

THE HAUNTING¹¹⁵

Ah, dear reader, pity poor Edward, for he is having a difficult time indeed.¹¹⁶ You know how it is when you are standing on a street corner and you think you hear someone call your name? You stop, you look around, your expression that of surprise and curio-

¹¹⁵ About the title. I was always taught that the title has to arouse interest. Now, for those of you expecting a ghost story, you may be disappointed. But you see, I can't really tell you what this story is about, because then you might not wish to read further. But let me just say, in all fairness, that if you are expecting a ghost story, well, this is definitely not a ghost story. Though, in some ways, it is scary.

¹¹⁶ Now, you may ask, *why should we care?* We all have difficult times, so why should anyone pity Edward any more than we pity anyone else? Or, ourselves, as far as that goes. These are all good questions, for Edward isn't all that different from anyone else. He's a very average person although to look at him, you probably wouldn't say to yourself, "Gee, what an average looking person," but then, you can't say that he has any characteristics that set him apart from anyone else, really. He's a human being and, as such, has come to this world in a way that is certainly human enough and socially acceptable and carries with him the heredity of the human race: the usual hair, eyes, nose, spleen, bladder (and when he needs it, plenty of gall as well), and everything in the right place. He is balding, and slightly buck-toothed (because he sucked his thumb until he was five, and carried a blanket around with him—remarkable only in its durability in lasting several years in the hands of a rambunctious and insecure five-year-old). The blanket was green, by the way, and the only reason I mention this is that I am told good writers try to hook the reader's attention by the very concrete examples of reality to enable the reader to visualize the scene more fully in their minds. In addition, if you add the blanket to the hand of said five-year-old boy

with thumb in mouth, who looks a bit bewildered at the world, and dress him in blue jeans with the zipper down and a red and black flannel shirt with holes in the elbow, you have a pretty good image of what Edward looked like when he was five years old; now, add about thirty-odd years onto the image, add good grooming, subtract the thumb-sucking and blanket, add hard candies to the mouth and you have a pretty good idea of Edward as he is now. The bewildered look is one of the things that has remained pretty constant. Also, Edward is agreeable in manner.

I think I should clarify the last statement—you know, the “agreeable in manner.” This is not to say the Edward is without moods. He does have all sorts of moods and is at somewhat of a loss at times to explain where they all come from, and frequently gets confused between feeling unpleasant about himself and thinking that because he feels unpleasant, he is therefore, by nature, unpleasant and can, if he is not careful, set himself up to be behaviorally unpleasant. At other times, he can keep the feelings and identity quite well separated. He also has the habit of thinking nasty thoughts; nasty thoughts about women, parents, the world and secretly enjoys the nastiness tremendously, even though he knows it’s “wrong.” (The reason “wrong” is in quotes is the Edward was raised as a nice boy and nice boys don’t think harmful or nasty thoughts about others, because if you think nasty thoughts, then, automatically, you’re going to do nasty things. The logic behind such a thought process is as solid as that logic used in a recent minor conflict: “We had to burn the village to save it.”) Naturally, because it is wrong to feel certain ways, and since Edward feels, wrongly, those certain ways anyway, he manages to dredge up from God-knows-where, lots of guilt so that he can punish himself adequately, and having done so, either thinks up more wrong thoughts/feelings or goes on to something else, and decides the best way to deal with feelings is to ignore them since he can’t figure them out and is too embarrassed to talk about them because men aren’t supposed to feel certain feelings.

Edward does, of course, also have times when he feels very good about himself; days when the sun seems to shine just for him, or all the stoplights turn green just for him, or there is a special sale just for him—in other words, when the whole world seems to be dancing and skipping to the beat of his heart. He knows it’s not true, of course, but it certainly makes a delightful fantasy and is a way of pampering himself.

What does all this mean? one may ask, and rightfully so. All these footnotes are simply saying how average Edward really is. What else can be said? He’s in control of his behavior. Certainly he is appropriate. He has good, functional, baseline behavior. He has emotions and although he knows that they have something to do with survival, he does not know quite how. Indeed, he is somewhat puzzled by the fact that he can experience fear, for example, while his mind, at the same time, is quite calm. How odd that—at least for Edward and probably everyone else as well—the rational and the irrational can co-exist

ity. Now this has happened to Edward in the past, but infrequently: twice, three times a year at the most and Edward has handled it by dismissing it, since he could never find out who was calling his name; and these days, he would continue to dismiss it except that it happened more and more frequently. And Edward was finding it more and more difficult to ignore.

And so, on one bright Saturday morning while he was standing on a street corner watching young ladies walk by, watching the flash of chrome and polished paint of cars, hearing the grunt of engines and squeal of brakes, amidst all this, Edward heard his name called: “Edward.”

As usual, Edward looked about and instead of ignoring it, Edward, on this fine Saturday morning with the sunlight pouring down, Edward decided, all right, dammit, I’ll follow you. Maybe I’m *not* imagining things. He turned and followed the voice, right into a drugstore, for that was the nearest building close to him. Maybe the voice calling his name was trying to say that the answer to all of this was in a drugstore.¹¹⁷

simultaneously within us. Which means, as far as Edward goes, that to strive for total rationality is as irrational as being totally irrational. Anyhow, by now it is established I hope, that Edward is a human being and probably pretty average. So, you may ask, what is the point of all this? Why should anyone be concerned with anyone so average? What sets Edward apart from everybody else? Why not just end this story and get on with something else—get on to a character with severe psychopathology? Someone interesting! A Dostoevskian character study! A Shakespearean character looking at the sky for the pale threads of fate weaving through the stars! Who cares about such an average person by the name of Edward? What has Edward got that we should be concerned about him? Who art Edward that we should be mindful of him?

Well, for one, Edward is haunted.

(For more information about this, please refer to the rest of the story, which appears after the indication of the second footnote in the main body of the story.)

¹¹⁷ A very reasonable assumption, actually, given that drugstores give out all sorts of powders, pills and potions. It’s no wonder that Edward, as so many, should go to a drugstore for the answers to life’s minor irritants: fear of death? Take Valium. Lonely? Stand at the newsstand and read the movie magazines to see how screwed up stars’ lives are so you can feel better about your lot and not have

And so he went in and listened for the Voice, which would certainly call him to the proper area, aisle, shelf, section that would help him fulfill his destiny and live up to his potential.

But, alas, an hour of methodically working through the store, going from Anacin to toy xylophones revealed nothing.¹¹⁸

Dismayed, Edward went outside. “Good Lord,” he thought, “if there is no answer in a drugstore, then where could an answer be?” He sighed and walked back outside.

“Edward!”

Edward looked around *again*. He proceeded up the street and kept his ears open. He listened to people around him:¹¹⁹

“Da-dum-dum-da-da-dum-de-dum . . .”

“...green plaid really looks nice with the slacks...”

“...*Whooeee!* Lookit them boobs *grunt grunt*...”

“No. You can’t have any so just stop crying...”

“...yeah, if I can just get a fifty-seven Chev, my life will be complete...”

to make changes. Anxious? Depressed? Probably lack of Vitamin X or Y or Z, which are, of course, on sale today. So, naturally, since drugstores contain so many “cures,” i.e., methods by which we all may be continually happy, so that even death will have as much impact as a Sleep-Eze-induced nap, it’s no wonder Edward would think that the Voice calling his name must be suggesting that he needs only Pepto-Bismol or Ex-Lax or mouthwash, and then the Voice will, of course, go away.

¹¹⁸ There are certain sections in the drugstore that Edward does not linger about too long: the feminine hygiene section doesn’t seem to apply to Edward, nor does perfume, cigars, Ken and Barbie dolls, toothpaste, latex paint or rubber gloves.

¹¹⁹ Alas. Edward suffers from audio-voyeurism. Edward is fascinated by, not only *what* people talk about, but *how* people talk about and express their feelings, and one thing Edward has discovered is how much easier it is to talk about *things* than it is to talk about *feelings*. Edward wonders why this is so, but then as he thinks about it, he suddenly comes to the realization that he, too, has a difficult time talking about his feelings. The most difficult feelings being those that he is sure that others would reject—which, he does not yet realize, is him, Edward, rejecting his own feelings, which makes about as much sense as a fruit fly rejecting fruit; a fish rejecting water; a star rejecting heat; or rain rejecting clouds. This could keep going for a while because I find it fun to think up examples, but I suppose I should get back to the story.

“...well, I just told him that it simply wasn’t going to work and that’s all there was to it...”

“—so I guess a part of me is still operating on my mother’s scripting, which is okay, but I feel that sometimes it’s just inappropriate to my otherwise baseline behavior...”

“Da-da-dum-de-dum-de-de-dum—”

“...just couldn’t figure it out; my body wanted to but my mind didn’t—”

“—yeah, you have to keep the two separate or you can really get into trouble...”

“Oh, God! Lookit that butt! Pick them short hairs right outta my teeth!”

“De-de-dum-da-dum-dum-de-de-dum—”

“Edward!”

Edward turned and followed the Voice; it seemed to be coming from the clothing store. He went in. A salesman came up to him, a young fellow dressed in a purple silk shirt, open at the neck and “with it” blue jeans, newly used and frayed in the best and most current style. The salesman rubbed his hands in a very casual manner and the light reflected off his pear-shaped glasses that were down on his nose a bit to give the casual, non-committal style of the time. His aura was that of, “Hi, I’m sincere, but let’s keep everything open, because if some opportunity comes up, I don’t want to miss it by being tied to any sort of relationship.”

“Hi,” he said to Edward, “Can I help you?”

“Um.” Edward said.

“A new suit to impress that young lady of yours?” He smiled. His eyes said, “Clothes make the man. They also make the lady. Wear the right clothes; the right fabric, color, cut, smell, image—the right combination, and like a safe, the tumblers will fall into place and *squoosh*, the lady will unlock her legs for you.”

“Um.” Edward said again. Maybe if he wore the right combination of clothes, he’d find out who was saying his name.

“Yes,” he said, “this looks like a nice suit, may I try it on?”

The salesman flashed the look “Need you ask?” but said, “Of course,” and pulled the suit off the rack. In a dressing room, built narrow and small for *lean, mean men on the move*, Edward, who was not lean, nor exactly a mover, bumped knees, elbows, butt as he got into a suit. He pulled the bold, red curtain back and, as though stepping onto some vast stage of life, Edward looked past an audience of stacked slacks, to a mirror.

Oh, but *now* what an image he has of himself in the pinstripe suit! Miss Fletcher, bring the Hotchkiss Report! No! Fire Snordly immediately! Get the janitor! I want that window clean! I want the glass clear as I stare out over Chicago, past the avenue, over the park, to the lake shore! I command all that I see! The glass must be clear while I make executive decisions! Miss Fletcher! Call my wife! I won’t be home tonight! I’m working late! Call Ms. Sommers; I’ll meet her at the Club at seven!

By God, Edward snorted, *what a suit!*

Ah, but the tennis shoes. Edward frowned and his image disappeared like the top of the Sears Tower engulfed by clouds. What’s more, his name was not called. Edward frowned.

“Something else?” asked the salesman.

“Um,” Edward said unexecutively, “that one.”

Off with the pinstripe, on with the blue denim suit, back with the red curtain and he and Ms. Sommers¹²⁰ (“Call me Ellie,” she said) leaned against Edward’s Ferrari, looking out over Big Sur,

¹²⁰ Ms. Sommers (actually, Mrs. Ellen Backlesford these days) actually did exist. She was the overdeveloped girl with the cute, heat-lamp sunburned face who sat next to Edward in eighth grade History. She was the sexual fantasy object who occupied Edward’s imagination as he learned the many intricacies of auto-eroticism.

(Note: auto-eroticism is, of course, also called “jacking off,” “beating the meat,” “jerking off,” “masturbating,” “spanking the monkey,” and probably many more terms that I cannot think of/recall right now.)

(Note to the above note: It occurs to me that you might be thinking that I am being unduly nasty, or thinking of issues hardly suitable for one’s consideration, which could also be termed “irrelevant.” That may be true. But nasty—certainly not! Although, I wouldn’t necessarily rule out being evil-minded.)

watching the sun set. She ran her hand over the back of his blue denim jacket (on sale for \$49.98, regularly \$59.45) and murmured, “Mmmmm, Edward, oh...I never dreamed as I sat next to you in Miss Prosebad’s class that beneath your average exterior, you were *such* a tiger. Mmmmm. Edward. As I stand next to you with my hand on your \$134,000 Ferrari and the other hand on the tremendous bulge of your incredible tool that I see pushing against the tight weave of your pants, I feel my breasts tingling, my thighs aching—Oh, Edward, I must have you, now, on the hood of your Ferrari, with the waves squooshing and slopping in the background, beneath the hot and sweaty sun, and my hands under your jacket clutching at the fabric of your hot pink silk shirt, which, by itself, costs \$23.88—I must have you, Oh, God...”

The salesman suppressed a snigger as he glanced at the bulge in Edward’s pants and abruptly Edward turned and pointed.

“That suit.”

Obediently, the salesman brought Edward another suit. A tan one, very expensive and...Flash of red curtain and...in his mind, the crowd quieted as Edward walked to the podium.

“I come to oppose my opponent, not to praise him. Whether it is better to withstand his slings and arrows of outrageous charges, I cannot say. But to withstand or not to withstand, that is not the question. What is in question, is a just peace at home and abroad. By electing me, you pass the torch on to a new generation of politicians; born of a hard and bitter recession; aware of the military industrial complex, yet open to new frontiers, great societies and peace in our time. Yes, yes, I see the light at the end of the tunnel, and yes, though at times we may have to destroy to save, we must remember our fatherland, the heritage of our proud and true race as we take on the burden of teaching the world our ways! And in the end, ask not what I can do for you, ask what you can do for me!” and the speech abruptly ended¹²¹ when Edward realized the pants

¹²¹ Edward would probably work well as a speech writer for public officials. He understands the Great Themes that cause people to swallow, look up and forget reality. But this thought never crosses his mind because, after all, he couldn’t possibly understand the deep and complex reasoning of public officials or politi-

were far, far too tight—and also, no one had called his name. So, with a sigh, Edward got back into his jeans and yellow tee-shirt and nodded to the trying-to-smile salesman, and as soon as Edward stepped outside—

“Edward!”

Again, Edward looked about.

“Dammit,” he thought to himself, “what *is* this? No matter what I do, I *still* don’t get anywhere!” And he simply wanted to ignore the Voice—yet, he could not, and so he again followed the Voice and it seemed to lead him back to his home, to his car.

“Okay,” he thought, “I get it. I’m supposed to *drive* somewhere.”

And so he got into his car and began driving.¹²² If he was to make a left turn, the Voice seemed to be on his left side. A right turn, and the Voice was on his right. Straight ahead and the sound of the Voice seemed to come to both his ears simultaneously. Edward wanted to interrogate the Voice, find out who it was and why it was tormenting him, and so kept right on driving, onto the freeway, driving north, then, hearing his name spoken on his left, turned off the freeway and headed west to Deep Pass,¹²³ a place

cians. No, they know what they are doing and are better left to do their jobs unhindered by mere citizens. After all, Edward reasons, they couldn’t get to where they are if their knowledge wasn’t more perfect than others’. Everybody knows that. Therefore, the decisions politicians make are obviously the right ones. Some truths, obviously, are self-evident. At least to Edward.

¹²² Which is reasonable, actually. There are two choices here. One can hear one’s name called and ignore it and secretly wonder what it’s all about, or one can ask directly, “All right, just what is this all about?” which is what Edward decides to do, and since it is Saturday, a nice day and all, and with little else to do—well, why not?

¹²³ When I say Deep Pass, I am out-and-out lying. The name is fictitious, but the place is real. The reason that I, the author, am not revealing the true name of the place is that it’s a favorite place of mine and whenever you mention a place that really exists, like John Steinbeck’s *Cannery Row*, the schlock shops come in to sell Steinbeck Coffee mugs for all the tourists to come down for some “kulcha” so that little Mary Sue in her cutoffs and white blouse with the chocolate ice cream stains on it from an ice cream cone bought at Doc’s Choclit Shop can get

where craggy headlands rise up out of the Sound; a delightful area of stunted pines, brown grasses, madrone trees, little blue and pink flowers peering out of the cracks in rocks, and a constant breeze that ruffles your jacket and blows your hair back.¹²⁴

her picture taken in the place where John Steinway invented the piano—or was it Jack Steinberg, who discovered rubber here on the day when he said, “Goodrich, come here, I need you.” At any rate, I’m not going to reveal where this place actually is: the thought of the place being ruined by candy bar wrappers, out-houses, car exhaust, beer cans, and crowds breaks my heart.

(Note: Of course my character Edward—as I have written him in this story—wouldn’t have second thoughts about revealing the place. To him, places have value only in terms of how much revenue they bring in. Whenever Edward goes anywhere, he immediately begins thinking in terms of where the Safeway should go, the best place for billboards, and of course, where the gas station should be. His father, who was in real estate, hadn’t the time for aesthetic values. To him, the land in Washington State was sadly under used. Once he had a dream: to level the Olympic Mountains. This would accomplish two things: open up the land for building, and push the shoreline of Washington State out. Likewise, he could see the Cascades leveled and used to fill Puget Sound. Mt. Rainier, he envisioned hollowed out and turned into a vast parking garage. And he dreamed of a city that ran the length of the West Coast, from Vancouver, British Columbia to San Diego. He even figured out, clever person, the name of the city: VanSeaPortFriscoLosDiego. And Edward’s father smiled in his sleep at this dream. Ah! What great use of the land! Who needs scenery when you got bucks in the hand? Ah. Such a befouling-of-the-nest-American was Edward’s father.)

¹²⁴ Unless, of course, you have short hair. At the time this story is written, it is the cultural fad, and has been for some time now, to wear one’s hair long. (Please note, the term “Longhair” is not presently used; it used to have a derogatory flavor aimed at intellectuals who were somehow less than American and if you are less than American, you must be unAmerican and if you are unAmerican, you must be a Communist and a revolutionary like Lenin, Mao Tse Tung and Thomas Jefferson.) So, the image of having one’s hair blown back should be a familiar one to those people who read this story at this point of time in this culture. If, of course, fads change, and the new fad is to go around bald, then obviously, no one will understand this image at all. And then what I said won’t make much sense. If this should come to pass, all I can say is: imagine how it would be to have long hair and then imagine the wind blowing through it. There, I think I’ve solved the problem. The only thing that might spoil this image is the chance that wind might somehow disappear, but I think that is unlikely.

Edward pulled into the parking lot overlooking Deep Pass. Three hundred feet below, the tides indifferently surged through a narrow gap between two massive pillars of stone—*islands*, actually—joined by several mighty steel arcs of bridge.

It was a grand scene to watch that water swirl about, and Edward immediately thought of how it would be to build a dam between those mighty cliffs of stone. For a few minutes he pondered this situation, turned on the radio¹²⁵, and after a few minutes...

“Edward!” came the Voice.

Edward got out of the car.¹²⁶ The Voice seemed to be coming from his right. He trotted like a curious puppy after it: over the bridges, down a narrow pathway that led through wind-punished pines, down along the beach (*slip, slip, slip* went the waves gently slapping at the shore). The pathway continued up through dry grass, then over boils and scabs of ancient lava and finally the trail branched and Edward, hearing the Voice on his right, followed the trail to a bluff overlooking the ocean. Edward sat. The color of the sky was the same as the water. The sun was like a flaming diamond in the sky and poured out heat and light as though it was really nothing unusual. In the water below, creatures born of the water lived, bred and died nonchalantly. Edward noticed the air

¹²⁵ Edward always has the radio going when he drives. He has lost his taste for classical music, and doesn't like rock-and-roll either. He prefers a light type of Easy Listening music—the kind that you hear in supermarkets or banks. With classical music you have to concentrate and somehow, a lot of the music leaves Edward feeling icky; you know, sad, uncomfortable. And rock-and-roll—well, you have to listen to the words and sometimes Edward hears things he does not enjoy hearing. Why do people have to sing about war? Or death? Edward just wants to be happy. That's all. And that's the danger of music: if you aren't careful, it can have an effect on you; one song can make you sad, another thoughtful, another uncomfortable. All these damn emotions running around. Why do musicians try to make Edward uncomfortable?

¹²⁶ A white Lincoln Continental. Edward's Daddy had benefited from the system so, of course, you protect that which benefits you and you can just guess who Edward's father—and Edward—voted for in one election. If you still can't guess, perhaps a quote from Edward's father would be helpful: “You tell 'em, Spiro! By God, now there's one man you can trust!”

moving about as it usually does; how or why or that it did—well, it really wasn't too awfully important, was it? In the cracks in the rocks, flowers bloomed, but then, big deal. That's what flowers were supposed to do.

The rock that Edward sat upon was once lava, flowing like molasses—you know, the expensive kind that you see on supermarket shelves. It was a good thing that the lava had hardened or else Edward wouldn't have had anything to rest his plump bottom on. Edward waited. He sighed. He reached in his coat pocket for a candy bar¹²⁷, peeled off the wrapper and dropped it over the cliff. He chewed the candy bar, savoring the chocolate, the almonds; it had a very nice taste to it. And Edward chewed the candy bar and listened for the Voice. Soon he was rewarded.

“Edward.”

Edward turned. There was a little green alien standing nearby, wearing a mask of Edward's face. The mask was on a stick, and the alien held it before its own face like a surreal sucker. In its other hand, the alien held a soggy Cadbury candy bar wrapper.

“You dropped this,” said the alien, and it deposited the wrapper very gently before Edward, as though it was made of some extraordinary material; woven gold, spun diamonds, hammered silver.

Edward ignored it and said, “All right, I've followed you, and now here you are, and here I am. Now. What do you want?”

The alien sighed, but kept the mask of Edward in place.

“Edward,” said the alien, “I want a divorce.”

Edward did not say anything, but finally he laughed.

“I didn't even know I was married.”

“That's very obvious,” said the alien. “We've been estranged—alienated—ever since I can remember. You've never let me be a part of you. You don't even recognize me; you don't even know who I am.”

Edward shrugged. “So? Who are you? All I see is a skinny green kid wearing a mask of myself.”

¹²⁷ Edward has an intense craving for Cadbury Chocolate with Almond bars: you know, the candy bars with the aluminum foil wrapper which is about as biodegradable as a Coke bottle.

“Do you really want to know me?” asked the alien. Do you really want to see behind the mask?”

“Sure,” said Edward, “I followed you out here, didn’t I?”

The alien said nothing for a few minutes. Finally, it sighed and said, “I don’t think you’re really interested, but—” The alien lowered the mask. Behind the face there was no face, just a blank disk, like a circular screen. But that changed very quickly and Edward stared as images formed and changed on that circular disk: images of sun and water, rock and flower, cat and bee, birch and barnacle, starfish, clam, clouds, moons, stars, dogs, galaxies, fish, waves, soil, mountains, eruptions, canyons, eagle, river, lightning, mice, and children playing, mothers laughing, grass bending, sunset, sunrise, birth, death, a child dancing in the moonlight, the seething atmosphere of Jupiter, a snow covered field on earth at noon, and the final image of Edward riding an eagle as it soared, soared to the brilliant burning diamond of sun.

The alien put the mask before its face once again.

Edward shrugged his shoulders and stifled a yawn.

“God, Edward,” said the alien, “I tried so hard to communicate with you—I tried and tried to get you to pay attention, but you didn’t. Even when I stood right before you, you still ignored me.”

Edward stood. “Sorry you felt so badly. Incidentally, you never did say who you were.”

“I’m *you!*”

“No,” Edward said. “I wasted my time coming out here, but I had to see what that Voice was. I still don’t know but at least I can ignore it now.” Edward turned and began to walk back.

“I’m sorry,” said the alien, “but I’m leaving you. It’s obvious that you aren’t going to miss me because you never took the time to know me. So, I’m going to assume another form and whatever happens to you is left to chance.”

The alien dropped the mask. A deer appeared on the trail; then the body of the alien merged with the deer; Edward heard a shout of joy, “Oh, the joy of the merging!” And startled, the deer looked about, saw Edward, and leaped and bounded away into nearby brush.

Edward gave a snort of disgust. He turned and began to walk—but something strange was happening. It felt as though he was walking into a fine mesh, as though the scene before him was becoming two dimensional and yielding to him as gauze or thin fabric might. He stopped, puzzled, irritated. He pushed.

Rip!

The scene tore and he was drifting in darkness. It was very warm in the darkness. He closed his eyes and when he awoke, he was startled. It was very light. There was the sound of his favorite music; the light, airy, noncommittal music that he had heard, at one time, was the type of music dairy cows liked, and gave more milk whenever it was played.

Edward looked around. If he felt anything, it might be some dismay. But then again, maybe it wasn't much of anything Edward felt, because he really didn't feel any different than he always had. It was true, however, that he no longer looked like Edward, no, not at all. He had two hands: one pointing to a three, the other pointing to a twelve. *All right then*, he thought, *I must have died and come back as a clock*. And as he looked around, he noticed that he wasn't alone. No, he was in a store, and the shelves all around him were loaded with gadgets, appliances, tools. And he smiled to himself. No, this wasn't too bad at all. Certainly felt no different. Yet, in the back of his mind, he couldn't help but wonder; just what was the alien trying to tell him? He knew he'd have to think about that for a while, as he absentmindedly ticked off a second.