

Here is an absorbing speculation, on the borderline between fact and fiction. It isn't "true", because the evidence remains insufficient; on the other hand, we cannot be sure that it is "false", either, as yet...

WHAT DO people want when they read science-fiction? I write this as science-fiction, but what if it is the truth? We might not want to hear about the truth. I'll tell you a story then.

But first, a question. Have you ever had a prediction dream? I've had one. It was nothing, just a filthy bit of gossip about a Hollywood star. Even in the dream I was sorry for that star that he was exposed to such talk.

And the next day I was told the gossip by a masseuse in a bus.

I'm a rational person, perhaps ex-ceptionally rational. I know my own mind, and its interests and escapes, and when I woke up from that dream I knew it was nothing of mine. Just to be sure, I checked, sitting there on the edge of my bed for a brief interval of concentrated self-scepticism, but I could find no history of delving into movie magazines, no hidden lewd in-terest in the love-lives of movie stars, only a genuine concern to leave the poor bedeviled creatures alone to a bit of privacy, at least from this par-ticle of their audience. I made a note that this was something unexplained, to be investigated again.

And the next day, as I have said, I fell into a conversation with this hearty, well-painted woman on a long bus ride to New York, and she told me anecdotes about having recently worked as a masseuse in Hollywood. I changed the subject uneasily, intro-ducing the fact that I was a writer to create a diversion. The response was the usual one. Everyone seems to be a writer at heart. She immediately pulled a sheaf of poems out of her purse and set me to reading them. They were honest and sensitive, but marred by a scattering of second hand purple cliches, so obviously out of con-text that they could easily have been removed. I tried to point them out, but she was so distraught with mater-nal anxiety over her creations that I could only compliment and reassure her, and let well enough alone, for it was surprising enough that such healthy brutality as hers could have produced the degree of sensitivity the poems contained.

We were approaching the terminal, but she went back to her inside gossip from her recent work in Hollywood, and now I saw the nasty item coming with a sinking of the heart, and tried to fend it off and interrupt again; she told me, anyhow, with a certain stubbornness and urgency in the set of her broad jaw.

I suppose she had to tell me. It was written, as the Mohammedans say, for otherwise I would have had noth-ing to have dreamed about already, and would have been in one of those insane time-paradoxes in which the effect destroys its cause that our science-fiction writers so delight in writing.

THAT PART was truth, and nothing to disturb you, for most of you have had prediction dreams, even if just about the death of Aunt Ella. They are a part of living, and seem nothing to be disturbed about; for anything which so persistently connects itself with Aunt Ella must be as harmless and futile as she. Even spiritualism, with its chilling implications of haunts and powers beyond life, long ago succumbed to the dusty sweet boredom of Grandma's parlor; for when the knocks are deciphered or the slate written on by the unseen is opened, it turns out to be Uncle Ben, who was a great bore in life, is now being a great bore in death, telling us he is "soo happy, soo happy" and he sounds futile and childish and soul-stunted, just as before.

So, reading Doctor Rhine's careful experiments in which he establishes the reality and universality of telepathy, you probably picture him, as I do—high-collared, bachelorish, and very bachelorish, and very like Aunt Ella.

And I read John Dunne's *Experiment With Time* in which he establishes that almost a third or more of our dreaming is random scrambled prediction, which we don't notice—because our futures are on the whole too uninteresting, and too much like our past for the difference to attract any attention on waking. To me, even his clear careful approach seems naive and childishly direct, although I couldn't say why; there is no question for me of the validity of his conclusions.

Before the delayed approach of careful science the subject of psi, telepathy, clairvoyance, ghosts, astral forms, precognition, and other such inexplicables seemed to attract only the childish and demented among us. Or perhaps it cast a blight of childishness upon those who approached it, for even the best investigators seemed to have found only their own hidden psychosis and a well of credulity. The subject traditionally has been so infected with nonsense that the very existence of psi powers came to seem an incompetent hoax.

Perhaps—Well, have you ever read Kafka's *Investigations of a Dog*? We come to my story.

I couldn't find any of the books I had come for in the public library at Red Bank, and after searching for something of general interest I finally drew out a book on calculus; something called *The Thinking Body* which I thought might cover the same ground in endocrinology as Cannon's *Wisdom of the Body*—which I had wanted; and a book on telepathy as my third...

Settled into an easy chair at home, I put aside the calculus with pious resolve to study it later, discovered *The Thinking Body* was a book on posture, and turned to the book on telepathy*.

(*Whately Carington, *THOUGHT TRANS-FERENCE*, Creative Age Press, 1946) I opened at the back chapters and read a few paragraphs of his conclusions to see if he were a crackpot. The conclusions were fantastic, but the writer, Whately Carington, handled words with the sensitive logic of a post-semantic; the contradiction was disturbing. I read further. Some religious fanatic had scrawled exhortations to prayer all over the margins, and repeatedly underlined random words, but it did not disturb the calm of the strange and appealing conclusions.

I began at the beginning of the book and checked his experiments. They seemed valid; his conclusions seemed conservative.

Experimentally he had found that when two or more people concentrate on one idea, the transfer of a second idea from one to the others is made easier—as if, by thinking of the first and second idea together, the first person had associated them not only in his own subconscious, but in the other people's subconscious also—as if thought transference were via associative linkages through a shared subconscious. The same amount of contact as is in two schizoid "minds" sharing the same brain on a psychiatrist's couch, minds held apart from unity of thought by two strongly divergent personality patterns. This opens a possibility that our ego-selves are schizoid subgroups in a larger mind, held apart by the alienation of divergent body-patterns and environment.

AFTER HAVING mentioned this, Carington abandoned it, acting on the pragmatic principle of using the minimum number of ideas possible in a hypothesis.

He returned to the statement that ideas form associative linkages. Since the effect is indifferent to distance, he concluded it is an effect not traceable in brain-structure, which operates in a three-dimensional world where all affects are most definitely a function of distance. The "ideas" then are not the physical dendrite linkages we mean when we normally say the word, although they seem the same.

Assuming that they are tenacious somethings in something, groupable by personality-patterns and thought-activity—but definitely not dependent on the physical brain as a trace—he extended logic into regions of good cheer by postulating that, on the death of the brain, this other imagination--thought-memory system (so like ourselves with our eyes closed) will go on, in vivid contact with the equivalent thinking-systems of anyone, living or dead, whose thoughts happen to run in the same channels as one's own on any subject, with the ideas held in common being the bridge-points of contact. This would be a friendly association by congeniality, perhaps forming a mesh of new linkages from mind to congenial mind, which would end with absorption into a slow-growing federated mind; and this

possible Inclusive mind, though including very human traits from all the assorted humanity who have lived and died, could very well be called a co-evolving "God."

This was a pleasing theory to me, for if I ever had to choose among religions I would unhesitatingly have chosen the Brahmist-Transcendentalist-Mystic group as representing the theory least insulting to reason, and most conducive to peace of mind.

But again the book seemed a simple-hearted performance, and incomplete. There was none of what Emerson called the "tragic sense," or a feeling of contact with a wider, more frightening reality than the comfort of a fireside at home. Englishmen write like that; one can always feel the tweed of their sleeves brushing the paper, the human warmth of the hand holding the pen, and know that supper will be ready in a few minutes. It is very real, but they live in a garden where the cat is not allowed to eat the birds, the view of the hills is walled off by a hedge, and all nature is orderly and reliable.

Should I say, then, that Whately Carington's approach was logical, but it did not go far enough to please me? It seemed to imply that there was nothing very startling beyond the safe garden-limits of its thought; and in following the trail further, all hypotheses would be equally orderly and domesticated.

What is important here is that, having constructed his comfortable club-room paradise of congenial conversation, he closed his book and left his tools lying in my mind. A challenge to seek the danger and reality I felt he had overlooked.

The semantic tool is a violin to play the sheet-music of life. You may pick up any melodic thread from the tremendously-orchestrated score and follow it, aware always that what you play is not the full truth, that a violin is not an orchestra. The magnificent pattern of the symphony is something the imagination cannot contain, but you dimly feel how much is not being played, for our bodies exist in that total symphony and are battered by it on the level of non-thought. It cannot reach our minds.

BEFORE this time I had recognized that there was danger in psi, and ignored its challenge, prudently leaving the question to be settled by others, yet inserting the thought of it as a silent question, an alertness far down in the body on the silent levels to screen all incoming data for para-normal traces.

The question was linked to consciousness again by the reading of the book and the challenge of its incompleteness—linked too close to the place where the violin had been laid aside. How far should an analogy be followed? This was more than violins, and less, too, for anyone who knows what music can be. There was a counterpoint of logic from the pattern of the book, and a gathering feeling that the screening question had recognized enough paranormal traces to know the special taste and flavor of psi. Enough for control?

I was writing a letter and said things I know now were a last attempt to restrain myself from what I was about to do. I marshalled all the old good arguments about its danger—ideas I had used in a story years ago, presenting them as if they were new.

The fact that it is now operating far down in the subconscious, on a completely uncontrolled, non-volitional level, shows first that it is so damned easy that we can do it by accident—without the faintest idea how, or why—and without the slightest effort. It shows, secondly, that there is some very good reason why it is down there where we can't use it. Anyone who has fooled with auto-suggestion knows well that one of the easiest tricks in the book is the bringing of a low-level activity to consciousness.

The most probable reason why it is not done is *because we don't want to*. In other words, there is some good reason why; we learned the reason so fast and hard after birth that it is buried in our past, and, continuous effort to *prevent* psi is too deeply-learned to reach consciousness—any more than we are aware that our habitual skilled effort to balance properly as we walk is sustained and driven by a memory of the early pains of falling.

Unconsciously, then, we avoid telepathy as much as possible. However, it cannot be totally avoided; apparently a steady trickle seeps in on the lower unconscious-levels. This trickle is what shows in the positive results of e.s.p. experiments. In the people who score consistently wrong is

psi guessing tests, those who reliably score above chance in misses—it is obvious that their minds are able to discriminate between a guess that is sheer randomness, un-influenced by knowledge, and the trickle of psi data; subconsciously they react against even this harmless psi data of card-symbols with such fear and aversion that it is deliberately re-versed and falsified before it is allowed to pass.

Why?

I come to my preliminary conclusions: It is dangerous.

There is probably little point in do-ing research on the subject. Psi is one of our natural faculties, so easy that it is impossible to suppress. When tele-pathy will be good for us, we will have it; we will have it without effort, full scale, including its effortless reach to the ends of the universe and its depth both ways in time.

Frankly I think that at this stage in our growth it would burn our brains out; I wouldn't want to fool with it myself.

I NEVER mailed that letter. I went on to more chatty subjects, then stopped and read back thoughtfully. It wasn't true; I was kidding myself. Curiosity is indifferent to caution, and the subsurface thinking which had gone on while I wrote had focused to one obvious experiment. I knew what I was going to do, and why.

The important point was that the psi powers might be held down by a pain-conditioned block. But any sort of conditioning can be voluntarily sus-pended by relaxing its associated muscle-set; and pain itself can be sus-pended in the same way.

(This trick is so well known it is even mentioned in the book on posture. The only reason it isn't practiced widely, I suppose, is that parents seem to delight in raising their children un-der the alternating "yes and no" con-ditioning—which is used in laborator-ies to make neurotics of experimental white mice—so that most of the popu-lation grows up half-wacked and too busy mind-muttering to learn their own internal keyboards. As soon as the culture straightens out some of its kinks, I expect they'll teach autoan-esthesia in 2 Hygiene, along with how to brush your teeth.)

Psi was probably held down by a pain-conditioned block. A conditioned block could be suspended.

It stopped being a casual thought. I got up from the desk where I was writing the letter, and considered. I could feel subconscious alertness on the subject; the screening question had alerted and integrated that class of sensation, so that it would be acces-sible to control. And it would be ap-proachable...

So I—

Maybe I shouldn't go on. There is a good commercial-type story at my el-bow, waiting to be finished; what comes next will be hard to explain...

Telepathy is untemporal. "Time" means no more to it than "space." A subject receiving thoughts is just as likely to take down the ones to be sent tomorrow as the ones which were sent yesterday, or the ones given at the moment of reception. The experiments which show this are logically and mathematically watertight. This is not a matter of calling yesterday's miss a bit because it accidentally struck to-day's subject. The subjects are highly unlikely to be struck at random, with a known and calculated unlikelihood; they are not known or chosen in ad-vance. The evidence is that ideas are "received" *before* they are "sent".

You may check this if you don't believe it. The fact remains that te-lepathy, which all possess, is a cogni-zance which wavers indiscriminately into the "past" and "future", as if the present moment were difficult to locate among the others—as if the difference between past, present, and future does not exist at all.

And dreams are untemporal...

These two low-level, involuntary activities of our minds somehow wander aimlessly outside of the bound-aries of "time"—without effort.

As if there *are* no boundaries...

How much of what we know is self-imposed illusion?

Standing there I looked at my watch; and while looking, I turned off all marginal thought, damping everything down to a relaxed blank-ness, a recording blankness, for I was going to remember this! I reached down into the psi-telepathy sector—and opened it up.

A blare of impressions came, like turning on the radio. Then it was more like *becoming* the radio, and becoming all the stations tuned into the radio. A lumpy concept.

THERE IS no time or space to the psi section of the mind. Can you visualize that? It is not a blankness: it means that the "You" diffuses to *include* all "time and space". It is all inside; it is you. Any moment, any place can be reached into, and touched. But the requirement of this diffusion is to think nothing, desire nothing; for thoughts are abstractive, and desire—being motive—must be local to a body. Omniscience held for a moment, and seemed natural; but some moments in time, some places in space seemed pretty rough. Suns for instance. A faint unease and an extra effort at non-reaction, as a guard against shocks, came; but the effort was a thought. Non-reaction, a thought...

Ideas held in common the bridge-points of contact...

I am seven years old, and lying on top of a bed in the beach cottage, fists propping chin, reading *Ozma of Oz*.

The unpainted wood wall before me is permeable; I could reach through it. I know that with a warm glow of magic certainty. I could reach through it if I wanted to. It would be like mist, and like crossing one's eyes in-side. I glance up at the rough wood, smiling, then suddenly lean on my book and cautiously reach out, closing my eyes with concentration. Out—further—further—Nope, touched it! Didn't manage that time. I glanced around guiltily, to make sure no one was there to see me, and go back to the story.

Another try. Simultaneously, full of determination and reluctance, I sit up in bed at night, sixteen years old. It is winter; this is the steam-heated house in Flushing that we live in winters when I go to school. Snow is falling outside.

"Give it just one try. No harm ex-perimenting,"—words muttered inside as placation to the sneering little god of society. Sit up now; eyes closed. Pretend this is the bed at the beach. Create the sound of the surf coming dimly over the sand hills, through the walls; create the feel of wooden walls around, shingles above. The light cord will be dangling just a little forward and above. Now, reach up, and out, and grasp it—

Fear, then relief as my hand closes on air. A few more grabs, secure now and safe, knowing that it won't be there. I can't reach through "time and space," or I won't. I drop back into bed and pull the covers up.

"Coward," say the thoughts. "That was no fair test. You didn't want it. It can't be done with a divided mind, even if it is possible."

"Can I make myself want it?"

"No. Forget it. Forget it." I lie staring into the dark, willing the com-fort of sleep to come.

"Try anything once," I mutter apologetically to the ugly little god of societies' judgments of such goings- ons. It sneers; I sneer back. I was an unlovely, timid, tongue-tied adolescent and that scene has an undertone of habitual misery and self-contempt which surprises me now.

I am fifteen, a year younger, and still habitually happy, sitting up sud-denly in bed at the beach with a sudden frightened urge to pull the light cord, turn on the light. I grope in the air. The cord is not where my hand is groping, and my heart con-tracts with shock. I wave my arm slowly in big sweeps until it intersects a string at the side of the bed, where it is this year. Next year it will be where I groped first. I pull it and the light comes on. And I look foggily around the familiar room with a vague feeling of oppression and unease. The room somehow looks unfamiliar and wrong, as if I had expected to see a different room. I reach for something to read, to dispell the feeling, but my mind is thickened with the vast still-ness of recent deep sleep; the words are meaningless, so I turn the light off and wait. The adrenalin wears off; the nervousness passes; and I sleep again.

I AM ONE year old, sitting in the grass under a tree, charmed by the existence and motion of everything. I am playing a game, reaching out for a tiny farmhouse in a valley that curves away before me. I reach out very stealthily, trying to keep it small, trying to grab it before it magically retreats and grows to a large building far away. It slips away as my hand approaches and I touch only air. I put my hands in my lap and pretend to be thinking of something else, wait-ing for the distant things to come close and small so I can try again. I am intensely excited and interested.

Around me in "time" the linked chain of other selves began to thicken, and beyond them were other lives be-ing lived—sunlight and storm; jungle; sand; day; night—Someone falling from a window, (not me, but it is as cold and despairing as the falling dream always is.) Someone going into a windowless grey dome under, a grey sky. (Where is this?)

Episodes on the edge of sleep and death, touching the psi boundaries. A man murdered, dying, trying to speak to a friend who has come into the off-ice and found him. It is intensely im-portant to speak, although the message is only a jaunty hello, and a smile—But everything is fading further away; it is like trying to call back up a tremendous distance to the dwin-dling figure on the office floor, the dis-tant form bending over him—the ef-fort of remembering how to move the distant cold lips—effort— That was probably the point of idea similarity that made the contact; for isolated from his dimming senses he reached sudden poised clarity, and stretched probes of alertness and sensitivity back over the thickening paths to the stiffening controls of his brain, *imagining* life into it with a last half-magical effort that touched the fringes of psi. He was trying to reverse "time" a little, and climb back up closer to the light and sound.

There was the experiment of being a man marooned out of his own civi-lization, trying to raise the one in which he found himself, and being attacked by a mob for his advanced opinions. I had already passed through a snatch of that in a dream long ago. It is not often that I am given a chance to absorb the feel of a charac-ter so fully human and so totally unlike myself. At the time, without both-ering to ask where or when, I had noted him down as a character for exploitation in a story. The story lies at my elbow now, having bounced at all markets, and is in the process of being rewritten. There is not much left of the original. A shy, with-drawing man with a touch of self-hatred when he was disliked, he react-ed with an uncharacteristic flash of resentment and some sudden random blows before they got him. Driving the blows was his sobbing bafflement at the uselessness of their murder, and, and a desire to be understood, to break through into their minds some-how and force logic on them. It reached such a burning intensity that the mood held after I had awakened from the dream-contact with it two years ago, and was bard to forget.

There was the experience of being a prematurely stuffy British Civil Ser-vant trying to smuggle himself across a border near Pakistan, enjoying the adventure, but feeling somewhat put upon because this was not in the nor-mal line of duty.

THERE WERE others. Each life at was as real as any life; each had its memories and sureness of self. Sun-light; storm; winter; jungle—every instant was separate and vivid on a knife-edge of "time". An older self flashed through and was gone. A de-tached psychologist somewhere in the future, for a moment wondered about the nature of reality, and thought-fully touched the time stream. As in all the others, the bridge-point of con-tact was the effort of mental stillness; a sense of near danger; controlled re-laxation; and a voluntary or involun-tary calling on the psi powers. But her spontaneous experiment was another and closer thought-linkage. Her mind was so much wider than mine that she could include it without a ripple; for a moment she did, then casually with-drew from contact again and went on to other thoughts.

There was too much that was inter-esting in that contact. The inward si-lence broke; irresistibly a

whisper of thought came. Thought. Each image in its chain of images became a bridge, and a link to the interior of a hundred other minds, each of them not stilled at the point of contact, but thinking. Thoughts. A tidal wave rose and swept in. Recording stopped. Each life was as real as any life; each had its own memories and sure-ness of self. The thread of identity was gone.

Centuries and generations, and behind them a vast shuttle weaving a pattern. These impressions are so nebulous that they might have been imagined, for it did not record. There is a blank in the memory, with only some dim intimations of experiment. Stop the wheel. Hold one idea one identity. It was an experiment with a touch of danger; an inexperienced fumbling for controls; a concentration on stillness. It was suddenly like another experiment far away. *The psi experiment of K.M.*

It flashed through vividly with some ideas and a touch of sensation, and I grabbed the mood and hung on, letting it pull me into the twenty-fifth year and the moment of the experiment.

Suddenly I was standing looking at a wristwatch on my arm. The wrist and hand looked oddly familiar, a distant echo of something I had known long ago. My senses grasped at the familiarity as though taking anchorage, rapidly assimilating to the memories of the moment before, until there was nothing else.

STILL hanging on to that one idea (psi-experiment ... psi-experiment...) I stood watching my wrist watch with careful fixity, urging it on to the next minute (experiment... experiment) until its ticking carried me past the point of contact.

While I waited, carefully not thinking, the protective wall of the inhibition against psi built up again to full strength. Psi was blocked off again.

The blocking mechanism went on to screen out all recent memories that could have led back to the point of contact, reclassified them as imagination-section of the mind where daytime logic does not tread, and only the safe, free non-reacting self of sleep can go.

"Neat trick," thought I, letting the make-believe go on its conclusion. And I considered the quick forgetting of dreams. Natural, or expedient? Everything was fine, plenty of good defense-mechanisms.

I sat down behind my desk again, then noticed something. My knees were weak, and I felt sick and shaken.

Why? How much had I just forgotten?

I explored back delicately. Something must have happened on the moment of entrance—when the recording began again for shock to have reached my physical self. I could find nothing; there was only the traces of un-recognized shock, and a persistently returning memory of a scene in Lovecraft's *Shadow Out Of Time*. It was the point the man scrambles up a labyrinth of underground corridors towards the surface, trying desperately for silence, terrified that the doors lining the walls of the corridors might open as he passes and the "nameless ones" emerge. A typical Lovecraft nightmare... I did not see the meaning of the clue, but I can guess at it now as I write.

Psi is repressed for some reason. Fears and worries and traumas and irrationality are repressed because of what they are; that puts them in an area very close to psi.

The ultimate horror for almost any person would be the sudden consciousness of the forgotten, repressed things in the dungeons of his own subconscious. They might be minor things in the cold light of reason, some of them (a child's misdeed; a fear that the house will fall, or burn; or that a snake will come from under the bed), but all have been forcibly forgotten, locked away in the dark, away from the light of logic and reason and maturity "forgotten"; left to swell and fester and join one another in monstrous growth.

As they grow, so grows the terror-driven strength of silent denial that holds shut the rusty iron door of their prison. The content of the subconscious, if approached rationally, might be harmless; but the terror which bars the door is not.

The peculiar power of psi is that it reinforces with other minds the thinking of any concept, and brings forth an endless array of experiences in other lives to make real the image of any happening that

may be imag-ined.

Consider, then, PSI linked even for an instant to the part of the mind where is hidden images of horror, fear, humiliation, guilt, madness.

Terror-driven flight up the long lab-yrinth corridors past the barred and rusty door that hold back the "name-less." "Nameless" because to think their name is to release them. To reach the top again might have in-volved forgotten failures and horror; to reach sanity again might have been a triumph of unthinking, forgetting, denying, below lying a hell boundless and subtle.

Did this happen? I don't know. To think of this explanation from a simple shock reaction and a persistent thought of a scene from *Shadow Out Of Time* is like reconstructing a bat-tle with a dragon from finding a sin-gle screen scale clutched in my hand.

But I would advise the next ex-perimenter to try it with euphoria drugs to keep the thought-trails away from fear.

It might work. It might not. But experiments will continue. I won't see the end of it. But I believe that some day the race will grow up enough to handle psi naturally, and learn to wander in the kingdom of no-bounda-ries.

This story is untrue, of course.

And my typewriter has jammed again. I'm afraid I'll have to take it apart. I'll be up all night finishing that commercial piece.

Go on; read the next story. Find out how Bat O'Hara rescued the green-eyed Martian princess.