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## Utopia...

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Utopia . . .

by

David A. Griffith

9/17/73  
3 made

A Senior Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement  
for the Degree

of

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE

in

PHYSICS

Approved:

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Major Professor

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Director, Honors Program

Utah State University  
Logan, Utah  
1973

## Abstract

This short story is an attempt to dramatize human relations as the crux of Utopianism. Its science fiction setting has been de-emphasized in order to keep distraction at a minimum. The House described in the story may be taken as a symbol of the phalanx - the physical structure - associated with Utopias. The story's focus, however, is on the importance and vulnerability of interpersonal communication in Utopia.

\* Note: There will also be a suggested reading list appended to the story. It is not yet compiled.

# Utopia.....

"Not me touch," the House said.

"Wha . . .?!" replied the two sanitation engineers who had been groping around the House's foundation in search of a water main hook-up.

"Did I that wrong say? I mean: do not me touch, please. Is that right?"

The two men didn't stay to answer, but scrambled away in such haste that they knocked over the young man who was coming up the walk to the House.

"Hey,, mister, don't go up there! That House talks!" one interjected.

"Oh, really? What did it say?" The young man turned toward the House.

"House!"

"Yes,, Dave?" Dave put his hands on his hips.

"Whatt did you say to these two gentlemen that would get them so shook up?"

The two men stood aghast. The taller one grabbed up their hats and slapped some of them into the shorter one's belly.

"I doo understand you not, Dave"

"You"ve got your syntax mixed, House."

"Oh, I am sorry. . . I said to them: 'not me touch.' They said, 'Wha..?' and did leave. What wrong was?"

"Nothing much. Let me intorduce them and then you can try again!"

One of the men stepped forward and scratched his head.

"Hey,, what kind of rig is that?"

"It'ss a nobile home. That's why it's here in this mobile village lot.

Only one of its kind, I think. I was just up inviting the city fathers to visit it."

"Oh yyeah. They told us to come down and check it . . . hook it up for you. "

"You can't fight city hall," intoned the House in a flat oratorical voice.

"Not now, House."

~~"Hey, that didn't sound too bad!"~~ chimed in the short hook-up specialist.

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"Hey, that didn't sound too bad!" chimed in the short hook-up specialist.

Dave nodded. "It can get direct quotes exactly, but regular conversation is a little trickier. I'm trying to teach it basic syntax now."

"How come it talked when we were trying to get it hooked up?"

"It doesn't need a hook-up. Energy comes from those four little windmills on top. They generate electricity. Heat is from solar radiation. Water and solid waste are mostly recycled and I have two hydroponic pods for food. Uses 83% less energy for heat because of the insulation and airlock. Plus it has a few very interesting features, besides talking. House, change your colors for me. Stand back, guys."

As they watched, the House ran through a spectrum of colors, it's outer walls and hemispherical dome roof becoming brick red, then rusty yellow<sup>w</sup>, shy blue, deep forest green, a translucent whiskey-bottle brown, and finally a strident hot pink.

"Would you open windows like to see?" asked the House. Its voice was even and soft<sup>e</sup> - almost feminine.

"Remember where verbs go in questions, House," remanded Dave. "But sure. Show us your stuff," The two engineers stood open-mouthed. Dave beamed with pride and amusement. "Watch this."

Thin slits formed in the sides of the House and widened into windows where solid wall had<sup>d</sup> existed moments before.

"Now clean<sup>clam</sup> up for us, House."

Slowly the windmills and solar panels retracted and the dome-like roof increased its size until it descended to meet the ground. Then with a hissing and shimmering, the hot pink roof became solid seamless metal. The House was entirely enclosed under the dome.

"Ok. Back to normal." Dave turned to the two men. "Would you like to look around inside? I asked the city fathers to advertise "model home"

Dg.

showing, but it doesn't look like I'll be here long enough. They weren't too enthusiastic either, if I remember. Come on in."

"Uh, well, we really haven't got too much time . . . ."

"It'll just take a second. You've been inside mobile homes before haven't you?"

They nodded.

"Well there's not too much difference. I'll point out the special things."

They hiss - click - hiss - clicked through the airlock and stepped into the circular living room. The interior was bright and warm. A breeze from outside had followed them inside and tinkled air chimes. Two large aquariums grew in a small window seat garden. Light bathed the plants from a panel above.

"We didn't see that window when we came in," said the tall engineer.

"It's really not a window. Optic fibers bring light from receivers on the roof. The plants grow just as well but I can get more privacy. Have a seat?"

"No, really. We can't stay too long. Gotta' get back to work."

"Man is the animal that works," piped the House.

"Thanks, House. Why don't you review your conjugates?"

"Oh, Dave," It almost whined. "Do I the perfect speaker have to be?"

Quotes are funner."

"More fun, House, and yes you have to be the perfect speaker. And no petulance. Remember, it's part of my job."

"What is that?" asked the short man.

"Oh, I'm a communicator." They looked puzzled. "I try to improve communications."

"Can you get a job in that?"

"Sure. The time has come when more than half the information industry is involved just in transmitting knowledge to the younger generation. The volume is incredible and the time factor enormous. There are more people

Dg.

~~volume is incredible and the time factor enormous.~~ There are more people trying to transmit, more information, and more people than ever before. Those who are transmitting are really trying to communicate themselves - their way of doing things; their history. I try and make it easier. I like it. It's a good job; I can do most of my work here. If not, I just pack up and move. I meet a lot of people. We make friends."

He pointed to a control board.

"That's the Comconsole and Comviewer in the center there. I've got a stereo and video, too. I sleep here. If I hook these <sup>up</sup> the House can read my dreams, or read to me if I want to sleep-learn. House? Show them the pods."

Two panels in the ceiling became transparent.

"You're looking at the bottom of them. They get sunlight directly."

He stopped. "I guess it looks pretty Spartan, really. I'm waiting until my wife moves in so we can arrange and decorate together."

"You married?"

"Well, not yet. I'm heading for her home this afternoon."

"Say, we better get goin'. It's been nice looking around. Hope you have a good trip. Are you going by 'rail or skimmer?"

He wanted to tell them neither. But he hadn't unveiled the most intriguing feature of the House to them, so he declined.

"Haven't decided."

"Well, thanks for showing us around."

"Yeah, thanks for the tour. If we're ever in the market for a house that can grow its own while it throws a light show, we'll bekyou up."

They chuckled and hissed through the airlock.

"Parting is such sweet sorrow," said the House.

After the two men had scrambled into their ground sim and sped away,

Dave turned from the window.

"A little inappropriate perhaps."

Dg.

He sighed, then moved to the Comconsole. A flick of a switch and four different views appeared on the Conviewer screens.

"Are you really to move, House?"

"Yes, Dave."

"Well, let's go."

As the House began to creep down the slope, ~~and~~ across the skimmer path and through the field adjoining the mobile village, Dave flipped switches and set dials on the Comconsole.

By the time he had set course and was ready to go through the airlock, the House was cruising along gently at ~~the~~ <sup>twice</sup> the running speed of man, Dave sat down on the perch.

He watched the passing landscape and soon fell to daydreaming. Mary, <sup>his future wife,</sup> was somewhere ahead of him. She was soft and kind and impish and had accomplished the incredible task of making him fall madly in love with her. The very thought of her made his brain feel as if it was electrified - all synapses firing at once. She was a little younger than he, but had already seen much more of the world. Friends had warned them that marriage would tie them down. "You'll never get a chance to do any of the things that you can do while still single," they'd point out. "Look at yourself. Where have you been? What have you done? How do you expect to get anywhere when you're married?"

For awhile he had worried. But then he decided the reason for going 'anywhere' was to try and find a little happiness there - or along the way. If he could do that while married, why stay single?

Why? Maybe because the other person would feel more pain than joy. That was one of the reasons Daniel had given to Dave <sup>once</sup> ~~once~~ a very long time ago. Daniel had been Dave's closest friend. He was the practical one; the scoffer, the absurdist, the philosopher, the city hater. He was an artist, and a very good singer. And a very good hunter also, who could sneak into a



magpie's den without ~~making~~ a sound. When Dave had asked him how he could create beauty with one ~~and~~ hand and train <sup>with</sup> to destroy it ~~with~~ the other, Daniel had shrugged, taken another swig of wine, and answered: "Don't exclude violence from your repertoire, Dave. Don't limit yourself by calling it ~~an~~ 'illiberal'. You've got to learn to be rude at times, and rough, and even violent."

Dave shook his head.

"Listen, kid. There are two intolerable conditions this world can impose on you: absurdity and the acceptance of absurdity. I think the last one is the ~~worst~~ worst. Figure it out."

Dave ~~cocked~~ <sup>cocked</sup> his ~~head~~ <sup>head</sup> to one side to listen.

"Look at Utopias. You want to build a brotherhood of man someday, ~~right~~ right? ~~I'm~~ I'm not saying it's impossible, but ~~just~~ <sup>just</sup> take a ~~look~~ <sup>look</sup> at the crazy reasons ~~they~~ that have bunged them up in the past. People who can't understand or tolerate each other. Or the guys who start them can't be satisfied with ~~as~~ just 550 or even 550,000 joining in. They want everybody! <sup>that's</sup> Man, ~~that's~~ crazy! ~~Great about the kids?~~

"Or what about the kids? Their <sup>e</sup>parents can't teach them the reasons they built the Utopia in the first place because all the reasons have been wiped out. Right? So the kids leave to find a new world of affliction. That's what they need. If they don't have some affliction to drag around like a bucket of rocks, people won't pity them. They'll <sup>e</sup>get jealous. They'll hate them.

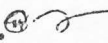
"Man, this is the best of all possible <sup>b</sup>worlds already. Crazy as it is. Do you understand?"


Dave shook his <sup>e</sup>head again.

"Well, maybe it's better that you don't. Undrestand that the world ~~is~~

DG

around you is insane, but keep on trying to <sup>be</sup>sane yourself. Maybe when that communications jazz ~~of <sup>be</sup> ~~you're~~ ~~working~~ ~~on~~~~ you're working on comes out you'll have the <sup>key</sup>key. It'd be great preventive medicine for when people would normally stop talking and start clawing.

"But what <sup>p</sup>happens if it doesn't work? You can't <sup>j</sup>ust let it gnaw at you. You may have hit upon the right thing, but that doesn't make you infallible. What do you do with the guy who understand<sup>s</sup> you but still just will not agree with you? And he doesn't disagree out of malice but is entirely consistent with his own values all the time? You keep hammering and hammering and nothin'<sup>g</sup> happens. No change. And if there is, you probably aren't going to be able to tell. It's going to hurt you someday. Why do you do it? If you know the reason and still do it, you're as crazy as all the ones you're trying <sup>t</sup>o cahnge. 

"Crazy like all the rest of it. We're put on this earth unasked and spend the rest of our lives feeding on the earth like piglets at a sow. And look at what we do to the nipple, for God's sake! <sup>s</sup>

"But listen. Accepting it all with<sup>o</sup>ut a fight is worse than the absurdity. Don't ever give up, kid. I may talk blue but . . . well, just don't give up. When you get tired of slugging, stop and think for awhile. Lean back and contemplate. If you're a man with half a brain, thinkin' about the mess we're in will surely get you back in the ring for one more try. Me? I don't know. I talk big . . . but I'm not sure. Being in action all the time isn't any easier than contemplating, but I'm getting a little tired. Maybe I'll be moving on."

Not long afterward Daniel had left. Dave was leaning back against the House and watching the clouds overhead as he daydreamed. He tried to remember if he still had a picture of Daniel, or the book he had lent him.

"House? Do you remember the book I borrowed from Dan . . .?"

Suddenly the House lurched violently to one side. It swerved and slowed and Dave could hear its gyro screaming. He leaped to the airlock and was about to go inside when a sudden collision jarred him off his feet. When he picked himself up, the House was still. Dave jumped from the porch to the ground and headed towards the rear of the House.

"House. What happened? I don't . . ." As he rounded the edge of the House he was momentarily blinded by the glint from the shining surface <sup>of</sup> an Omni-Trailer. It had rammed his House.

"Move away slowly. Are you damaged?"

"My lower wall supports perhaps sprung are. Crack in outer shell maybe. Insulation most of it absorbed. I cannot . . ."

A high-pitched voice was heard from around the end of the oblong shaped Trailer.

~~"Hey"~~ "Hey, just a minute! <sup>h</sup>What do you think you're doing? You can't go around banging into people like that! Who are you?" The tall, curly-haired man who appeared started toward Dave. "Christ! A guy can't even drive these days without getting hit by some half-wit on the open road. Can't you watch where you're going? You're a menace! You oughta' be kept off the roads. Why can't they do something about people like you? It's stupid! I can't believe the things that can happen to a person!"

Dave felt his stomach tense. The man was about Dave's age but somewhat taller. He was thin; his hands were especially thin.. He looked as if his face was hurting him a bit, just below the threshold of conscious pain. It was twisted up <sup>into</sup> ~~with~~ a cocky squint, the kind guys get when they are looking for a fight, or when they have a migraine. He stared down at Dave.

"Just what in hell do you think you're doing?"

Dave's  
"I . . .", <sup>Y</sup>his stomach knotted more tightly.

"This is insane! Look at what you've done to my Trailer!" <sup>The man</sup> He waved his hand in the general direction.

"Sorry about this accident, Mister . . ."

"Sorry?! Is that all you can say? What kind of answer is that?"

Dave was definitely feeling less than conciliatory now. He turned away and rubbed the back of his neck. He had the feeling that he was sinking into something he didn't like. The first small twinges of anger began to register in his brain, like the plak-plak of raindrops on a picnic day. He took a deep breath.

"Listen . . . friend." It almost <sup>h</sup>hurt to <sup>s</sup>say it. "I . . ."

"Yes?"

"I . . . it looks . . . I mean it appears that I took the most damage. I don't see why you're so upset. Let's talk this thing out . . ."

The man looked at him as if he were addressing a fool. Hadn't they been talking? Dave recognized the look but didn't let its significance sink in. He suddenly realized that he wanted to start all over. The conversation had become foolish. He wasn't communicating. He almost <sup>m</sup>wanted to shout at the man.

"Well, what's your name?" The gruffness of <sup>Dave's</sup>his voice didn't feel right. It was <sup>an</sup>irritated, angry thing.

"My name is Eric. What's yours?"

"Dave."

There was the faintest suggestion of a breeze.

"Uh . . . well, why don't we find out how much damage there is?"

Eric grimaced. Dave wasn't sure whether it was a sign of pain or incredible amusement.

"First I want to find out who was at fault," he said.

"Well, I . . . uh."

"We could my <sup>Y</sup>Conviewer tape play," said the House.

At that Eric noticed the House for the first time. It was almost as if he had run into Dave instead of the House. He began a minute inspection of the House's exterior that puzzled Dave. What was he up to?

Dave couldn't understand why he had begun to resent this man so much so fast. He felt like a lovable, warm puppy that had just been slapped down. He couldn't see the reasoning. He felt unsure of himself, suddenly; afraid that no one would understand him when he opened his mouth to speak. He wanted to leave. Have the House <sup>clam</sup> ~~clam~~ up and creep away with him <sup>f</sup> safely inside. His mind was in a tug-of-war. Part of it wanted him to forget this man. The other part was prodding him to make this man a friend<sup>d</sup> - to force him to like him.

Eric straightened up from looking at the House.

"Never saw a rig like this <sup>b</sup> before."

"I built it myself."

"You did? I built that Trailer over there myself, too. Hey, bring that tape and come on over. I'll show you around."

Dave didn't know what to make of it. He wondered whether he could trust the man. He didn't feel friendly and he hated the man for it. He wanted the man to like him, but he couldn't relax his stomach or stop the turmoil in his head. Without his realizing it ~~realization~~, anticipation and anxiety began to replace the wisps of anger. Maybe he could force the odds in his favor.

"Sure, I'll be over in a minute."

The insides of the House were a mess. Water had sloshed from the aquariums and part of the window seat garden had been torn up. It upset Dave. He grabbed up the Conviewer tape and slammed through the airlock. When he burst into Eric's Trailer, he was momentarily shocked.

There was light everywhere! Music was ~~to~~ blaring from a dozen speakers. A kaleidoscope of sight and sound bombarded him.

"Quite a sensation, huh?" shouted Eric. "Here. Just a minute and I'll turn it down." He took the tape from Dave's hand and place<sup>d</sup> ~~it~~ it on the control console. Dave rubbed his ears when the music stopped.

"Wow!"

"Really something, isn't it? Never a dull moment in here, I'll tell you. What do you think?"

"Uh . . . yeah, it's different all right." He glanced around and saw the tape. "If you want to view that you just put it in a video play . . ."

"Yeah, well, we'll see that later. I've got a game on right now." <sup>Eric</sup> ~~He~~ flicked his hand in the direction of the video-player. The sound was down. Some sportscaster was on-camera momentarily, excitedly pointing below him and gesturing as he talke<sup>d</sup> in to the microphone. He was laughing hard, his head thrown back, as Dave started to turn away.

"Come on, I want to show you the rest of the place."

→ Every inch of the Triler was packed with bright light. Dave felt excited. His mind couldn't comprehend it all. One room was lined from floor to ceiling with bookshelves double-crammed with detective stories and science fiction. It puzzled Dave. He felt as ~~if~~ he'd just walked into a candy store that only ~~had~~ had sugared orange slices and cinammon sticks. They moved on.

"I've never seen so many gadgets. And ~~this~~ this furniture . . . . It must have cost a mint!"

Eric was smiling. It look<sup>e</sup>d as if any minute he would burst into uncontrolled laughter. He plopped into an overstuffed arm-chair and sighed contendedly.

"Yeah, well . . . you know."

"Well, what do you do?"

"I own controlling interests in the ~~XXXXXX~~ Mt. Henry Power Plant.

Dave frowned. The brief feeling of elation was swept away. His stomach

lg.

knotted once again.

"So you're the one."

"What is

~~that~~ supposed to mean?"

"I mean that I haven't met an owner of a fossil-fuel burning power plant for over a decade. You know what that plant does, don't you?"

"I think I do, yes. For one thing it supplies the power for my Omni-Trailer. It is transmitted by microwaves. Those ~~domes~~<sup>domes</sup> on the roof are receivers."

"That's <sup>n</sup>ot exactly what I mean." Dave was beginning to feel tense, as if he were picking his way ~~back~~<sup>a</sup> across talus-strewn mountain side that harbored unseen rattlesnakes. He felt free to ~~take~~ take certain steps as he talked, but very uncertain of the consequences.

"Well, what exactly do you mean!" Eric had risen from his chair and switched off all the music. "Come on. I want to hear what you have to say about the power plant. We'll find out whether or not you know what's ~~going~~<sup>g</sup> going on there."

"Do you know?"

"I think I do, yes. It burns coal that's strip-mined from the Butte plateau area. It produces electricity. The electricity is used for municipal and industrial purposes. It lights houses. And schools. And hospitals. And research centers. And runs factories. That's what it does."

"What about the rest?"

"What 'rest'? What did you have in mind?"

"Well, you mentioned part of it. I mean the strip-mining. And the thermal pollution in Lake Henry. And the effluent pollution from your smoke stacks. And the fact that 90% of the electricity produced leaves the area and goes to metropolises where . . . well, you know about electric toothbrushes<sup>s</sup> and vibrators and those air-conditioners. You must know the facts about the kind of insulation used in most of those houses."

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"All I know is that a bunch of wild-eyed eco-freaks are running around screaming their heads off about how we're raping the environment. Listen, there's <sup>e</sup> always been pollution. The stuff I put out in a year could never match even one volcano. And besides, nothing we do is illegal. I couldn't do anything about it if I wanted to. I'd just antagonize people. Like those <sup>e</sup> maniacs who yell their head <sup>s</sup> off about something they know nothing about. All they do is polarize people. I mean, I tell you - those people are really the problem!"

"Some of them are probably my friends."

"Well, then you're crazy, too." *Perhaps, thought Dave. Perhaps I am.*

"All they're doing is trying to suggest alternatives to the way we're doing things now. Maybe some of them are a little extreme, but they don't cause nearly the kind of hostile reaction in me as you do."

"Yeah, well I'm not responsible for the way <sup>y</sup> you react. That's part of your life! I'm responsible for my life and you're responsible for yours! I'm not going to live your life for you."

It reminded Dave of a college course in existentialism he'd had years before.

"I've heard it before. You don't have to pound <sup>u</sup> the <sup>a</sup> same point into me forty times <sup>s</sup>." He felt foolish for exaggerating, and foolish for feeling hostile, and angry because he couldn't get <sup>his</sup> ~~the~~ mind to function. He felt like a floundering swimmer who had gagged on some water and was flailing wildly trying to regain composure <sup>e</sup> and style. If only he could just calm down and breathe <sup>e</sup> a little; maybe ~~he~~ even go under once in order to be away from the splashing <sup>s</sup> and get straightened out again. But no. Somebody was grabbing him by the seat of the pants <sup>v</sup> each time he started to sink and shoving him towards the shore.

"Listen, I don't want to ~~seem~~ sound radical myself, but I'd like to give you some of my views on the alternatives my friends give. I mean, I'm living in

dg.



one of their ideas right now."

Dave expected a laugh from Eric, but the only response was a benign stare. x

"So go ahead and talk - no one's stopping you."

Oh yes you are, you bastard, thought Dave. Just by being there you are threatening me with every word I say. You turn them around so <sup>that</sup> I never recognize them again, and make me feel like I have no <sup>r</sup>freedom to suggest anything without fear of attack.

He realized he was being irrational and totally uncommunicative, but his pride was hurt. He blindly, animalistically determined to push his points through.

"At least Don't you agree that it's a good thing someone is suggesting alternatives?"

Eric shrugged. "Not necessarily. Just because some half-brained idiot starts spouting off his own stupid opinions about what I do for a living it doesn't mean that it's good. I'm not going to suddenly throw up my hands and shout 'Oh, marvelous! Oh, fantastic!' Oh, thank you for saving me from myself! No, not at all! I don't buy that one little bit!"

Dave was exasperated. He thought back to how patient Mary was with him, and how careful she was to avoid snickering at his own hare-brained ideas. Better to let him discover how to laugh at them himself, than <sup>n</sup> laugh at them while they were covered with a still fresh layer of his <sup>d</sup>egotistic pride.

This man was so totally different. Why was Dave so stubbornly hooked on making him agree? Dave had Mary. She loved him, and cared for him, and respected his ideas and helped soothe his worries. He had all that. Why in God's name did he keep on with this irritating man? He let escape a tremendous sigh, (make him resolve not to) as if that alone could resolve him to not lose his temper.

"No one is asking you to buy that. Don't get me wrong. All I'm saying is

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that maybe there is some little bit of <sup>worth</sup> ~~worth~~ in the things these other people are saying about the way we all live. I happen to believe there is plenty of worth in their counter-arguments, but that's just me." He paused for a reaction. There was none.

"Don't you think that if they know their stuff and present it logically that you could agree?"

"Not necessarily."

Dave blinked. He felt his ~~ag~~ anger beginning to probe at his resolve in search of a loophole.

"But don't you feel that you should at least listen to what they say, or read <sup>what</sup> ~~that~~ they have to write?"

"No." The anger began scratching away.

"Then how in God's name can you....? Listen, how can you call yourself open-minded or a scientist if you won't...." Eric cut him off.

"I never said I was a scientist - or open-minded. I don't think those labels can accurately describe me. You were making an assumption."

Dave shook his head and clenched his fists. The anger had punched a large hole<sup>e</sup>, and had one claw out. Its sharp talons were clenched tightly around Dave's brain.

"Yes, but that means that you have to assume. . ." He stopped. He had known only seconds before what he thought Eric was assuming, but his anger had licked it out of his mind like milk from a bowl. It robbed him until he was blind.

Eric spoke.

"I happen to enjoy the way I live. You and your friends seem to expect me to change it without giving me any good reasons why. What can you anticipate from me?"

Respect, thought Dave. His angry mind could not figure out reasons why, but he thought of respect. And friendship of all things. And recognition of his worth as a human being with his own opinions. He knew they didn't make sense

alg

to him. He had no idea of how to communicate them to Eric. How do you communicate feelings? Through anger? Is that like killing in order to show concern?

Eric spoke again.

"As long as I live within the limits I set for myself, I feel perfectly satisfied and safe. I never get upset with myself until then. And then I get angry. Within the limits I set I ~~am~~ am responsible for myself and expect no intervention from others. Nor do I interfere with the lives of others. Doesn't that sound fair? I'm not responsible for the way others live their lives. Isn't that right?"

You're telling yourself a lie, thought Dave. You're <sup>not</sup> letting yourself see all the truth.

But he was so drained of control by his anger that nothing came out. Eric demanded an answer.

"Well? Isn't it?"

If it had been another time, another place, another set of people; one might have sprung ~~violently~~ violently forward, hands clawing, surprising the ~~ff~~ other. The angry one might even have even hurt just the other. <sup>g</sup> Dave knew what can happen when an obsession with being right gags and happens before when the obsession with being right of the one has gagged and chokes on irrefutable logic. But as it was, the fragments of Dave's ~~choked on the irrefutable logic of the other.~~ But as it was, the fragments of resolve banded together against the anger - hamstringing it; setting resolve left in the one banded together against the anger, hamstringing it - it to sour in his stomach, resigning it to the inner realm of nightmares, ~~setting it to sour in the man's stomach; resigning it to an inner realm of nightmares.~~ nightmares.

"Well?" Eric wanted the verdict, <sup>G</sup> Guilty or not guilty? Right or wrong?

Dave prosecuted, defended and judged himself. In most cases, the foreman of the jury never looks at the accused when he reads the little slip of paper in his hand. Dave hung his head, as if he were before the Hooded Inquisitor <sup>g</sup> or.

"Yes." Guilty. "Yes, I guess you're right there." To Dave it was an admission of failure; of <sup>being</sup> less than that right - less than a whole human. The

look on Eric's face made it clear that to him it was simply an expression of agreement. No anger was shown. No confusion. Agreement. Resolution of a difference of opinion. ~~Nothing~~ Nothing more. Simple. He turned away

"What if . . .?" Dave raised his head as Eric turned. "Well, what happens if you do get angry? What happens if you get past those limits of yours? Tell me, ~~what happens~~"

Eric gazed on him with a tired, pained look. It was almost sad, as if his face hurt him again and he longed for a rest.

"I just never allow myself to <sup>get</sup> go to those limits. <sup>That's</sup> ~~That's~~ all. Understand?" The last was asked so quietly that Dave felt a warm breath of pity well up inside him. He nodded. "Yes." Softly.

"Right. Well, you'll have to excuse me for a minute or two. I have a little business to attend to. Listen to some music if you like. The console ~~is~~ is there. You can run it, I think"

<sup>Eric</sup> He moved slowly away. There was a slight tremble to his walk and hands. His jaw was tightly set. A vein on his forehead bulged and flattened, bulged and flattened. Slowly at first, and then quicker and more noticeably with each step. Dave ~~did~~ <sup>c</sup> noticed nothing - barely sensing that Eric had spoken or moved at all until he had disappeared <sup>through</sup> ~~thru~~ a door. Dave stared quietly. He noticed the Comviewer tape. He snapped it into the console and fipped a switch. He gazed at it absently, as if it were a test pattern or a very bad commercial. The screen showed the view as the House ~~scuttled~~ scuttled smoothly over the landscape. It showed everything.

Suddenly the bright reflection of Eric's Omni-trailer flashed into view. The Trailer rocked crazily to one side as it sped around the curve. In moments it was upon the House, faster than the House could react. The swerve, the braking, and the crash. Then the tape ended.

"That <sup>v</sup>bastard! That God-forsaken bastard! He ran me down! He wasn't even watching! That bloody no-good . . .!"

Dave

~~He~~ slammed his fist down on the 'off' button of the console and turned violently away, knocking over a steel-and-plastic lounge chair. The anger roared with a vengeance, clawing and scrambling to the surface! Ah, sweet revenge! <sup>sure of his rightness!</sup> ~~Right in his own eyes~~ once more. Maybe not so infallible, <sup>b</sup> after all!

"Where are you, you stinking freak!?"

He tore through the book-room. Eric was no where in sight. A <sup>c</sup>door they hadn't entered before stood slightly ajar.

"You were asleep at the wheel, hot shot!" <sup>i</sup>belowed Dave. "What kind of tune are you gonna' whistle now?" He burst through the door.

And stopped dead in his tracks.

There in the middle of the bare room <sup>was</sup> ~~is~~ a <sup>a</sup>pear-shaped Electro-Womb. Eric was in lotus position inside ~~it~~. The Womb's umbilical electrode cord snaked <sup>n</sup>down from the top of the contraption and joined Eric at the base of his neck. He had changed clothes and was now <sup>a</sup>wearing a one-piece, terry-cloth exercise suit.

The <sup>g</sup>light images of Eric's subconscious swirled about the room, projected from the beamer on top of the 'Womb. A rhythmic, searing-red pulse overshadowed the lesser flashes and pictures.

Dave wandered about in the lyrical somersalting light and color. The entire room was bathed in it. The stronger red ~~a~~ flash filled the room like a beacon - on-off - on-off. He suddenly realized that the red light was the brightest of all the images, and nearly matched his own heart beat in regularity.

So this is where you go when the emotions get to you, thought Dave. Your own little womb. Just like Mom used to make, but with none of the nagging. A private Utopia!

Between the <sup>d</sup>blood-red throbs, <sup>f</sup>flashes of movies, glimpses of dancing girls, great cosmic expanses, forests and mountains, cars, every subconscious dream-image was <sup>e</sup>reconstituted in light and beamed onto the walls of the room. ~~x~~

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"My God," breathed Dave. "I never knew."

He stumbled from the room and back to the Comviewer console. He removed the tape. The 'off' button had been smashed when he hit it. For the first time he noticed that his fist was bleeding ~~at~~ <sup>where</sup> the ~~broken~~ <sup>broken</sup> plastic had cut it. The wound was oozing blood rapidly. He pressed his hand ~~with~~ <sup>over</sup> kerchief over it, but still the blood came. The first-aid kit was in his House. He left Eric and the Trailer.

The House was strangely quiet while he bandaged his hand.

"There. That should hold. House, are you able to move?" It didn't answer.

"House? Are you all right?"

Silence.

Something <sup>n</sup> was wrong. Dave stood up and it spoke.

"I am fine, Dave. Why don't you lie down?" You seem very tired and you lost blood."

"I'll lie down later. Right now I want to have a few words with that . . . that thing over there in the Trailer."

"He has not from his sleep chamber come out yet," replied the House.

"Sleep chamber? That's a laugh! It's an Electro-Womb of some sort. I've seen 'em in the bigger cities. They run 'em like they used to run those massage parlors. Probably got it jazzed up to juice his pleasure center every second.

God! Instant organ<sup>s</sup>ism."

"He rests ther<sup>e</sup>," offered the House.

"I bet!"

The House was playing soft music. Dave checked the aquariums and planter box. One wall support had torn out. His hand had started to ~~be~~ hurt a great deal. The pain was a low throb - like a strong headache that centers in the middle of the forehead and won't go away. He ~~laid down~~ <sup>lied down</sup> on the be<sup>d</sup> and rested his hand on his chest. The pressure of the throbbing eased slightly. He closed his eyes and

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began to breathe the regular breathe of exhaustion. Soon he was asleep. He dreamt.

In the dream, Dave stood before a tall hooded man who was sitting at a judge's bench. Behind the man a deep red glow pulsed like a heartbeat. Dave looked ~~up~~ at the man.

"Then you do understand me?" Dave asked.

"Yes." The voice was a deep reverberation. Dave could feel as well as hear it.

"And you know then that I <sup>m</sup> ~~am~~ right?"

"Not necessarily." The voice boomed <sup>z</sup> in the darkened hall. The only light came ~~form~~ the pulsing red glow and a spot-light shining on Dave. The hooded judge was silhouetted.

"But, if you understand me, what more ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> ~~there~~ ~~that's~~ needed?"

"You may be right, but you're not infallible. We can only judge whether or not you fail or succeed."

"But you can't determine that unless you know what my goal is," answered Dave.

"Oh, we know what that is, all right."

"But how can you know if I'm right or not?"

"Why is that such an obsession with you?"

"I want to be accepted. I want to be liked. I want to always <sup>a</sup> do the right things so ~~that~~ people will like me." There was no emotion on Dave's face.

The judge shook his head. He stood to deliver his sentence

"You will never know ultimate rightness. You will only know . . . whether you fail or succeed to make a friend. . . and never ~~is~~ the reason why. You are <sup>a</sup> ~~is~~ fool!"

At this point a faceless demon suddenly jumped in from ~~of~~ Dave from the

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shadows.

"Fool! Fool! Fool! Ha! Ha! Ha!" It shrieked and pranced and pointed and cackled.

"Freak! Idiot! Stupid! Moron! Crazy! Crazy! Crazy! Crazy! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Dave ~~o~~ bellowed like an enraged boar. "But why!? Why are you saying that? Why?!"

"You'll never know! You'll never know!"

On the bed in the House, Dave jerked in his sleep. His hand was beginning to hurt again. He grimaced.

"Stop it! Stop it!" he yelled. The demon simply taunted him more.

Dave struck at him and missed. He struck again and again and again but the demon always danced aside. The spotlight enlarged to show all the courtroom. An audience was seated in rows above the court's floor. At the top of the audience, a sportscaster was standing in an enclosed press box. Dave could see him pointing and gesturing in his<sup>s</sup> direction and talking in an animated manner into the microphone.

"You devil! I'll kill you!"

"Now, now, now," said the demon. "Not nice to lose temper. Little boy get spanked!"

The demon struck Dave square, dazing him. A blow to the midsection. A chop to the back of his neck. And he was down. The demon pushed Dave over with his foot and bent low over him with his knee on Dave's chest. His face was almost touching Dave's as Dave winced and cringed while trying to regain breath. Dave clutched his stomach.

"Little boy hurt? Ah. Too bad. Shouldn't say naughty things. No<sup>o</sup>, no, no!"  
The demon straightened up and put his <sup>b</sup> foot near Dave's face. The heel rested on his chest. The toe smashed his nose. Dave struggled to move but could not..

"Lick it!"

"No!" he gasped.

The boot pressed harder. Every move hurt.



"Lick it!"

"Never!"

Through the corner of his eye Dave could see the sports <sup>caster</sup> throwing his head back in unrestrained laughter. With great effort ~~he~~ <sup>Dave</sup> lifted his hand to grab the demon's leg. He struck at it and tried to push it aside, but the demon only laughed. In frustration he slammed his fist down on the floor.

On the bed in the House, Dave dropped his hand to the mattress. The sharp pain awakened him. He sat up with sweat dripping from his face.

"My God, House!"

"Yes, Dave? Are you all right?"

"No!" He bolted <sup>f</sup>from the bed and pushed through the airlock. It was dark outside, and chilly. Great constellations sparkled <sup>d</sup>the night. The Trailer was <sup>g</sup>gone .

"Where'd he go, House?"

"I don't know, Dave. The <sup>T</sup>Trailer moved away 2.35 hours ago."

"Follow him."

The House did not move.

"What's wrong? Can't you follow him?"

"Yes, Dave."

"Then why aren't you moving?" Dave's voice was a plea - a desperate, yearning mournful cry.

"What will you do there, Dave?"

"I don't know yet. Just get moving or I'll take over manually."

"You are too upset for that . . . ."

"Stow it, House! ~~Whim!~~ Move! ~~now!~~"

The House crept forward. Dave climbed aboard and punched his way through the airlock. "Put ~~it~~ on some speed or we'll never catch him! I want to . . ."

They had not moved a hundred yards before a small blinking light <sup>e</sup>became visible before them. It was on top of one of the Trailer's domed receivers.

When Dave approached the Trailer he noticed it was dark and quiet. The

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door was unlocked. There was no sign of Eric. Dave slid into the Trailer silently and ~~he~~ began to make his way slowly through the rooms. Through a door ahead of him he ~~he~~ saw a faint glow of light. He moved ~~forward~~ toward it and ~~he~~ bumped into a table.

"<sup>Who</sup>Who's there?" It was Eric's voice; unsure and surprised.

Dave moved through the door<sup>c</sup>way - Eric was sitting in his bookroom with a single light turned on. He was reading.

"It's me."

"Oh,<sup>w</sup>vell, so it is. Come to make yourself sound even more radical? Want to try and change my mind again? Come on. I'm willing."

Dave didn't answer.

"You want to read me some poetry or try gestalt therapy on me? I'm game. I just think you're wasting your time is all."

Dave looked at the book in Eric's hands.

"What's that you're reading?"

"Oh, just something I read once when I was seven! I hadn't read it since. It's Walden by Henry David Thoreau."

"You read Thoreau?"

"Why sure. <sup>What</sup>What's wrong with that?"

"Do you understand him?"

"I think so. There's nothing too deep to grapple with in it. I like the way he writes. For a hermit who renounced everything he certainly maintained a worldly vocabulary. I like some of his words."

(Dave's temper snapped.)

"A hermit?! . . . You call him a hermit! And you say you understand him! You're a fool, Eric. You're a poor, damn fool who's going to wake up some morning and find yourself so hated and lonely that no Electro-Womb on earth could make you happy!"

Eric jumped up from the chair.

"You saw that?"

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A nod.

"You had no right! That is private!" His face suddenly screwed up into the mask of pain. He grabbed at his forehead with one hand as he turned away.

"What's the matter, Eric? Sorry that someone saw into your life a little too far? Well don't worry about it! Nobody is going to be interested!"

"Damn you! Damn you!" Eric whirled around to face Dave. His teeth were clamped tight; as if pressure there would relieve pressure <sup>s</sup>elsewhere.

"Can't you leave me alone for awhile?!" He clutched the sides of his head with both hands and rocked back and forth.

"Why? Afraid that I'll find out something else? Do you want to get away to your little joy center again? Go ahead! I won't stop you!"

Eric's face contorted into a look of fright.

He whimpered. "Good God! What do you think I am !?"

He sucked air through his <sup>e</sup>clinched teeth and dropped his hands to ~~his~~ side. The book was still in one of them. Suddenly he grew furious. He charged towards Dave with the book.

"There's a word in here that describes what you are! I remember it from when I read it before! <sup>t</sup>In~~ter~~loper! The stranger that intervenes! That's what you are! You had no right to break into my personal life like you did! Now get out!" ~~E~~

Dave backed away.

"<sup>G</sup>et out! Get out!" Dave stumbled through the door.

"Get away from me and leave me alone! And take your god-damned book with you!" He hurled the book out into the darkness over Dave's head. As he turned away from the door he clutched his head again, and double<sup>d over</sup>with pain.

The door slammed. In less than a minute Dave saw the lights come on again and ~~heard the~~ <sup>heard the</sup> music begin to blare. The ~~the~~ <sup>k</sup>Tailer lurched away, pick<sup>ing</sup> up speed as it entered the <sup>b</sup>blackness.

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"Well good riddance." sighed Dave.

But he felt uneasy when he got back to the House. And he had no appetite during the rest of the trip to Mary's ~~home~~ home. And when he finally arrived and she asked him why he was so late, he snapped at her. It was the first time. He didn't know why he did it.

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