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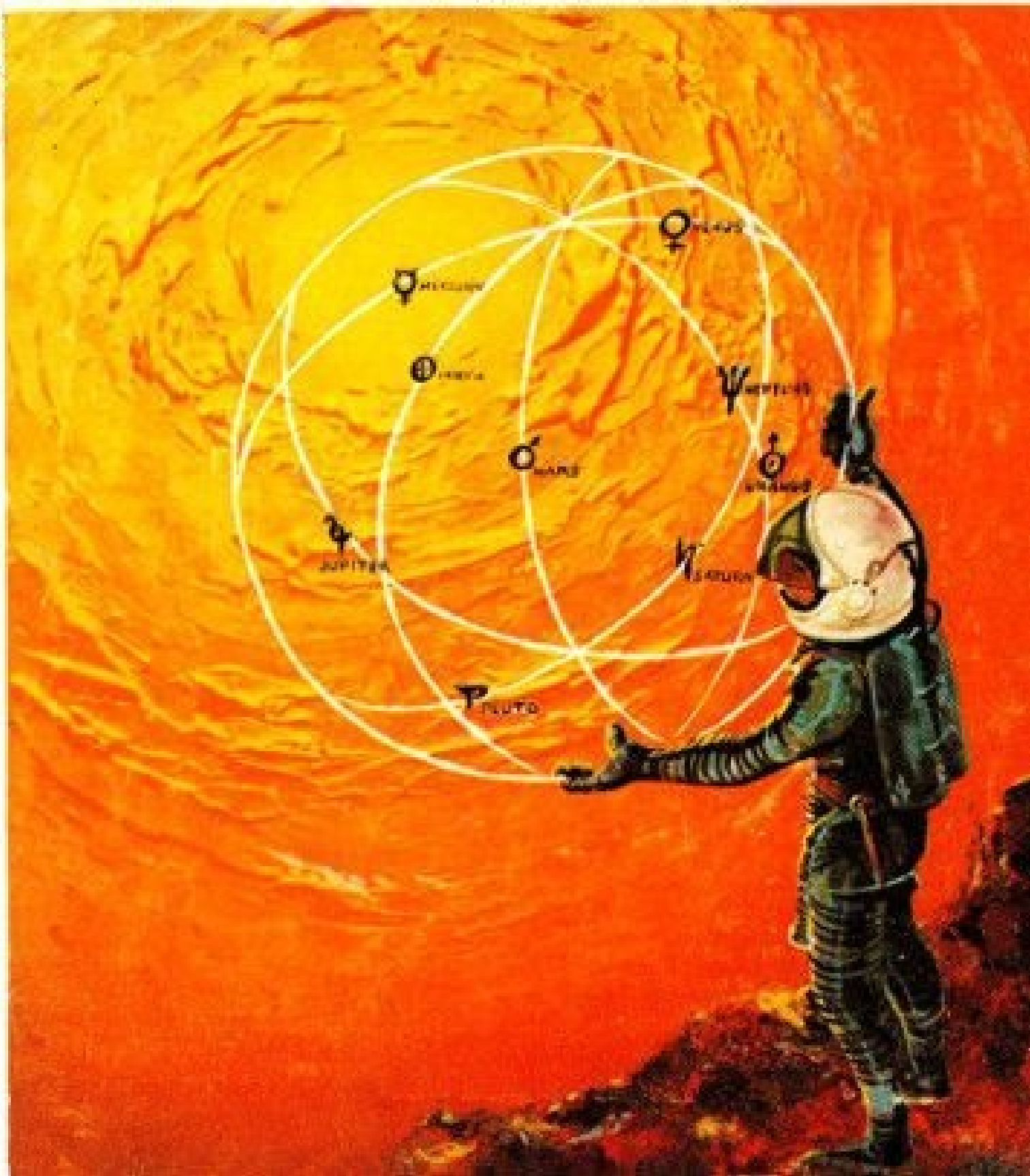
The Day After Doomsday

GREAT NEW NOVEL by POUL ANDERSON



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DECEMBER 1961

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Interstellar trouble-shooting is the easiest work there is. All you need is brains, energy—and a steno with nice legs!

Andrew Stephens was trying to think of two things at once, and it wasn't working out. An inspirational message (delivered by Crumbly, president of Planetary Promotions, Inc.) was mixing itself up in his mind with the probable difficulties of his first company assignment.

He hoped he was thinking, and not worrying. Crumbly said worry was fatal in the promotion business. It was fervor, not fret, Crumbly said, that had made Planetary Promotions, Inc., what it was today. And it was work, not worry, that would make it what it was destined to be tomorrow.

Andy Stephens stared at the farthest corner of his office (about four feet from his nose) and sighed. He didn't have a slogan in his body, let alone on (or off) the top of his head.

His assignment was an easy one, Crumbly had assured him. Planetary Promotions always started new men off with easy ones. Only fair.

Andy squared his narrowish shoulders in as close an imitation of Crumbly's desk-side manner as he could, and picked up the dope sheet.

It seemed there was a planet, Felix II, somewhere near the edge of nowhere. It wanted to join the Galactic Federation.

A laudable desire, Andy thought, but strictly a political matter, having nothing to do with Planetary Promotions, or Andrew Stephens.

However, it also seemed that a planet had to demonstrate that it would be contributing something to the Federation before it was allowed to join. In other words, Andy thought, you have to have something they want, or they won't let you in.

A buzzer squawked out of the dun-colored box on his desk. Andy jumped, and

flipped the lever.

"The bus to the port will be at the door in seven minutes," the grim voice of the Lower Office Co-ordinator told him. "A stenographer will meet you on the ship."

"Thank you, Miss Ellis," Andy said meekly. He stuffed the dope sheet into his jacket and left the Main Office for Felix II.

"Excuse me," said a feminine voice. "Are you with Planetary Promotions?"

Andy looked up. A sandy-haired girl with a passable figure and nice legs was looking down at him. "Yes," he said. "I'm Andy Stephens."

The girl looked relieved. "I'm Edith Featherpenny from the steno pool," she said. "I was afraid I wouldn't be able to find you."

"Sit down," Andy invited.

He moved, and Miss Featherpenny moved. Between them, they unsettled a large woman eating an orange. When the juice had been mopped up and the woman apologized to, Miss Featherpenny squeezed in beside Andy.

"Is that the information on the case?" She indicated the dope sheet crumpled under Andy's arm.

"Yes." Andy tried to pull it out. "Were you issued one?" He moved his elbow and tried again.

The orange woman glared at him.

Miss Featherpenny shook her head. "Miss Ellis told me you'd tell me everything I needed to know."

Andy felt obscurely flattered. "It doesn't look too promising," he admitted.

Miss Featherpenny glanced at the dope sheet and found a ray of hope. "The Federation only requires that the Felician exports are nearly as valuable as their imports," she pointed out. "'Nearly' is a nice vague, maneuverable word."

"But," said Andy, "if the Felicians can't think of anything to sell, how do they expect me to?"

"Maybe they're too isolated to know what's in demand," Miss Featherpenny comforted him. "It says they won't authorize ships to land on the planet except

by invitation."

"It might be isolation, I suppose," Andy doubted. He felt an urge to confide in Miss Featherpenny. She did, after all, look as if there might be something besides fluff in her head.

"Look," he said. "This is my first assignment, on my fourth job, on my second career. I've got to make good. My father is beginning to get impatient."

Miss Featherpenny's eyes grew softer. "Fathers are usually more patient than their children think," she encouraged.

"But," Andy added morosely, "I have a brother, a salesman with Universal Products. He keeps getting promoted, and I keep getting fired. Dad must be conscious of the contrast."

"Maybe," Miss Featherpenny suggested, "your brother's been lucky. You know, being assigned jobs that were easier than they sound."

Andy glanced at her to see if he was being humored. He decided he was not, or not much. "I've tried to believe that," he admitted. "Unfortunately, Lloyd keeps proving me wrong. He got his last promotion for selling fancy food products to the Mahridgians."

Miss Featherpenny had obviously never even heard of Mahridge.

"They have a strong taboo against eating," Andy explained. "They swallow concentrates to keep alive, but it's still not quite decent. On Mahridge, it's the dining room, not the bathroom, that has a door with a lock on it for privacy.

"Is he married?" asked Miss Featherpenny, who didn't intend to be a steno all her life. "I mean," she added quickly, "his wife would get anxious about his selling something like that, that could get him put in prison, or killed. How did he do it?"

There was a certain coolness in Andy's voice. "He took a lead from the dope peddlers. He converted the adolescent Mahridgians first. It's all right to eat on Mahridge now."

Miss Featherpenny diplomatized. "I don't think that's ethical. Convincing people to do what they think is wrong."

Andy was still suspicious. He said, "Ethical or not, he got the promotion."

They stood at the edge of the only launching pad on Felix II, and surveyed the landscape. Thirty feet away, there was a barnsized stone building with a weedy roof. Aside from some rounded blue hills in the distance, and a Felician leaning against the building, there was not much to detain the eye.

Miss Featherpenny giggled softly in surprise. "He looks like a leprechaun," she said. "The sheet didn't say that."

"Tourist trade," Andy breathed, his eyes gleaming with the solution of his problem.

Since the two-foot-tall welcoming committee showed no signs of moving, they started toward him.

"My name," Andy said in Galactic, "is Andrew Stephens. I'm here from Planetary Promotions."

"I know," the Felician muttered ungraciously. "I came out from town to meet you. My name is Blahrog. Who's this?"

"My steno, Miss Featherpenny."

"Urk." Obviously Blahrog had never heard the term "steno" and was interpreting it freely. "I'm in charge of our admission to the Federation. That means I'm in charge of you." He eyed Andy unenthusiastically. "You haven't had much experience with this kind of thing, have you?"

Andy had a wild rush of hope. If the Felician government rejected him as a representative, he could go home without a failure on his record, and pray for a simpler assignment. Even P. P. didn't consider an agent responsible for the unpredictable whims of aliens.

"No, I haven't," he replied cheerfully. "I was hoping maybe you had."

Miss Featherpenny, who hadn't read the contract, gasped.

Blahrog, who had read the contract, replied, "I haven't. Let's get on into town where we can discuss the possibilities in comfort."

They set out, walking unequally through the thick white dust that passed for paving on Felix II.

"Don't you use ground cars?" Miss Featherpenny choked at the end of the first half-mile.

"Don't have technology," Blahrog growled, stumping grimly along. "The

Everking has a car, but he doesn't use it much. No fuel."

As he walked, Andy composed a speech on the merits of the tourist business, to be delivered to the Everking.

Miss Featherpenny grew visibly more depressed with each mile. She uttered an involuntary cry when the guard of the city gate appeared with a slender mug in each hand.

"Felician ladies don't drink," Blahrog said gruffly.

"I can fetch you a glass of water," the guard offered, without enthusiasm.

"Thank you," said Miss Featherpenny, with an attempt at sincerity.

The contents of his mug made Andy choke. "Tastes something like cider," he gasped.

Blahrog downed his without a wink. "It's customary to give a guest a mug of Throatduster as a sign of gratitude because he walked so far in the dust."

"In this dust," Miss Featherpenny murmured to her second glass of water, "any distance is far."

"Thoughtful custom," Andy said quickly. "Could you export the beverage?"

"Sell Throatduster?" Blahrog was indignant. "It would be a breach of hospitality. Besides, Felix II can't produce enough second-rate stuff, let alone first-rate. Sometimes, in a bad year, we have to greet guests with water."

"What a pity," said Miss Featherpenny.

She became increasingly unsympathetic as Andy swallowed another Throatduster at the door of the Palace (a one-story building similar to a small barn), and yet another in the presence of the Everking (an eighteen-inch Felician with a beard-warmed paunch).

Andy watched the Everking dim and blur on his wooden throne. Swaying slightly, he muttered, "I wonder what proof this stuff is?"

"In short, Mr. Stephens," Blahrog was translating, "we cannot think of a single product which we could sell. Have you any immediate suggestions?"

Blahrog's expression indicated that he ought to say something, but Andy couldn't think of a thing, except that he didn't need any more Throatduster. "No," he said firmly, if faintly. "Thank you very much, but no." He passed out cold.

"I'm afraid the journey was too much for him," Miss Featherpenny put in.

"Ah, yes," Blahrog translated for the Everking. "Throatduster has that effect on some life forms. Perhaps he had better retire, and discuss the situation more fully tomorrow."

The Everking motioned to a pair of stout-looking guards (thirty inches tall, at least). They towed Miss Featherpenny's immediate superior out of the royal presence.

"They will show him to his room," Blahrog explained.

The Everking let loose a quick stream of Felician.

"Would you," Blahrog addressed Miss Featherpenny, "enjoy meeting my daughter? The Everking suggests it, since our affairs could hardly be of interest to you."

"I'd be very pleased." The words were not empty ones. Edith Featherpenny's education in coping with men had not extended to Felician males. Blahrog frightened her with a feeling of superior and incomprehensible intelligence.

Hrom, although seventeen inches tall and weighing perhaps eleven pounds, was definitely feminine and comprehensible.

"Why don't women drink Throatduster?" Miss Featherpenny asked, on the strength of a two-hour acquaintance.

"The men grow the grain here," Hrom explained, "and it's theirs as long as it's in the fields. However, we consider harvesting women's work. We also make the Throatduster. Then we sell it to the men. We don't drink because it is uneconomical."

"Does everyone grow his own grain?"

"Not any more. Town women have other sources of dress money. The custom started that way, that's all."

"If you'll forgive my saying so," Miss Featherpenny remarked, "that dress you

are wearing must have taken a big chunk out of your pocket."

Hrom sighed. "In my mother's time, I would have thought nothing of it. Now, one such gown is all I can afford."

"I would have thought your father was one of the wealthier men on Felix II," Miss Featherpenny remarked.

"He is *the* wealthiest," Hrom said. "The richest man is always Minister of Finance. It's only reasonable." Her tone changed. "We're all poor now, since the tourist industry failed. It took every dnot we had to pay for the contract."

Invisible antennae shot from Miss Featherpenny's forehead. "You must be quite sure that Planetary Promotions won't fail you." She tried her best to sound casual.

Hrom smiled faintly. "Have another of these seed cakes," she said.

"Thank you. They are delicious." Miss Featherpenny took one, regardless of calories. "Of course, there is the guarantee clause: 'Double your money back.'"

Hrom busily fluffed a cushion. "One must have some insurance," she said, having her turn at sounding casual. "Tell me, are they wearing large or small hats on Earth this season?"

Miss Featherpenny conceded defeat. "It's all bonnets for summer," she said.

Her first impulse was to tell Andy that she thought the Felicians had bought the guarantee clause, not the contract. It died at her first sight of the morning-after Andy. The situation must be pretty desperate, she rationalized, when the wealthiest girl on the planet has only one dress. This is probably their last chance.

Andy tried to conceal his headache by being brisk and efficient. "Have you considered your natural resources?"

Blahrog, slow and shrewdly inefficient, said, "We mine soft coal. Enough for our own fires and to spare."

"No one within a hundred light-years of Felix II uses coal for fuel anymore," Andy said gently. "Do you have enough for the plastic industries?"

"We have four freighters surplus every season." Blahrog was evidently banking

heavily on the coal.

Andy wondered if coal were the only surplus on Felix II. "What are you doing with your surplus at present?" he inquired tactfully, hoping that Blahrog would realize, without being told, the impossibility of supporting the population of Felix II on four freighters of soft coal.

"We store it up," was the crafty answer, "and sell it to the synthetics plants on Darius IV when the Ionian miners go on strike."

"How long since the Ionians struck?" If this economic event occurred regularly, the coal surplus could assist in meeting the Federation's requirements.

"Twenty seasons or so." Blahrog's tone was off-handed, but his eyes slid guiltily toward Andy and away again.

Andy sighed. "Any other resources?"

They went quickly through minerals, agricultural products and animal skins; established that Felicians could not teleport, levitate or read minds. They were technologically uneducated, and had no industry on the factory-system level.

"It is coal or nothing, Mr. Stephens," Blahrog said with finality. "Isn't there some way to make the Federation believe that our coal is superior to other coal, and worth more?"

"Do you, perchance, own a sizable proportion of Felician coal reserves?"

Blahrog nodded, guilty looking again.

"Well, forget it. There isn't enough."

The Everking, who had been holding Andy's translator to his ear in silence, burst into speech.

"His Foreverness says," Blahrog remarked cannily, "that it appears impossible for Felix II to join the Federation."

"We aren't through yet," Andy said quickly. "What about the tourist industry? If you'd allow visitors and advertise a little...."

"No," the Everking shouted, in Galactic.

"We tried that during the last reign," Blahrog said. "It didn't work."

"You're pretty far off the shipping lanes, I'll admit," Andy said, "but surely you could attract enough tourists from somewhere to show a profit."

"We showed a profit," Blahrog said morosely.

He translated a remark of the Everking's. "We made money hand over fist."

"Then why did you quit?" Andy was baffled. "Why did you restrict the planet?"

"Because of the way we happen to look."

"Like leprechauns," Miss Featherpenny explained. "And Hrom looks exactly like a little Christmas fairy."

Blahrog winced. "The tourists found us amusing. We weren't real to them. It became difficult for us to seem real to ourselves. Most of my generation couldn't grow up. The birth rate dropped. We closed the planet to keep the race alive. That's all there is to it."

"Surely," Andy protested, "if you handled it differently...."

"Tourists," Blahrog translated for the Everking, "are out of the question."

"I remember hearing about an intelligent life form that resembled teddy bears," Miss Featherpenny said thoughtfully. "Everybody loved them on sight."

"What happened to them?" Blahrog asked with interest.

"They became extinct."

Andy glared at her. How could he accomplish anything with a stupid steno butting in? She looked away, guilty.

"It's such a simple solution," he said. "It fits your situation perfectly."

"That's what we thought, until we tried it," Blahrog said, grinning sidelong at Miss Featherpenny.

"If you won't try tourists," Andy snapped at both of them, "I don't see exactly what you can do."

"Maybe you didn't cover everything in the special abilities list," Miss Featherpenny suggested softly.

Andy glared at her again. "All right, Blahrog. Can you think of anything you can

do that most other species can't?"

Blahrog looked at the floor and considered. "We can walk a long way without getting tired," he offered.

Andy sighed, and wrote "Endurance?" on his scratch pad. It was scarcely saleable. "Is there anything else? Anything you know how to make? Besides Throatduster."

"We make good shoes," Blahrog said hopefully. "The tourists used to buy lots of them."

"Hum," Andy cogitated. "Here we have something for which a market already exists. If we can expand the market and the production facilities...." He nailed Blahrog with a finger, in conscious imitation of Crumbly. "How many pairs of shoes can Felix II produce in a single season?"

"If the reserves were called in to the Cobbler's Guild, it would be almost half the manpower of the planet...." Blahrog paused, doing mental arithmetic. "Four and a half million pairs, more or less." He sounded as though he were surprised.

"That ought to do it," Andy said gleefully.

"But where will we find that many pairs of feet?" Blahrog asked.

"There are eight million times that many pairs of feet in the Federation," Andy said. "Leave the advertising to Planetary Promotions."

"It seems sort of poetic," Miss Featherpenny romanced. "Leprechauns are supposed to be cobblers."

Blahrog snorted.

Andy turned and addressed her from the full distance between a promoter third class and a girl from the steno pool. "Miss Featherpenny, I will ask for your opinion when I want it."

Miss Featherpenny answered from her side of the gulf. "Yes, sir."

Andy had always despised rank-pullers. He turned to Blahrog "I'll have to send the dope back to the Home Office so they can put it through the computer and send me the ad-intensity index."

Blahrog looked a polite enquiry.

"That will tell us how effective the ad campaign will have to be to make a go of this. What's the fastest way to send a message to Earth?"

"Radiogram the satellite station," Blahrog answered. "They'll relay it to the next ship within range, and the ship will relay it to the next planet it nears with the radiogram facilities to send it to Earth."

"How long will it take to get an answer?" Andy asked.

"About twelve days."

They didn't stare at the sky while they waited for the answer.

Blahrog called the members of the Cobbler's Guild together, and delivered a series of lectures on their importance to the future of Felix II.

Foreseeing a return to political and economic power, the reserve members dusted off their lasts and aprons and got back into practice. For the first time in nearly thirty seasons, the applications for apprenticeship were too numerous to handle. New life showed on their faces.

The Master Cobblers (including the Everking and Blahrog) worked around the clock, fabricating plastic lasts. Miss Featherpenny and Hrom dug pictures and descriptions of the various types of Galactic feet that habitually or occasionally wore shoes out of old periodicals, located by members of the newly-organized ladies' auxiliary.

Felix II was humming, if not absolutely singing, with industry and good humor. Some of it rubbed off on Andy. He relented toward Miss Featherpenny to the extent of presenting her with a pair of Felician shoes, fabricated by the Everking. They were of the sensible walking variety, and not Miss Featherpenny's style. Nevertheless, she was extremely pleased with the gift. Like all Felician shoes, they fit her perfectly.

The Everking, backed by his Debators and ministers, issued public thanks to one Andrew Stephens, restorer of hope, and propagator of economic equality. The ladies' auxiliary gave a tea in Miss Featherpenny's honor. They were both showered with gifts from a grateful and admiring populace.

The reply to the message was signed by Crumbly himself. "Forlorn hope," it said unsympathetically. "Try something else. Computer indicates ad intensity of 0.94."

An ad intensity of 0.0001 means you sell someone something he wants anyway.

An intensity of 1.0 means you have to make the consumer love something he thinks he hates.

Andy sent a young Felician on the run for Blahrog, and retired to the storeroom of Blahrog's dwelling, which housed two fair-sized plastic barrels of Throatduster.

"But you have to try," Blahrog insisted, finishing his second mug of hospitality.

"Snow good," Andy said, deep into his fifth. "Even Gray Flannel, ad man in legend, only got to 0.87. Simpossible."

Blahrog, who knew little about advertising or computers, repeated, "You must try. No member of the Cobbler's Guild has ever quit without trying."

Andy had been accepted as an apprentice of the Guild the night before.

"Dunno," he said. "Tell you simpossible."

Blahrog climbed off the barrel of Throatduster. "I'll go get Miss Featherpenny," he said. "Perhaps she can help you."

"Miss Featherpenny. Bah," Andy snorted. "What good would she be? Dumb steno." He tried to be fair. "Nice legs, I admit. But no brains."

"I'll go get Miss Featherpenny," Blahrog repeated firmly, closing the door behind him....

"What frame of mind is he in?" Miss Featherpenny looked uncertainly at the heavy door to Andy's store room.

"Drunk," Blahrog informed her coldly.

It takes an enormous quantity of Throatduster to intoxicate a Felician. Intoxication is therefore considered bad form.

"And belligerent," the Minister of Finance added.

"Oh, dear." Miss Featherpenny looked at the door again. "But what can I do?" she asked in a helpless voice. "I'm not a promoter."

"He said," Blahrog indicated the door, "that you were a dumb steno."

"Well!" Hrom exclaimed.

Miss Featherpenny's hackles invisibly rose. Her mouth visibly tightened. She turned away from the door.

Hrom said, "You ought to try to show him."

Miss Featherpenny looked at them, and at the surrounding examples of Felician landscape and architecture.

"Mr. Blahrog," she said suddenly, "you don't mind looking like a leprechaun, do you? As long as you don't have to meet people?"

Blahrog's silence was more than dignified.

"What do you mean?" Hrom asked.

"You wouldn't mind if we used a picture of a Master Cobbler in the ad, would you?"

Blahrog thawed abruptly. "You have an idea?"

"If you don't mind the picture."

"He doesn't mind," Hrom said, adding in Felician, "After all, Papa, we don't have to let any ships but the freighters land."

"Go ahead, then," Blahrog consented.

"Good luck," Hrom added.

"You," Andy welcomed her. "Bah." He shut his eyes. Most of him was sprawled out on the floor.

"Yes, me," Miss Featherpenny agreed, repressing an inclination to kick him. She sat down on one of the kegs, and opened her stenographer's book. "I came to take down the ad for the shoes," she announced.

"What ad?" Andy moaned. "The newest, biggest, brightest ads can't get over an 0.62. How can I manage an 0.94? You're crazy." He opened his eyes. "But you do have nice legs."

"Felix II is sort of quaint," Miss Featherpenny suggested. "Why not use an old ad?"

"An idea," Andy enunciated, without hope.

"It's sort of pretty too," Miss Featherpenny nudged.

"We could use a color picture of it," Andy said, kicking thoughtfully at an overturned stool.

"The Felicians are quaint looking, too."

"Sure," Andy said. "Put a Felician in the foreground, cobbling." He tried to sit up.

"I've seen ads like that in history books," Miss Featherpenny said, exuding admiration.

"It's so old it's new," Andy said, lying down again. "Old English lettering over the top. A real cliche." He considered Miss Featherpenny's ankle. "Peaceful scenery, Felician shoes?"

"Not quite," said Miss Featherpenny.

"Quiet field, Felician shoes?"

"Nope," said Miss Featherpenny.

"You're an aggravating woman," Andy said sweetly, "but you do have nice legs."

"What about Elysian fields?" Miss Featherpenny suggested.

Andy tasted it. "Elysian fields, Felician shoes." He tried to sit up again. "You got all that down?" he demanded.

"Yes," Miss Featherpenny lied. She had it in her head, but not on the steno pad.

"Then get somebody to send it off so we can find out if it's good enough. And come back soon." He wobbled on his elbow. "You do have...."

"I think I'd better attend to sending it personally." Miss Featherpenny opened the door. "You rest until you feel better."

Blahrog had gone, but Hrom was waiting for her. She looked more like a Christmas fairy than usual. A mischievous one.

"Did you manage?" she whispered.

"Barely." Miss Featherpenny looked grim.

"Drink this," Hrom ordered, holding out a mug of Throatduster.

Miss Featherpenny was surprised. "I thought ladies didn't drink on Felix II."

"There are," Hrom said, "exceptions."

The next twelve days of waiting for computer results were not as hopefully active as the first twelve. The Felicians finished setting up their manufacturing and storing systems, but they didn't start making shoes. The cattle drovers forbore to slaughter the beasts who provided the leather.

The Everking and his Debators all developed severe cases of beard-itch, a Felician nervous disorder. Since it is even more unseemly to scratch on Felix II than it is on Earth, they retired temporarily from public life.

Andy also retired from public life, biting his fingernails, an Earther nervous disorder. Blahrog joined him in the illness, which was new to Felicians. By the time the answer from Planetary Promotions came it was the most fashionable habit on the planet, in spite of the fact that Felicians have extremely tough nails, and a pair of bony ridges rather than true teeth.

The second message was also direct from Crumbly. It read: "Computer rates ad campaign at intensity 0.942. P. P. in action by the time you receive this. Stephens ordered back to Home Office; promoted to first class."

Four Earth months later, Miss Featherpenny entered Andy's ten by twelve office, her high heels clicking on the plastic tiles, and laid a memorandum on the new steel desk.

"They've been admitted," she announced.

"What? Who?" Andy said irritably. There were times when he thought her position as his private secretary had gone to her head.

"Felix II has been admitted to the Federation. The contract has been fulfilled." She smiled brightly. "Shall I mark the file closed?"

"Can't yet," Andy said. "Felix II won't be a permanent member of the Federation until they've been self-supporting for ten years."

"Why?" asked Miss Featherpenny.

"It's a precautionary measure," Andy began to explain. "Oh, let's go get some lunch and forget Felix II."

"Yes, Mr. Stephens," Miss Featherpenny said meekly.

He followed her out the door, admiring the effect of her plastic skirt. She did have nice legs....

Three years later, Edith Featherpenny was forced to remember Felix II. There was a communication on her mock-baroque desk. Felician shoes weren't selling. Felix II wasn't making enough money. The Galactic Federation was threatening to take steps.

She glanced at the impressive door to the inner office. Andy, she knew, was engaged in reading a letter from his brother Lloyd, who had just been promoted to vice-president of Universal Products.

She judiciously forged his initials on an order to put data on the Felix II failure through the computer.

In an hour and a half she had the answer. The Felicians hadn't changed the styles, and their shoes didn't wear out. Everybody had a pair.

She considered the door again. There was really little sense in disturbing Andy over such a simple matter. She forged his name on a message to Blahrog. "Change the styles of your shoes."

She then picked up some carefully selected problem sheets from the top of the filing cabinet, and went through the impressive door.

The next morning, Blahrog's answer was on her desk.

"Felician shoes are of the cut most suited to the feet that wear them. To change them would be both foolish and unethical."

It was a good thing, Miss Featherpenny thought, that Andy was feeling better today. She went into his office, padding softly over the carpet to his contemporary prestwood desk.

"Good morning, Edie," Andy said cheerfully. "What happened? Lightning strike you?"

"Practically," Miss Featherpenny said. "It's Felix II again." She handed over the sheaf of papers.

"Why didn't you tell me about this yesterday?" Andy muttered, reading them.

"I thought I could handle it." Miss Featherpenny made a face. "Until I got that answer this morning."

"It sounds like typical Felician thinking," Andy said. "There's no sense trying to argue by mail." He sighed. "You'd better reserve a first-class passage for me on

the first ship out."

"Can't I go?" Miss Featherpenny asked.

"Who'd run the office?"

"The stenos can stack stuff until we get back." Miss Featherpenny looked wistful. "I was in on the beginning of it. I want to see it through. Besides, I'd like to see Hrom again."

"Oh, all right," Andy agreed. "Make it two first class."

Blahrog was waiting on the long porch of the space port dining room.

"Have a nice trip?" he asked.

"What's all this about not changing the shoe styles?" Andy countered.

"As I told you in the message," Blahrog said impatiently, "We make our shoes in the best possible shapes for the feet that will wear them. There isn't any good reason to change them."

"You can't sell people two pairs of identical shoes," Andy insisted.

"You might be able to sell them if you changed them," Miss Featherpenny added, sounding reasonable.

"Save your arguments for the Everking," Blahrog said. "Come on to the car."

"Car?" Miss Featherpenny exclaimed. "The Everking's?"

"No, mine." Blahrog couldn't keep the pride out of his voice. "There are nearly two hundred cars on Felix II."

Andy went over the same ground in the presence of the Everking. It didn't help. The Everking, his minister and his Debators were solidly against changing the shoes. The ethics of the Cobblers' Guild were involved.

"If you won't follow Planetary Promotions' advice," he said at last, "the company can't be responsible for the outcome." He glared at the assembly. "In other words, the guarantee clause is cancelled."

There was an indignant and concerned buzz from the audience. Blahrog got up.

"Your Foreverness," he said, "honorable members of the government, Mr.

Stephens. Three Earth years ago, Felix II gathered together all the money the government could find, and bought a contract with Planetary Promotions." He paused and shuffled his feet. "We did not expect the contract to be fulfilled. We needed money, and two for one would keep us going while we attempted to educate the young to be immune to the tourists. Of course, if Planetary Promotions found a way for us to be self-supporting without tourists, we would be equally pleased."

"I thought so," Miss Featherpenny murmured.

"Really," Andy said. "Why didn't you let me in on it?"

Blahrog cleared his throat to indicate that he wasn't through. "Since a way was found," he continued, "Felician self respect and content has increased along with Felician prosperity." He glanced uneasily at Andy. "We would like to continue as we are going."

"Unless you change the styles," Andy said flatly, "that is impossible."

Miss Featherpenny, realizing that they were starting over the same ground, slipped out the door and walked over to visit Hrom.

"So Papa admitted it," Hrom said, after Miss Featherpenny had admired the baby, and been shown over the house. "I almost told you myself, when I first met you."

"You told me enough to let me guess the rest," Miss Featherpenny said.

"Have some olgan seed cakes," Hrom offered. "Why didn't you tell Mr. Stephens?"

Miss Featherpenny took a cake. "Partly because of his almighty attitude, and partly because I was on your.... Ow!" She clapped a hand hastily to her jaw.

"What's wrong?" Hrom asked, alarmed.

"Broke a tooth," Miss Featherpenny muttered, her face contorted.

"Does it hurt much?" Hrom's question was part sympathy and part curiosity.

Miss Featherpenny nodded. "I'll have to find a dentist right away."

"What's a dentist?"

"Man who fixes your teeth."

"But we don't have teeth," Hrom said.

"I forgot," Miss Featherpenny moaned. "Oh, Lord, I guess I'll have to go all the way back to Earth."

Hrom shook her head. "There are a lot of Earthers living on Darius IV. They must have a dentist. There's a ship every morning."

"Fine," Miss Featherpenny gasped.

"Can I get you something for the pain? Would an aspirtran help?"

"I'd better have two. Thanks."

"Here. Take the bottle with you." Hrom was frowning worriedly. "My, I'm glad we don't have teeth."

"I'll have to tell Andy—Mr. Stephens—that I'm leaving."

Inspiration dawned on Hrom's face. "I've hardly been out of the house since the baby was born. I'll leave him with my husband's mother and go with you."

"I'd be glad of the company," Miss Featherpenny admitted.

"Good. I'll find out what time the ship leaves, and tell Mother Klagom about the treat she's got coming. You go tell Mr. Stephens and then come back here for the night."

Miss Featherpenny heard them shouting before she opened the council chamber door.

"I suggest," Andy was saying, "that you either change the styles or go back to the tourist business."

She pushed the door open.

"Mr. Stephens," Blahrog said mildly, "the last time calamity was upon us, you solved the problem by drinking Throatduster until you got an idea. May I suggest that you try again?"

"Andy," Miss Featherpenny whispered.

"Well?" he snapped.

"I broke a tooth. I'm going over to Darius IV tomorrow, with Hrom, to have it fixed."

"Why Darius IV?" Andy demanded. "What's the matter with Felician dentists?"

"What's Hrom going to do with boy?" Blahrog demanded.

"Hrom's leaving the baby with Mrs. Klagom," Miss Featherpenny answered, "and there aren't any Felician dentists."

"Mrs. Klagom is a silly woman," Blahrog disapproved. "She would do better to leave him with me."

"If you must, I suppose you must," Andy admitted grudgingly. "Where are you going now?"

"Back to Hrom's house to lie down."

"Tell her I'll mind the baby," Blahrog called after her.

As she closed the door, she heard Andy say, "Gentlemen, if you'll supply the Throatduster, I'll give it a try."

"It's awfully quiet," Hrom said doubtfully, looking around at the Felician spaceport. "Look at the tannery chimneys. No smoke."

Miss Featherpenny, her mouth in good repair, glanced into the bar as they passed it. "Only two shippers," she said. "There are usually dozens."

"They must have stopped production entirely," Hrom said.

"Maybe Andy thought of something."

"I wonder if Papa brought the car down for us."

He hadn't. They walked into town.

Blahrog was in conference with the Everking.

"I'd better wait for him," Miss Featherpenny said. "I want to find out what's going on before I talk to Andy."

"I'd better rescue Mother Klagom from the baby."

Blahrog was as long-winded as usual.

"Where is Mr. Stephens?" Miss Featherpenny demanded, as soon as she saw him coming down the hall.

"In his old storeroom," Blahrog said moodily. "He's quite drunk, I believe, but he doesn't seem to be getting any ideas."

"Then why did you stop cobbling?"

Blahrog did a Felician shrug. "We're waiting to see what happens. There's no sense making shoes any more if they aren't wanted."

"I have to talk to him," Miss Featherpenny said.

"Do you have an idea?"

"No," Miss Featherpenny lied. "But you'd let him drink himself to death, if he didn't think of anything."

"You want a lift in the car?" Blahrog asked, uninsulted.

"I'd be pleased, if you don't mind. I just walked in from the port."

Andy was not, as Blahrog had suggested, very drunk. He was only hung over. "Get your tooth fixed?" he asked cheerlessly.

"Yes."

"Good dentist?"

Miss Featherpenny nodded. "He had some entirely new equipment. Extremely powerful, and quite precise."

"Oh?" Andy straightened in the old arm chair. "I've been trying to think. And drinking. Throatduster isn't working this time." He paused to reconsider. "Except that it makes me drunk. Everything keeps getting fuzzy, and my head is wider than my shoulders."

"The dentist said," Miss Featherpenny persisted, "that he could pull a whale's tooth as easily and smoothly as he pulled mine."

"You had to have it pulled? Too bad." Andy made a face at the full mug of Throatduster on the barrel beside him. "The Felicians won't change their minds about the shoes, and they won't try tourists again. I can't think of anything else. And they can claim the guarantee. I was bluffing."

"I know," Miss Featherpenny said. She tried again. "The dentist claims even the tiniest species could do dental work on the biggest species." She paused, hoping

it would sink in. "Providing the tiny species had sufficient dexterity."

"Blasted Felicians," Andy muttered. "Stubborn little pigs."

"That's part of their trouble, I think," Miss Featherpenny said. "Being little, I mean. But it doesn't always work against them. When they're doing delicate work...."

"Like those shoes," Andy agreed. "'Best possible shapes already,'" he imitated Blahrog.

"They're one of the smallest intelligent species," Miss Featherpenny said in desperation. "And their manual dexterity rating is one of the highest. Why, a Felician could get both hands inside an Earther's mouth."

"And steal his fillings...." Andy started. "Wait a minute. You've given me an idea."

Miss Featherpenny breathed relief. "I have? What is it?"

"Dentists! They can all be dentists."

"All?"

"Well, enough of them to provide for the planet's income."

"Why, that's marvelous," Miss Featherpenny said. "It won't matter that other species think they're cute. Everybody takes dentists seriously."

"Their appearance will work for them," Andy said. "Think of children's dentistry."

"Let's go tell them right away," Miss Featherpenny said, feeling like a Bobbsey twin.

Andy swayed upward.

"Sit still," Miss Featherpenny commanded. "I'll bring you some coffee."

Blahrog accepted the suggestion with Felician phlegm and ministerial greed. "We'll have to change the tax system, since most of our working population will be living off-planet."

"Maybe you could work out a rotation system, Papa." Hrom had sneaked into the

council chamber.

"Wait a minute," Andy said uneasily. "How are you going to educate these dentists?"

Blahrog stopped and thought. "We'll use the hotels for schools," he said slowly. His face wrinkled with sly pleasure. "And we can sell the coal surplus to pay teachers and buy equipment."

The Everking made a wicked-sounding comment in Felician.

The entire assembly burst into loud, beard-wagging laughter. It had a nasty ring to it.

"What did he say?" Andy demanded.

"He said," Hrom giggled, "'Let them try to treat us like stuffed toys now.'"

"Disgusting," said Miss Featherpenny.

"Indecent, Edie," Andy agreed. "But never mind. Let's go home and get married."

"You're a little sudden."

Andy grinned. "I'll have a raise coming for this, and I'd like to keep you in the family. I can't seem to think unless you're around."

"Took you long enough to notice," said Miss Featherpenny. But she didn't say it out loud.

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