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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FIELD TRIP \*\*\*

*It is rumored that technology might eliminate many useless items from our regulated life of the future—including good, old-fashioned sex. However, let's kibitz for a moment ...*

## FIELD TRIP

By Gene Hunter

KIAL was disgusted with the slow, cumbersome train. He disliked using this uncomfortable means of travel, but since he wanted to learn more about these strange creatures who were his ancestors, he had decided to try to become used to their ways.

He was lonely in this strange, backward age and when he unexpectedly saw another being like himself in the same coach, he hastened to make his presence known. He introduced himself and asked politely:

"When are *you* from?"

"8000," the other replied. "Name's Broyk, from VII Galaxy."

"I'm from out XIX way myself," Kial said. "Just a country boy. But 8000—that's only a period ahead of my own time. Maybe you could tell me ..."

"Ah, ah!" the other admonished. "Remember the First Law of Thek!"

"Oh, Center," Kial grumbled. "I know: 'One may not divulge any scientific, technical or social information to anyone from his own past whom he may meet at an equidistant point in a Thek-travel.' I forgot."

"Bad," Broyk said. Then he added, almost jokingly: "You wouldn't want to be marooned in this dismal era, would you?"

Kial shuddered. "Of course not. But the Laws seem so ridiculous."

"Not a bit," Broyk said, warming up to the subject. "It's very simple, really. Same principle that doesn't allow anyone to Thek-travel into the future."

"Look. I'm from 8000. Say that I went into 12,000, where I memorized as much information as I could on some subject such as medicine. So I return to 8000, retaining all such knowledge in my mind that's been learned in four periods. Therefore, I'd have knowledge that wasn't dreamed of in my own time, but was discovered sometime during the next four periods. But then it couldn't be discovered, because I'd brought it back to 8000 and—well, I'm no Logician, but you see my point."

"Oh, it's reasonable, I suppose," Kial admitted. "I realize the Laws are really for our own good. By the way—I'm here on a field trip to gather material for my thesis on Advanced Therapeutical Psychology and its development since the Twentieth Century. What phase of this era are you here to study?"

"I—I'm afraid I couldn't tell you that," Broyk said. "It's of rather a secret nature and ..."

"You mean we might violate a Law and be stuck here for good—is that it?"

"Yes—in a way."

Frightened, Kial let the matter drop. His gaze wandered through the coach, examining the other passengers with interest. As time-travelers from a different space-time plane from their 20th Century ancestors, he and Broyk were naturally invisible to their fellow travelers.

Two pompous old gentlemen were lighting cigars and Kial was about to remark on the habit of smoking when he noticed an even more remarkable phenomenon. A few seats ahead of them sat a good-looking young couple, oblivious to others about them.

"Look!" Kial cried excitedly. "Lovers! Honeymooners! I've read about such things! Isn't it disgusting?"

"Oh, I don't know," Broyk said, a little wistfully. "I sometimes think it was a mistake for Center to do away with sex. It must have been interesting."

"Atavist!" Kial snapped in horror.

Had his people's emotional make-up provided for blushing, Kial would undoubtedly have turned beet-red. Broyk's words had caused him acute embarrassment.

As he sat reflecting upon his strange companion, he suddenly began to feel a sensation he had often heard about but never before had experienced. Terror and dismay filled him as he sought to throw off the probing finger that was penetrating his mind.

He looked at Broyk. There was the faintest notion of a smile on the other's face as he said: "Yes, Kial—I am a Telepath."

Kial's mind reeled. He felt himself on the brink of some gigantic abyss and then, as suddenly as it had come, the searching sensation faded away.

"Since you are unable to enter my mind," Broyk said calmly, "it's only fair that I tell you about myself. You were right—I'm an atavist. Even in period 8000, such things can happen. Always such creatures are destroyed after their first psychotests, but my case was different. The Controller who bred me was only a dabbler in such things. I was a failure, but he took a fancy to me. I was allowed to mature secretly—few people knew of my existence. When I reached my majority my presence became dangerous and I was sent back into time to try and find the proper place for myself. And I think I've found it—here!"

Kial was a very amazed young man. "But such a barbarous age," he complained. "Sex and atom bombs and everything ..."

"Remember," Broyk smiled, "these people are the forebears of the geniuses who created Center and the Galactic Empire. They'll survive, despite their barbarism. The existence of Center is proof."

"It's rather horrible to contemplate," Kial said thoughtfully, calmer now, "and yet, this might really be a great age. In a way I almost envy you."

"Of course you do," Broyk said. "You have certain tendencies—they bother you, although you manage to hide them well. I discovered them when I took the liberty of telepathing you. Artificial Genetics isn't perfect, even in our time—perhaps because we originally sprang from man. Perhaps we'll never be quite perfect, because of that, even after thousands of periods of breeding."

Kial took another look at the loving young couple. "It—it might be fun, after all."

Broyk laughed. "You needn't envy me at all, you know."

Kial frowned.

"I'm telling you about myself," Broyk went on, "I have also told you of a specific condition existing a period ahead of your own time. Remember the First Law?"

"Center!"

"We're marooned in the Twentieth Century. You have to accept it."

"But what will we *do*?" Kial's mind was reeling again.

"Since we've already broken the First Law," Broyk said, "we may just as well break the Second: 'No Thek-traveler may enter the body of a native of a foreign space-time ...'"

The young lovers kissed again and this time there seemed to be an added zest, even to their

THE END

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