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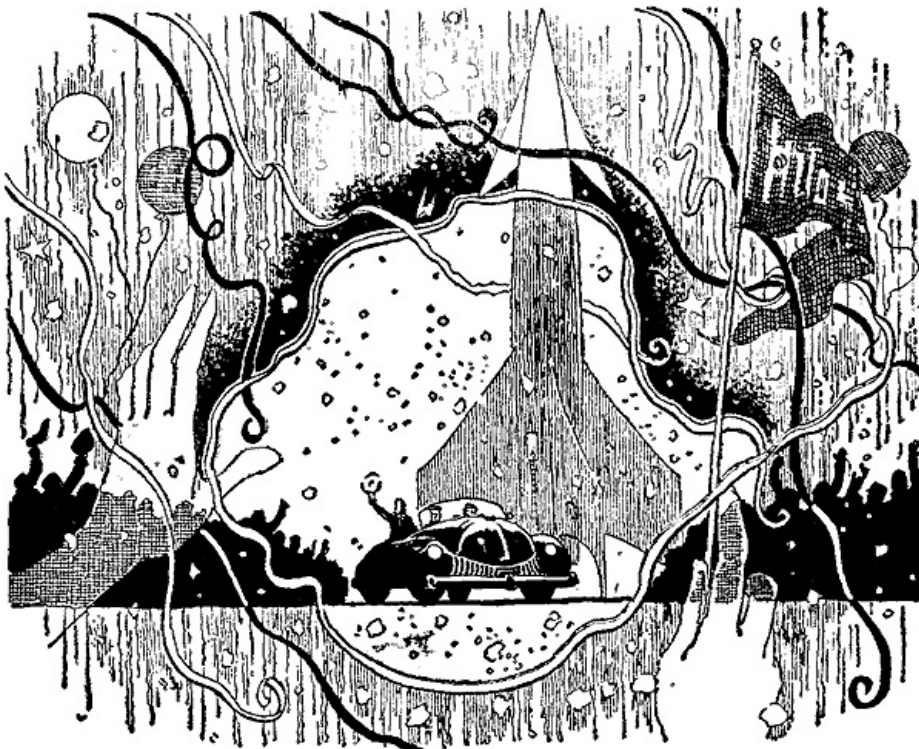
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CELEBRITY ***



*Sound the fanfare! Beat the drums!
Shout hosannas! Here he comes....*

CELEBRITY

By James McKimney, Jr.

Illustrated by PAUL ORBAN

JUNE 19, 1978. Celebrity day.

The city stretched. Empty streets glistened from the bath of a water truck. Dew-wet grass winked at the fresh peeping sun, like millions of shimmering diamonds. A bird chirped. Another. The city yawned.

Rows of houses lay like square ivory beads on patches of green felt. A boy drove his bicycle down the middle of an elm-bordered avenue, whistling loudly, while tightly rolled newspapers arced from his hand and slapped against porches.

Lights snapped on in a thousand windows, shining yellowly against the cool whiteness of dawn. Men blinked and touched beard-stubbed chins. Women moved sleepily toward porcelain and

chrome kitchens.

A truck roared and garbage pails rattled. There was a smell of sour orange rinds and wet leaves and unfolding flowers. Over this came the smell of toasting bread and frying bacon.

Doors swung open, slippered feet padded across porches and hands groped for the rolled newspapers. The air was stricken with the blaring sound of transcribed music and the excited voices of commercial announcers. The doors swung shut and the sounds were muted.

A million people shifted and stretched and scratched. The sun rose above the horizon.

Celebrity day.

DOORS SLAMMED again, and half-consumed cups of coffee lay cooling behind. Children wiped at sleepy eyes and mothers swept crumbs, touching self-conscious fingers at their own bed-ruffled hair. Laborers and clerks and lawyers and doctors strode down sidewalks and climbed into automobiles and busses and sleek-nosed elevated trains. The city moved.

To the center of the city, where the tall buildings stretched to the lighting sky, came the horde, like thousands of ants toward a comb of honey. Wheels sang and whined. Horns blasted. Whistles blew.

And waiting, strung above the wide streets between the cold marquees and the dead neon tubes, were the banners and the flags and the bunting.

The air warmed and the sun brightened. Voices chattered. Elbows nudged. Mouths smiled, teeth shone, and there was the sound of laughter, rising over the pushing throngs. The city was happy.

The bunting dipped and the banners fluttered and the flags whipped. At the edge of the city, the airport tightened itself. Waiting, waiting for the silver and blue rocket. The rocket of the Celebrity.

A large hotel, towering above the pulsing streets, began the quiver of activity. As though a great electric current had been run through its cubes and shafts and hollows, the hotel crackled. Desk clerks clicked bells and bell boys hopped. Elevators rose and fell. In the cellar, wine bottles were dusted by quick, nervous hands. In the kitchen, a towering cake was frosted and decorated. Orders cracked. Hands flew and feet chattered against tile. In one rich expansive suite a giant hoop of multi-colored flowers was placed in the center of a room.

It was in the air. Laughter, awe, worship, *excitement!*

Ropes went up and stretched between lamp posts. Blue-coated men on horses began blocking streets. Old women with wooden boxes, children with flashing eyes, men in rich suits and tattered suits began filling the sidewalks.

Curbs became lined with people. Bars threw open doors and fresh air met stale air. Men with fat faces, thin faces, white faces, red faces, twitching with the anticipation of holiday freedom, gulped jiggers of raw whiskey and shuddered happily.

Children giggled and yelled and sprinted in crazy zig-zags. Men in white caps hustled in front of the lined curbs, shouting, carrying their boxes of ice-cream. Men with buttons, men with pennants, men with balloons joined the shouting, and the sound rose in the air and the city smiled and shifted and its heart pounded.

The hotel whirred inside itself. The airport tensed and searched the sky.

TIME MOVED and the swelling throngs jammed the sidewalks, raising their strengthening sound between the tall buildings. Windows popped open and faces beamed. Tentative showers of confetti drifted down through the air.

The city waited, its pulse thumping.

The rocket was a black point in the sky. It grew. White-suited men scattered over the landing strip. Photographers crouched. Bulbs snapped into reflectors. Cameras pointed.

The rocket landed. A door snapped open. Blue uniforms converged and flash bulbs popped. There were shouts and orders and men running. Gates swung and there was a blue-rimmed movement to a black open car. Sirens moaned, screamed. And the black car was moving swiftly into the city.

Beneath the buildings, marching bands in red and blue and yellow uniforms stood assembled. Girls in short skirts and tasseled hats spun silver batons into the warm air. Bare legs kicked. Black boots flashed.

The crowd swayed against the ropes, and there was laughter and sweating and squinting.


The black car reached the heart of the city. Sirens died. Rows of men snapped to attention. Policemen aligned their motorcycles.

A baton shimmered high against the sun and came down.

A cymbal crashed. Drums cracked. Music blared. And there was a movement down the street.

The black car rolled along, while tape swept down from the buildings in long swirling ribbons. There was a snow of confetti. And from the throats of the people came the first roar. It grew, building, building in volume, and the city thundered its welcome to the man sitting upon the back of the open car, the small man who tipped his hat and smiled and blinked behind his glasses: Joseph S. Stettison, B.A., B.S., M.S., M.D., Ph.D., L.M. (Hon.), F.R.C.O.G.

THE END

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