

## THE MAN FROM THE FUTURE

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The midget put on a very good performance

HE WAS obviously a dwarf but not exactly the kind that circuses and midget shows want. You see, he wasn't a perfect miniature because his head was as large as a full grown man's even though the whole of him only came up to our belt lines. There he stood by the door of the subway express looking more or less disinterestedly through the glass pane of the window at the local stations speeding by.

Jack and I were hanging on to a stanchion because the car was crowded. I was the first to notice him because I was facing Jack and the dwarf was just behind him. Jack glanced around when I nudged and took him in without being rude enough to stare too blatantly.

Having just come from a meeting of our science-fiction club out in Brooklyn, we still had all sorts of fantastic ideas on our minds. A science-fiction club, in case you're not familiar with one, is a group of young fellows who read the sciencefiction magazines regularly, sometimes collect them, and like to meet once in a while to talk over the various ideas presented in them--like interplanetary flight, Martians, time travel and so forth.

It was not unnatural therefore that upon seeing this little man we should start to invent fantastic explanations for him. Of course we didn't believe them but it tickled us to whisper to each other that maybe the little man with the big head was a Martian going about the city dressed in business clothes and hoping people would mistake him for a circus dwarf or something. Jack said that he couldn't be a Martian because everyone knew that Martians were at least eight feet tall and had barrel chests. So then I suggested that he might be a man from the future because everybody knows that men from the future will have very small bodies and big heads to hold their big brains in.

"As a matter of fact," I whispered to Jack as we were passing De Kalb Avenue, "he could play the part to perfection. His face is sort of odd. His nose is flat and pudgy, his features small, and his brow does seem to bulge over his eyes." Jack stole another look at him and nodded but added, "But he has hair on his head and in the future everyone will be bald."

That was true of course but then we were only making believe. The dwarf had a fair crop of wiry black hair even though there was a little bald spot towards the back. I noticed too that his skin was sort of darker than the average and wondered if he could have a touch of Negroid in him.

I think that we both got the bright idea at the same time. There was a big national convention of sciencefiction readers coming off in two weeks in New York. Why not engage the little man, if he was available of course, and have him come to the convention dressed as a man from the future? We could fool a lot of people, get some newspaper publicity from it, and it would help out the entertainment committee no end. We fellows who lived in New York naturally had the organization of the convention on our hands and we had to keep thinking about what could be done.

It was a great idea; we could have odd clothes made for the dwarf to wear, and

write him a script in the best science-fiction style to read.

Jack was always the more forward of the two of us and he approached the dwarf with a casual comment. I was a bit leery of that part for these midgets are often inclined to be very touchy about their heights and to take offense.

However the dwarf took it in good spirit and proved to be quite amiable.

It turned out that he was not a circus actor at all. He didn't work for a living because he would have had difficulty getting jobs outside of freak shows, and he didn't have to work, fortunately, because he had a small inherited income. Or so he said.

He had a sense of humor anyway and saw the fun in the idea of attending the convention as a man from the future. He waved aside queries as to how much we would have to pay him as he said he would enjoy the stunt himself.

We met him a couple of times during the next two weeks at my place. He preferred that we didn't visit him and we didn't. He turned out to be quite an interesting conversationalist and had a number of odd ideas on things. We fitted him up with an outlandish costume for the part which we modeled from some of the illustrations from fantastic stories. A vividly colored shirt with a bright purple cape dropping from the shoulders, green shorts, yellow leggings. He supplied an oddly designed pair of slippers himself and we topped it off with a wide metal studded belt.

THE CONVENTION met in a hall in Manhattan and was quite a success. About three hundred people from California, Texas and other far away states had traveled all the way across the continent to attend.

The regular business of the convention had been disposed of and we introduced the star visitor, our "Man from the Future."

The dwarf played his part to perfection. He strode on to the dais with perfect ease and looked great. His normal sized head really looked quite gigantic in comparison with his stunted body and we had emphasized his brow with a metallic helmet. He had clipped a number of things to the trick belt, a couple of dials, a leather pouch, and a couple of tubes which I supposed were chrome flashlights he might have bought in the five-and-ten.

He started his little talk nicely. The audience was quite spell-bound, he really looked the part you know. And with that helmet, you couldn't see that he wasn't bald as a real man from the future ought to be.

Anyway he was getting along famously, following our script closely, telling how he had come back from the future in his time machine to investigate the Twentieth Century for the historians of his day.

Then one of those nuisances from the science-fiction club that meets in the Bronx recovered his breath and started to heckle. Just for explanation, I might say that our clubs are sort of rivals, friendly-like, but rivals. They had a movie they made themselves and were going to project and they were afraid our Man from the Future would prove to be the more memorable attraction.

Anyway this chap over in the Bronx section near the back of the hall kept calling out annoying questions and trying to confuse our dwarf. I could see that the dwarf wasn't taking this very well for he was getting a bit mixed up and was looking quite angrily in the direction of his persecutor.

Finally the heckler called out something about why don't you go back to Coney Island where you came from and that got the speaker rattled once too often.

The dwarf stopped, stared at the heckler from his raised dais, dramatically unhooked one of his flashlights and pointed it at the, source of annoyance. It was nicely acted and I was tickled he had such presence of mind. The dwarf

pressed the switch and an ordinary beam of white light, narrowed down to almost a pencil beam shone on the speaker. You couldn't see it very well in the afternoon light and it would have been more effective if there had been a green or red filter in it, but it seemed to have done the trick.

The heckler shut up and our Man from the Future finished his little talk.

The rest of the convention went off without any trouble. The dwarf left shortly after he had finished and didn't want to stay to see the movies. After the film we all left the hall for a buffet supper downstairs in the building and we didn't have occasion to go back.

That's all I know about the affair. We had a good time, everybody thought that the Man from the Future had put on a good act and had been very clever in using that ray trick to shut up the heckler. That is everyone thought so but the police when the caretaker discovered the body after the week-end lying in the hall crusted with green and blue spots. The police are still looking for that dwarf and that trick flashlight.

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