 5 will transmit at 29.45 MHz in the 10-meter band and at 144.05 MHz in the two-meter band. A transmitting life of about 2 months is expected from the 20 pounds of batteries which the satellite carries. This lifetime is based on continuous operation of the 2-meter transmitter and weekend operation of the somewhat higher power 10-meter transmitter. The latter can be turned on and off by commands from the earth.