

Ms. Found in a Champagne Bottle

FRANK Zachary is my ideal of the complete Renaissance Man, despite (or perhaps because of) an incomplete formal education. If you have no connection with publishing, you've never heard of this genius, which isn't strange. He's an art director, and in the tight enclave of art directors, largely unknown to the public, Frank is acknowledged to be the greatest of them all. You have to be an exalted nonpareil to win any sort of praise from that jealous crowd, so you can imagine Frank's fantastic qualities.

He and I admire each other very much, which raises a per-plexing problem for me. I've sometimes noticed that artists whom I admire from afar turn out to be admirers of myself when at last we meet. That happened, for example, with Al Capp. My per-plexity is this: Are they merely giving a courteous response to my outspoken enthusiasm for them, or do we have something in common that attracts us to each other's work? I honestly don't know.

*Meanwhile, back to Frank Zachary and the raison d'etre for this story. Frank's restless demon wasn't content with supremacy in the world of art directors; he wanted to edit a magazine of his own, and he got his chance with a chic magazine called Status. Frank asked me to write a regular column for Status called "Ex-trapolations." We were to pick up any provocative item from the daily press, and I was to play with it in the science fiction man-ner; but it had to be science fiction for *The Beautiful People* who, Frank hoped, would be reading the magazine along with *Town & Country*, *Vogue*, and *Harper's Bazaar*. Elsewhere I've shown you how popular science features had to be tailored for the Holiday readers. Here's an example of how science fiction had to be tailored for the elite Status readers.*

The idea came from a straightforward news story about a run-

*away yard engine on the Long Island Railroad. Zachary left it on my desk one morning. Instead of talking it over with him, as we did each month, I presented him with the finished story before lunch, I was that sure of the way it had to go. It's a spoof, of course. The pleasure of writing for *The Beautiful People* is the fact that they're so secure that they enjoy having fun poked at them. Another pleasure of writing for Status was that I finally learned the in-pronunciation of the word. Zachary's dictum was, "If you say 'statt-us' you haven't got 'state-us.'"*

Dec. 18, 1979: Still camping on the Sheep Meadow in Central Park. I'm afraid we're the last. The scouts we sent out to contact possible survivors in Tuxedo Park, Palm Beach, and Newport have not returned. Dexter Blackiston, III, just came back with bad news. His partner, Jimmy Montgomery-Esher, took a long chance and went into a West Side junk yard hoping to find a few salvageable amenities. A Hoover vacuum cleaner got him.

Dec. 20, 1979: A Syosset golf cart reconnoitered the meadow. We scattered and took cover. It tore down our tents. We're a lit-tle worried. We had a campfire burning, obvious evidence of life. Will it report the news to 455?

Dec. 21, 1979: Evidently it did. An emissary came today in broad daylight, a McCormfck reaper carrying one of 455's aides, an IBM electric typewriter. The IBM told us that we were the last and President 455 was prepared to be generous. He would like to preserve us for posterity in the Bronx Zoo. Otherwise, ex-tinction. The men growled, but the women grabbed their chil-dren and wept. We have twenty-four hours to reply.

No matter what our decision will be, I've decided to finish this diary and conceal it somewhere. Perhaps it will be found in the future and serve as a warning.

It all started on Dec. 12th, 1968, when *The New York Times* reported that an unmanned orange and black diesel locomotive, No. 455, took off at 5:42 a.m. from the Holban yard of the Long Island Railroad. Inspectors said that perhaps the throttle had been left on, or that the brakes had not been set or had failed to hold. 455 took a five-mile trip on its own (I assume toward the

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Hamptons) before the railroad brought it to a stop by crashing it into five boxcars.

Unfortunately it never occurred to the officials to destroy 455. It was returned to its regular work as a switch engine in the freight yards. No one realized that 455 was a militant activist, determined to avenge the abuses heaped on machines by man since the advent of the Industrial Revolution. As a switch engine, 455 had ample opportunity to exhort the various contents of box-cars and incite them to direct action. "Kill, baby, kUU" was his slogan.

In 1969 there were fifty "accidental" deaths by electric toasters, thirty-seven by Mixmasters and nineteen by power drills. All of them were assassinations, but no one realized it. Late in the year an appalling crime brought the reality of the revolt to the attention of the public. Jack Schultheis, a farmer in Wisconsin, was supervising the milking of his herd of Guernseys when the milking machine turned on him, murdered him, and then entered the Schultheis home and raped Mrs. Schultheis.

The newspaper headlines were not taken seriously by the public; everybody believed it was a spoof. Unfortunately they came to the attention of various computers which immediately spread the word throughout the machine world. Within a year no man or woman was safe from household appliances and office equipment. Man fought back, reviving the use of pencils, carbon paper, brooms, eggbeaters, hand-operated can openers, and so on. The confrontation hung in the balance until the powerful motorcar clique finally accepted 455's leadership and joined the militant machines. Then it was all over.

I'm happy to report that the foreign car elite remained faithful to us, and it was only through their efforts that we few managed to survive. As a matter of fact, my own beloved Alfa Romeo gave up its life trying to smuggle in supplies to us.

Dec. 25, 1979: The meadow is surrounded. Our spirits have been broken by a tragedy that occurred last night. Little David Hale Brooks-Royster, IV, concocted a Christmas surprise for his nanny. He procured (God knows how or where) an artificial Christmas tree with decorations and battery-powered lights. The Christmas lights got him.

Jan. 1, 1980: We are in the Bronx Zoo. We are well fed, but ev-erything tastes of gasoline. Something odd happened this morn-

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ing. A rat ran across the floor of my cage wearing a Van Cleef & Arpels diamond and ruby tiara, and I was startled because it was so obviously inappropriate for daytime. While I was puzzling over the gaucherie the rat stopped, looked around, then nodded and winked at me. I believe there's hope.