

## Introduction

Several miles from downtown Gotham City stood majestically the ivory-white building of Masters High School, a public institution of secondary education. A fairly recent establishment, the school took great pride in spawning the finest scholars of the state. This apparent abundance of intelligence was mainly due to the fact that even though brilliance is usually held to exist in very minute proportions, attendance there was so numerous that the school was simply bound to donate a more than good share to the intellectual community. However, of the nearly four thousand students and teachers at Masters High School, the bright individuals were indeed counterbalanced(if not overshadowed) by the stupid, of course to be followed by the terribly stupid. There were the rich, there were the poor, and there were the terribly poor. There were the fun, there were the boring, and there were the terribly boring. There were the good, there were the bad, and there were the terribly bad. And there were the human, there were the inhuman, and there were the terribly inhuman. Under the general category of inhuman will be found the school's resident extra-terrestrial population, some one hundred fifty to two hundred Phobones, who, although most(especially the humans) did not realize, conducted within the walls of the school clandestine activities whose nature the same most completely failed to realize. Also not realized was the strangely exact correspondence between the number of Phobones and the number of faculty and administration personnel at Masters High. These and other unrealized facts may at the moment seem totally irrelevant, but they will soon prove crucial to the workings of the following story.

## Chapter One

At Masters High School, it looked as if it was going to be a day like any other.

"Please settle down class while I finish checking attendance."

The teacher continued reading off the names on her roll. English instructor Ms. Stone could best be described as being peculiar--something about her seemed to radiate an unearthly oddness. Maybe it was the way she chronically wiggled her left elbow, giving the impression of being in great discomfort, as if the skin there was much too tight for the bones. Maybe it was the way she often fell into violent coughing spasms as if her respiratory system was not quite used to the surrounding atmospheric conditions. Or maybe it was the way she would have abruptly (but not necessarily intentionally) turned her head towards anyone who were to be called out "Phobone."

"Madison, Irving Bernard?"

From his seat in the back of the room, Irving Bernard Madison answered. A rather small fellow, he sat in his chair elevated by his textbooks, which he had some time ago deemed totally useless. One weekend many years past, Irving took the time to assimilate the entirety of human knowledge and thought and concluded that it was nothing special and predicted that it never would be. Going to school was clearly a daily exercise in futility, and he did so only to please his parents, who had really hoped all along that he would go to college on an athletic scholarship. Irving himself would be perfectly content to sit all day at his personal computer, by far the most complex system on Earth, flicking switches and pressing buttons. This he did, even at school, where he remained diligently at work on the portable terminal set up and all over his desk. When asked jokingly by his classmates to what matter of monumental importance he was currently tending, he would reply "rebuilding the economy" or "trying to put a stop to the nuclear war I just accidentally started." He usually spoke the truth. Because of his diminutive musculature and his affinity for things computerized, he was given many appropriate nicknames, all of which he personally detested, including "Microchip." In this and other ways his comrades would mock little Irving, considering him a social outcast doing what social outcasts do best. He was indeed very different from them, for Irving Bernard Madison was in fact a representative of the next step in human evolution, born much too early as one of Nature's attempts to make up for the many Neanderthals living in today's society born much too late. His intellect and mental capacity were unequalled among mankind and would be so for at least another nine thousand years. For some strange reason, however, he had difficulty passing his high school courses.

"Monroe, Lisa Ursula?"

From her seat also in the back of the room, Lisa Ursula Monroe answered. Like her superevolved classmate sitting two desks to her left, Lisa was also

intimately occupied with herself, not with advanced computer programming, but with applying pound after pound of makeup onto her face. Not that she needed any such artificial enhancement, of course, for Lisa was undeniably a natural beauty. Her complexion knew not a single blemish, and her figure was faultless. In her opinion, however, perfection was always in need of improvement, so she often indulged herself in the latest cosmetics and fashions. Leading metaphor specialists would compare Lisa to an European sportscar: she was not only high in cost, but also sleek in design, exciting in curvature, dynamic in motion, and generally great to look at. Leading synonym specialists would describe her as pretty, good-looking, fair-haired, comely, and extremely attractive. Leading objectivity specialists would characterize her as a brown-haired, gray-eyed, pale-skinned, carbon-based, biped ape-descendant female humanoid with an unusual influence over social matters. (It should be mentioned that today she looked especially nice in her cheerleading outfit.) Unlike Mr. Madison, whose higher evolutionary state prevented him from being completely accepted by his peers, her particular anomaly--namely her staggering beauty and astounding anatomical features, if the point has not yet gotten across--has made her very popular, and she always remained at the center of attention; girls saw her as an object of admiration and respect and flattery through imitation, and, respectively, guys saw her as an object of sexual fantasies. While always aware of the privileges of her prestigious position, she took constant heed of the drawbacks of her lifestyle. High school only lied in the path of a successful career in modelling, movies, or any other involving male heterosexual audiences. The value of education, nonetheless, was stressed in a family whose father was a professor of Analytical Mathematics and Subatomic Physics and whose mother held several degrees in English Literature and World Philosophy. Having such scholarly parents, not only did Lisa feel her future professional life somewhat delayed, but she had also received from them quite a gifted mind. Here was a girl who was neither dumb nor blonde. Despite her inherited intelligence, she too had trouble with her grades.

"Nelson, Benjamin Ernest?"

From his personal sitting space in the very back of the room, Benjamin Ernest Nelson answered. He had recently learned to respond to his name, remembering it only by its "b" and "n" sounds. That was about as far as his comprehensive capabilities stretched. On strikingly rare occasions, he was known to display marvelous outbursts of extraordinary brilliance, explained along with other mind-boggling phenomena by theologians as a way God likes to catch people offguard. Otherwise, brontosauri could score higher than could Benjamin on aptitude tests. He was indeed as intelligent as an average brick wall, but built like one as well. His muscular formation would possibly astound geologists, and his failure to keep celestial bodies in gravitational orbit around him baffles astrophysicists. In fact, the research and development department of several world armies are currently in a race to determine the exact chemical composition of his skin and bone structure for use in their anti-artillery tanks. No one on Earth could match his brute strength, either individually or even collectively. Benjamin was unquestionably a tremendously valuable asset for the football team, being the only player from whom opponents actually run away, even if he were to be carrying the ball. Such was his great power--when he walked into a room full of people, for example, they fearfully knew that he dominated the entire room, taking into account his unnerving presence and the fact that he took up most of the available space anyways. Benjamin, on the other hand, never had an idea as to what was going on. It would seem a wonder that a person of his intellect was sitting here in high school, but not so when considering the generous donations made to the state annually by the incredibly wealthy Nelson family. Meanwhile, Benjamin had no unexpected problems with high school like Ms. Monroe and Mr. Madison--failing all of his classes was for him quite easy.

The names that followed are not included as they have no relevance to the story at all.

Irving took a quick glance around the room and said to himself, what a bunch of stupid idiots.

Lisa did the same and thought, what a bunch of ugly idiots.

Benjamin also grasped a brief glimpse of his classmates. He was not so condescending towards them, nor did he know exactly how to be, though he did often wonder why they were so weak and puny.

So class went on. It certainly did look as if it was going to be a day like any other.

## Chapter Two

Monotony, when left uncontrolled to rampage, may wreak havoc. It also often has a detrimental effect upon story quality. Fortunately for this tale, relief managed to step in.

Few noticed its/his entrance. As he walked in, his jet-black eyes, capable of grasping the entire electromagnetic spectrum and beyond, immediately scanned the premises and took note of its most interesting structural highlights: a small section of the IBM laboratory in one spot, a Venus de Milo in another, and in the very back of the room, a tightly-packed Egyptian pyramid.

Slightly out of touch with current fashions, his attire, consisting of an ordinary jacket, an ordinary bowtie, and an ordinary spacesuit, was fitting only for a formal occasion--on the lunar surface. A light shock of dark hair formed shapeless patterns topping his head. His expression appeared to be molded into one of terminal boredom, but there did gleam a remote hint of enthusiasm in his face. In fact, everything about him seemed to be indefinite, and even his exact age was undeterminable--he could change from being an adult juvenile to being a juvenile adult, and though his appearance could offer no clues, his behavior led most to believe he preferred the latter.

He did not uncomfortably wiggle his left elbow or burst into any violent coughing, nor would he have answered to "Phobone," but he did share a mutual unearthliness with the woman who stood before him.

Ms. Stone was deeply engaged in her lecture, placing undue emphasis upon every single word(or was it every other word?), and even the arrival of a new student failed to deter her from speech. Although at first he expected a light tap on the shoulder would attract her attention, he eventually had to come to almost fatal blows to her head until she finally recognized his presence.

"Who are you?" she irritatingly asked as if his interruption was indeed a grievous one.

"Transman, Entrepreneur Transman."

The teacher made the first of a series of terrible mistakes. All names on Earth may have been unfamiliar to her, but what she did not realize was that the name "Entrepreneur Transman" was unfamiliar to all names on Earth. It was, however, not unfamiliar on Betelgeuse Five.

"And who are you?" she repeated.

A brain analysis of Transman would have at the moment revealed a surge in biochemical activity. The principle and purpose of repetition had always left him baffled and even more annoyed. Either this person required a more specific response to clarify her undersatnding of the situation, or she was just stupid. His diagnosis, as usual, was to accept both possibilities as being equally true.



"A new student. Here are my papers." He handed them to her. Still quite upset, she snatched them from him as if they were some of her vital organs.

In another terrible mistake, Ms. Stone paid absolutely no heed to the fact that all the information on the documents had obviously been crossed out and rewritten. She casually dismissed this gross exaggeration of indiscretion as being the usual product of human tendency to err and promptly gave him her approval.

Transman was now a full-fledged student of Masters High School. Oddly enough, his admission coincided with the inopportune loss of records of an insignificant student named Joseph Hurley.

Her last and by far worst terrible mistake was her desk choice for him. He took his seat between Irving and Lisa and Benjamin. This was an oversight which would eventually prove extremely costly to her and her associates.

As the teacher continued her talk on the major contributions of the Celts to the English language, Transman surveyed the room and his classmates. All of them were either totally alert to the lecture, paying careful attention to every single word (or was it every other word?) and taking notes verbatim, or fast asleep. All except the three around him.

The sound of relentless typing drew him to Irving. The only thing moving faster than his tiny but dexterous fingers were his large eyes, going at sub-light speeds from viewing his monitor screen to scrutinizing his computer readout, burying the student sitting in front of him in an igloo of paper. His first impression of him was comical. So was his second. His third, too.

"What are you doing?" he inquired.

After a short interval intended to make his reply much more profound than it actually was, he answered "Nothing much." Irving was actually calculating the Square Root of Negative One to several decimal places. He would have enjoyed explaining his process to his new classmates but doubted his comprehensive capabilities. Transman himself knew the Square Root of Negative One to several hundred decimal places, having had taken a course in Irrelevant Mathematics, but since that was about the only bit of numerical wisdom he could claim, he quietly acknowledged the exceptional intelligence of the little fellow.

Transman turned to his right and fell madly in love with the girl there. A lighted mirror on top of her desk separated her lovely face from the rest of the class. Lisa was fondling her luscious hair, experimenting with various styles but looking gorgeous every time. The brushing and curling fascinated him.

"What are you doing?" he asked, feigning an air of nonchalance.

Pleased with having an observing admirer, she modestly replied after a brief pause to make her seem as carefree as possible with a cool "Nothing much." With every change, she became the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. Multicellular life forms started evolving in the small pond that had watered from his mouth. He was inventing quaint stories in his mind of how he would win her heart after getting rid of her boyfriend in the ways that would make a Nazi concentration camp torturer vomit in disgust.

Whomever her boyfriend might have been, he prayed that he was not the person right behind him. He nearly dislocated his neck adjusting to his incredible height, having an experience somewhat like walking around a corner and unexpectedly running into the Empire State Building. Benjamin was fiddling with a small piece of candy.

"What are you doing?" Transman questioned.

This question, like all questions, interfered with his set train of thought, and it was not until dinosaurs were making their appearance from the puddle that Transman had created earlier that Benjamin gathered enough intellect to answer.

"Trying to get the wrapper off." The delay in reply was not deliberate.

He was having as much success as an elephant should hope to have undressing an ant, so he ended up doing what he normally ended up doing, which was to just swallow the whole candy, wrapper and all. "Nothing much" would really have been a more appropriate response here.

All of this exciting conversation led Transman to start listening to what Ms. Stone seemed so intent on telling the class. Every single word(or was it every other word?) struck him like the cane of an old lady refusing to cross the street.

### Chapter Three

The traffic situation worsened.

"Get out of the way!" he cried. A passer-by yelled back obscenities at him.

"Would you hurry up and move?!" he snarled. He knew he was going to be late.

"Look out!" he screamed. A sudden sharp turn prevented a terrible collision.

Transman was surprised to have made it intact as he stepped out of the crowded hallway into his next class.



## Chapter Four

Having very sensitive nasal receptors, Transman had been smelling something fishy all morning.

On the menu for lunch today was "Beefy Stew." Little bits of animal flesh haphazardly heated in a gelatinous liquid containing unidentified substances must have been thoroughly appetizing to the students of MAsters High School, for they raced to the cafeteria at Olympic speeds, fought bloody battles over better positions in line, paid incredible inflationary prices and sometimes resorted to pilfering goods that they would later complain about, and devoured their meals ravenously. Here was pure capitalism at work.

Transman stared at his bowl intently, expecting the claw of some hideous monster to reach out and pull him in to his death. It bubbled and burbled and gurgled and underwent explosive chemical reactions firing noxious gases into his face. He was still not sure whether this was lunch or a new experimental rocket fuel.

The stew may have presumably been unfit for human consumption, but it was definitely unfit for consumption by him.

His curiosity slowly turned into foolhardiness as it always did. Mustering up all of his courage, he bent down and took a deep inhalation of the smoking fumes. His head reeled back as if fatally intoxicated, then jerked back.

There was that smell again.

Reaching into one of his pockets, he furnished a small acid-proof vial into which he poured a sample of the stew. The rest, left foresaken on the table, eventually ate through the earth's crust and rapidly made its way to the core.

The smell was indeed everywhere.

Chemistry was no exception. Old Professor Sloane entertained the class by bumbling over and smashing to bits hundreds of dollars worth of laboratory equipment, acting as if his eyeglasses did more to inhibit his sight tahn to improve it. He did manage to complete his lecture on atomic theory of which Transman took meticulous note even while personally knowing that it was all wrong.

Towards the end of a discussion of the military strategies of the Carthaginian army during the Punic Wars in History class, Transman found himself giving in to scholastic exhaustion. His ears grew tired from listening, his eyes grew tired from watching, his hands grew tired from writing, and his nose grew tired from smelling. Even his legs, which really have not been doing much in the story so far, were growing tired. He tried to stay awake by inflicting upon himself terrible masochistic acts.

His was a fairly common affliction which resulted in temporary mental and physical collapse and occurred in three distinct stages:

(1) The eyelids grow unnaturally heavy, and keeping them from closing demands an enormous amount of effort. Conversely, the mouth expresses a nagging need to yawn, and keeping it from opening requires equally tremendous exertion. The student places a massive strain upon the facial muscles, trying desperately to withhold the rigid balance between his open eyes and closed mouth, in fear of the possibility of a reversal in roles, while participating in class.

(2) The victim feels his entire head increasing in weight and to prevent a brisk and painful contact with the rather hard surface of the desk, struggles to hold it erect by resting it upon a hand. What must be remembered here is to continue writing at all costs to avoid being discovered.

(3) Composure becomes impossible to preserve. All attempts to give the appearance of consciousness by maintaining any kind of motion at all are in vain. The head drops upon the folded arms and falls asleep.

Every part of his body petitioned for sleep. Transman let his face fall into his textbook. Suddenly, he threw up his head, choking furiously.

Yes, it was the smell, the same smell in the air and in the stew.

Less than an hour later, Mathematician Ms. Capone was teaching the class how to divide big long numbers from big long numbers and get big long numbers.

Transman could no longer bear the smell. He turned to see Irving sitting at his left.

"Excuse me, but could you perform a chemical analysis?"

"Certainly." Irving's response seemed somewhat indifferent, but having a new challenge, especially one involving a computer, he truly felt excited.

"I have the necessary facilities," he added, "at my house, which is about a three to four minutes' walking distance from here. If you would like to, you may come over after school today."

Transman now faced a problem. In his locker(which Transman had obtained earlier in the day by merely throwing the contents out of the first one he could open, disappointing no one but the school janitor and an insignificant student named Joseph Hurley) had accumulated a load of textbooks, the weight of which would probably have given an Indian elephant a hernia. There was no way that he would be able to transport them all by himself.

Who happened to be there behind him but Mr. Benjamin Nelson.

After taking nearly the whole period to explain his predicament to him, Transman finally got him to agree to help. Another problem surfaced: how would he convey a substantial sample of the air to Irving's house?

Beside him sat Lisa, totally defenseless to the frequently deranged schemes of Transman. A moment of thought produced a wildly hopeful idea.

"Er, hello there. Could you please do me a favor?"

Transman was still a stranger to her, but from him shone a quaint charm which attracted Lisa. She could not resist a chance to get to know him better.

"Sure."

"Do you swim?"

"Quite well. Why do you ask?"

"For how long can you hold your breath?"

When the final bell rang, four students left the building in a hurry. One of them was running considerably faster than the others.

## Chapter Five

Irving's room was the ghastly product of technological advance. It was in fact a great computer itself, as mentioned earlier, the greatest on the Earth. No machine could match its functional capabilities or its memory capacity, which is curious indeed considering that Irving had originally developed the entire system from a simple Lego construction set he had received on his sixth birthday. It was endowed with every possible feature dreamt of, except that of freedom of speech, thought, and action--Irving was well aware of where it had led the human race and did not want the same happening to his wonderful creation. There was not a single spot in his room without flashing lights, a little television screen, a paper dispenser, a row of keys and switches, or a small slot in and out of which things were constantly being pushed.

Although holding her breath (and the air sample along with it) did not bother Lisa very much, she was awfully displeased with the clash between her clothes and the colors into which her face had been turning as a result.

Irving handed her a clear plastic tube.

"Empty your lungs into here." She did and took a hard seat on top of a filing cabinet, which did little to relax her but delighted the cabinet a great deal.

Fearing damage to his house, Irving wisely quieted the clumsy brute strength of Benjamin with a delicious banana.

Transman tore from his books tiny pieces which, along with the vial of stew, he promptly turned over to Irving for chemical analysis.

Of what followed no one had the slightest idea. Irving scurried back and forth between the laboratory in his bathroom and the computer in his bedroom, mumbling complex calculations and intricate equations. Only did Transman reply to his heavy scientific jargon with the casual "yes, I agree" and "of course" and maybe an "I know" squeezed in here and there, doing a commendable performance of pretending complete comprehension but actually just as lost as Benjamin, who seemed content to sit idly examining his banana peel and wondering where exactly the edible portion had gone.

"I'm finished."

Transman sighed in relief. Lisa sighed in relief as well.

They prevented Benjamin from doing so, realizing the destructive potential of sonic booms.

The monitor wall flickered and squeaked into life, displaying a grotesque picture of what appeared to be fifty basketball games going on in the same place at the same time.

"Here is the basic molecular structure of the substance common to all of the materials I studied. It is not registered in current scientific catalogues, but according to standard means of nomenclature, it would probably have to be called TRIOXYHYDROCHLORALOSE. As to its function, I assume..."

"I know what it is," Transman interrupted. "It's a potent sedative used primarily in hypnotic induction."

"What are you saying?" Lisa demanded.

"Take a good look at these notes." Transman piled upon her the mounds of notes that he had taken today. Reading them was futile, for they were illegible.

"Didn't you notice at all? Every other word was emphasized."

A pause here for a response was useless.

"If you connect every other word together then redivide them in different combinations, don't you see what you get?"

Another total waste of time between his interrogative statements ensued.

"For example, this sentence from today's English lecture reads,

'Beowulf is the first landmark in English literature and the greatest literary work we have inherited from the Anglo-Saxons.' I know it has almost absolutely no meaning this way, but rearranged it says,

'Isfir stinlite raturet heliterar ywhi chhavef roman glosax ons.'

This left even Irving dumb.

"It's an obscure dialect found on some of the planets in the vicinity of the Greater Magellanic Cloud. It means 'when needed you will come to our aid.'"

There was more silence, but any sentient being who has read this far ought to have expected it.

"The teachers are trying to take over!" Transman howled in frustration. Not only did this last statement exhibit a nominal talent for alliteration, but it also was the first to make any sense whatsoever.

Lisa and Irving stared at each other aghast. All of sudden, Benjamin burst forth.

"Can I have another banana?"

## Chapter Six

Darkness tends to shine a different light on everything, especially at Masters High School. Gone was the beautiful ivory brick of the building coming under attack by graffiti. Gone was the muffled sound of cars being stolen from the parking lot. Gone was the stench of cigarette smoke making up nearly the entire atmospheric content of the restrooms and the surrounding area right outside the school. Gone was the essence of life; gone was the humanity.

Finding an accessible entrance proved quite simple. Clearly such an illegal act of infiltration necessitated considerable caution if not some degree of stealth, but Benjamin indeed added a whole new dimension to the execution of tiptoeing--he did so with the same noise and effect of an average jackhammer.

Now frightfully foreboding, the school had lost its daytime familiarity. Guided by a small flashlight, Transman led his three comrades down the unlit hallways which twisted and turned like the maze of a Pac-man game. (During the day, all that was needed to get anywhere was to be thrown into the bulk flow of students; now, however, movement was unrestricted and for the most part unsuccessful.) Lisa enjoyed playing the role of the innocent heroine, clinging fast to Transman's side. Irving crept along behind her, trying relentlessly to complete a map of the building with his pocket computer, supposedly to make the journey less difficult but probably to delay it as long as possible. Benjamin followed, bombarded by shushes.

Unexpectedly, Transman came to an abrupt stop.

"What's that over there?" he whispered, pointing to a bright object at the far end of the hall. The group approached with so much hesitancy that they appeared to be reaching for it by moving backwards. It looked like the glistening, razor-sharp fang of some abominable bloodthirsty monster.

It turned out to be an English essay which had been slipping out of a locker. Why should the light take all the credit for playing tricks on the eyes, thought the dark. The paper had been painstakingly prepared all week by an insignificant student named Joseph Hurley to be submitted tomorrow.

"What is it?" Lisa asked.

"Nothing important," Transman replied as he handed it to her to satisfy her insatiable curiosity. He was right, for the sole value of the assignment lied only in someone else's grade. It was of no worth to her, and when she realized this, Lisa crumpled it up and, in accordance to her principles of tidiness, sought out a waste basket in which to deposit it.

One happened to be standing just beside her, which came as no surprise since it was common knowledge that these tall, plastic, barrel-shaped waste baskets were located somewhat strategically throughout the school.

What did surprise her was that after swallowing the crushed paper wad, the waste basket thrust a gun at her face and demanded immediate identification, threatening to separate her lovely facial features from the rest of her head.

Before Lisa could scream, she was pushed aside by Transman, who then tried to disable the machine by giving it a painful kick to the side. It seems that Transman himself received more pain from his blow than did the waste basket, because while the full force of the kick may have done irreparable damage to a reinforced wall of heavy-duty bathroom tissue, it had little overall effect upon the robot's powerful plastic protection. The trash barrel grew angry in a way only mechanical trash barrels have been known to grow angry and turned its sights on Transman. Deadly energy bolts thundered around him, destroying the spectacular architecture of the corridor, most noticeably the locker assigned to Mr. Joseph Hurley after his complaints about losing his original one.

He managed to dance around the streaks of light, showing his remarkable dexterity, his acrobatic talents, and, above all, his incredible luck. The waste basket glided along the floor on its wonderfully smooth wheels, also displaying extraordinary mobility and maintaining close pursuit of its target, until it unwittingly crashed into and demolished itself against a wall of unsurmountable strength. Benjamin brushed the debris off of his shirt.

"All I did was throw that garbage into it," Lisa coughed out as she emerged from the smoke.

"Maybe it was in a bad mood," suggested Transman.

Feeling a strong grip of guilt, Lisa aspired for acceptance of her attempt at an apology.

"How was I supposed to know that? I always thought that waste baskets were gratified to have trash emptied into them. Doesn't that fulfill them, I mean, give them meaning to their miserable existence? Isn't that why they are here?"

"I don't think that was why this one was here. It could have been some sort of guard," Transman answered.

Irving inspected the wreckage with interest. He was fascinated. Here was technology comparable to his own.

"This device is slightly more complex than that I would expect from our teachers," he remarked with a remote hint of sarcasm.

"Well, what was it guarding?" Benjamin inquired.

Everybody stood in shock from hearing not only a worthwhile question asked by Benjamin, but also the sudden sound of footsteps drawing nearer. The group bustled away to hide themselves, hoping whoever it was that was coming would not notice this scene of destruction.

They didn't. Dozens of people marched by, many of whom Lisa recognized as teachers and administrators, including Principal Ramone, Professor Sloane, and Ms. Capone. When they had gone, Transman and his fellow trespassers sprang from the shadows then quickly leaped back to avoid being seen by Ms. Stone who, late as always, scampered after the other teachers.

"I wonder where they were going," Transman said as he walked over to the corner behind which the procession had disappeared. Actually "disappeared" was in this case ideal word selection because Transman, expecting to see a wide hallway stretching out before him, found himself standing in an empty inlet with no exit besides the one through which he had entered.

Seconds before he could finish his question which started with "what" and would apparently have ended with "happened to them" but really did so with "are we doing here," loud sirens filled the air. From the other end of the corridor came charging madly a battalion of armed waste baskets with explicit orders to vaporize the intruders.

Transman and Lisa and Irving and Benjamin made their way through the school with startling rapidity; a lack of light or familiarity made absolutely no difference to them at all.

It was not until an hour of running about, meeting dead ends, turning around, and meeting more dead ends had passed that they reached the safety of the outdoors. Something that Transman was to learn from this adventure was that although getting into school was amazingly easy, getting out was dreadfully difficult. This was, of course, a fact of which high school students had been aware since the beginning of time.



## Chapter Eight

The next day the smell was overwhelming, but the four individuals around whom most of the story has so far revolved seemed to have a natural resistance to its effects. All others, however, did not.

Transman and his friends reported to school feeling like criminals returning to the scene of a crime. This feeling was imposed upon them by both themselves and everyone else, student and teacher alike. No one talked to them as much as they normally did, and when they did, they did so with a suspicious suspicion.

Their criminal paranoia eventually met with confirmation. Each of them throughout the course of the day confronted some situation in which they were accused of a particular injustice and sentenced to after-school detention: Lisa for her persistence in asking to use the restroom facilities at a time when she wanted and not when the teacher wanted, Irving for his refusal of participating in what he considered prehistoric scientific experiments, and Benjamin for his breakage of three desks within the same day--nothing out of the ordinary, of course. In fact, this behavior was so customary that their having received reproach for them came as a complete surprise.

Entrepreneur Transman encountered similar punishment, but instead of standing struck dumb by the bludgeoning brunt of the Masters High School penal system, he decided to continue his investigation.

Somehow the decorum of the corridor wherein last night's scuffle had taken place had been restored to its same splendid state, leaving no trace of a tempestuous energy barrage with the exception of a new doorway where had once been the locker of an insignificant student named Joseph Hurley.

Lisa, Irving, and Benjamin approached, all in awe by the coincidence of their simultaneous detention notices. Transman was closely inspecting the inlet into which they had witnesses the procession of teachers mysteriously disappear.

"I see nothing special," Irving remarked.

A small, hardly noticeable fire alarm clung on to the wall. Posted above the alarm was a large note written in large, red letters warning those who would tamper with it and release it under false pretenses of the fine, which indeed exceeded the federal deficit.

Totally disregarding the importance of this discovery, Transman stepped back out into the corridor, disappointed by his lack of success.

They were about to proceed to their next classes when they abruptly stopped short in the path of an oncoming group of people. It vaguely looked as if the front line of the German panzer division was treading towards them, destroying everything and everyone in their way. Drawing closer faster and faster were six or seven of these massive students, among their ranks football players and other specimens of no less than cement truck-physique, brandishing terrible weapons of destruction, including baseball bats, telephone poles, and mathematics textbooks, and bringing their girlfriends along as reinforcements. In their eyes burned the desire to inflict great pain.

Quite familiar with this sight, Transman urged his friends to back away. Lisa was disturbed by his apparent cowardice.

"What's the matter? Ben here can take them all on with just a sneeze."

"Look, I could handle them myself," he retorted, "but I already have three weeks of detention for having scratched my pencil too loudly during a test, and I would rather not try for a life sentence."

Slowly the quartet found themselves retreating into the very same inlet.

The problem with this situation was that there really was no problem at all--any one of Transman's allies could have easily tackled their pursuers: Benjamin, as mentioned earlier, could have filled a half dozen vacancies at the State Hospital without even knowing it, Lisa could have charmed each fellow into a serfdom that would last for generations, and Irving could have begun a lecture on supply side economics that would have had its usual effect of causing terminal brain collapse.

What Transman needed now was that sense of impending doom, and aware that he certainly would not be getting it under the current circumstances, he went on to create one for himself. For him, danger tended to provoke involuntary action that often turned out for the better.

In his self-induced fit of desperation, he reached out to the fire alarm and pulled it with all his might.

Like a trap door, the bottom fell out from under him.

Descriptive imagery will be omitted from the following scene because, to tell the truth, it was of no use. Everything was constantly changing--the background, the foreground, the overhead, the underside--the entirety of existence itself was in flux, which gave the illusion of a very sharp drop. There was neither rustling ground nor the pull of gravity, but every molecule, every atom of Transman's body felt as if lacking firm ground or stable position, affirming the sensation of falling.

He was not alone in his dive. Beside him sailed Lisa, Irving, and Benjamin, actually more astonished with their detention convictions than the sudden shift in scenery. The matter, however, being of rather obvious nature, was destined to turn up in a subsequent conversation. Lisa was the first to point it out.

"What's going on?!" she screamed.

After a moment of consideration, Transman realized what had happened.

"We've jumped into hyperspace..." he started, but the rest of his sentence came out in a deliberate whisper, "...but I forgot to set the coordinates."

He thought it wise to change subject.

"Well, since we do have some free time, er, why not introduce ourselves? Yes, that's it. I really do think some introductions are in order."

Lisa thought this odd but complied with his request, completely failing to recognize his poor attempt to disguise his blame.

"Oh, excuse me. My name is Lisa, Lisa Monroe."

Transman kneeled before her, very difficult to do in free-fall without contortionistic capabilities, took her hand and kissed it gently, trying his best not to swallow it whole. *break his neck while doing so.*

"Enchanté, mademoiselle. I am Transman, Entrepreneur Transman, your most humble and obedient servant who cannot even begin to express the honor and the privilege of being in your presence."

Lisa giggled in response. To maintain his momentary hold over the type of dialogue, he quickly diverted his attention to his two other comrades. He shook Irving's hand warmly.

"Greetings. How do you do?"

"Very well, thank you. Although most refer to me as 'Microchip,' I prefer simply 'Madison,'" Irving said as he continued to analyze the strange environmental conditions with his baffled computer. Transman smiled at Benjamin.

"Hello there. I'm Transman."

"Hi, I'm Ben. People call me 'Big Ben'."

How could it be otherwise, Transman wondered as he recovered from the pain of their handshake.

"I'm pleased to meet all of you, and I'd like to let you know that I would have enjoyed defeating the Phobone menace together..."

"Phobone?" Benjamin gave a puzzled look, which was not in the least uncommon.

"That's whom I guess is behind it all. They're a bunch of ~~real~~ enterprising opportunists with diverse fields of business, especially in intergalactic imperialism."

"So you believe that they are involved with our school?" Irving inquired.

"Yes, and getting rid of them would have been great fun," Transman replied with a slightly somber tone of voice.

"What do you mean, 'would have'?" Lisa demanded.

"If you hadn't cared to notice, we are plummeting through hyperspace without a preset destination, which means that we could pop up anywhere at anytime."

Here again was that monotonous series of monologues with futile interim pauses for group participation.

"Just think of it like this: pretend that we are a two-dimensional ~~plane~~ <sup>plate</sup>--a plate, for example--flying through three-dimensional space--like the air--flying until we reach somewhere to land.

"Since we are of somewhat fragile nature," then remembering Benjamin, "most of us are of fragile nature, you can expect to hit the ordinary three-dimensional plane with quite a crash."

"We're going to be smashed to bits!" Lisa cried out.

"That's what you get when you fool around with higher dimensions," Transman stated.

"But is there no hope for us?" Irving asked.

"Maybe if we land on something soft, of course, like a vast ~~field~~ <sup>expanse</sup> of foam rubber. Unfortunately, vast ~~fields~~ <sup>expanse</sup> of foam rubber are not very common throughout the Universe..."

Three-dimensional space hit them like very hard ground.

## Chapter Nine

Rock was the first thing that Transman saw. He yelped in terror of having possibly appeared buried in solid rock; after a short period of dimensional location adjustment, which included doing several jumping jacks and singing an excerpt from "Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer," normally impossible to perform when buried in solid rock, however, Transman realized that he was not buried in solid rock, but he was, in fact, standing in front of solid rock. It was a vast wall, one which reached up to a cloudless light violet sky and stretched down to sightless depth, and they were on a tiny ledge in between. His three comrades stood beside him, slightly shaken by their trip.

"Where are we?" Lisa inquired.

Before Transman could reply with his most commonly-used expression, "I don't know," Irving called out,

"On one of the planets in the Magellanic Cloud, I suspect, according to my computer analysis of both the temporal duration of our exchange through hyperspace and the shift in the relative position of the stars."

"The little guy sure learns fast," thought Transman.

From where they were, they could see that they were located on one of many mountains on a landscape with jagged topographical features resembling the inside of an empty egg carton. They could have stared for hours at their marvelous view but immediately grew bored and decided that it was best for them to depart as soon as possible--the added weight of the foursome upon the feeble ledge, which was used to burden of lesser tonnage like insects or an occasional bird, made it very likely that they might have an even closer look at the terrain. Simply walking away from the problem would have indeed defeated the purpose because the only way to go was over the edge, and since none among them was especially accustomed to atmospheric flight, they turned their attention to an unusual step-like formation in the rocks and though it looked quite uninviting and uncomfortable, slowly climbed up.

The valley which stood below them looked very much like an airport. A domed building lay in the middle of a great pavilion with patterns of paint and lines of lights. Towering above the ground, almost completely hiding the single central structure, were several massive hemispheric crafts floating in designated areas wherein were posted special signs repealing the law of universal gravitation. Also worthy of mention were the hundreds of manned <sup>robot</sup> giants strewn all about, but even these gargantuas, standing nearly one hundred meters in height, were overshadowed by the awesome size of the mighty ships which they repaired and supplied.

"Look," Transman exclaimed, pointing at the large clearly legible letters along one of colossal bowl-shaped vessels looming in the sky. 'PHOBOSPHERE PHOO' was all that was visible, but it was enough.

"I was right," he continued, "<sup>it is the</sup>there are Phobones here. This must be their ~~base of operations~~, probably the planet Phobosphere."

"Phobosphere? What kind of ridiculous name is Phobosphere?" Lisa asked with an equally ridiculous chuckle.

"Well, they used to call it Phobosphlat, which did have a more pleasant ring to it, but <sup>the discovery of</sup>you know, the world being round and all..."

Transman did not intend on finishing his sentence, but was not given the chance had he wished to do so, for Benjamin, upon encountering beings of comparable physique to his own, namely the mechanical giants, jumped forth in a rage of excitement, pushing himself forward with his feet against a soft but firm surface behind him. That soft but firm surface turned out to be Transman's face. *He rocketed off the side of the cliff with a scream of despair, disappointment and other profanities.*

Benjamin could do nothing but say "oops," Lisa could do nothing but shed a tear of mournful sorrow, and Irving could do nothing but calculate ~~the~~ estimated time of impact as Transman plummeted into the depths below like a coyote.

Suddenly a gigantic shadow ~~came~~ befell the three onlookers, and they soon found themselves along with a sizeable chunk of the mountain in the closed palm of one of the enormous automatons who had just gone off duty.

This would appear to have truly been a perilous situation since the slightest squeeze of the fingers could have crushed them to death, but it was not really so because their roles as main characters have yet to be fulfilled.