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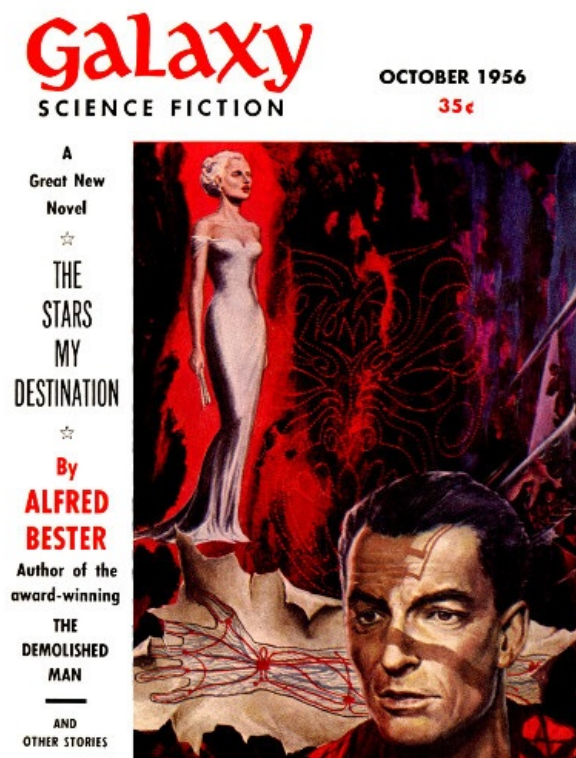
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# **MAN OF DISTINCTION**

**By MICHAEL SHAARA**

**Illustrated By DICK FRANCIS**

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***Being unique is a matter of pride—but being  
a complete mathematical impossibility?***

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The remarkable distinction of Thatcher Blitt did not come to the attention of a bemused world until late in the year 2180. Although Thatcher Blitt was, by the standards of his time, an extremely successful man financially, this was not considered *real* distinction. Unfortunately for Blitt, it never has been.

The history books do not record the names of the most successful merchants of the past unless they happened by chance to have been connected with famous men of the time. Thus Croesus is remembered largely for his contributions to famous Romans and successful armies. And Haym Solomon, a similarly wealthy man, would have been long forgotten had he not also been a financial mainstay of the American Revolution and consorted with famous, if impoverished, statesmen.

So if Thatcher Blitt was distinct among men, the distinction was not immediately apparent. He was a small, gaunt, fragile man who had the kind of face and bearing that are perfect for movie crowd scenes. Absolutely forgettable. Yet Thatcher Blitt was one of the foremost businessmen of his time. For he was president and founder of that noble institution, Genealogy, Inc.

Thatcher Blitt was not yet 25 when he made the discovery which was to make him among the richest men of his time. His discovery was, like all great ones, obvious yet profound. He observed that every person had a father.

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Carrying on with this thought, it followed inevitably that every father had a father, and so on. In fact, thought Blitt, when you considered the matter rightly, everyone alive was the direct descendant of untold numbers of fathers, down through the ages, all descending, one after another, father to son. And so backward, unquestionably, into the unrecognizable and perhaps simian fathers of the past.

This thought, on the face of it not particularly profound, struck young Blitt like a blow. He saw that since each man had a father, and so on and so on, it ought to be possible to construct the genealogy of every person now alive. In short, it should be possible to trace your family back, father by father, to the beginning of time.

And of course it was. For that was the era of the time scanner. And with a time scanner, it would be possible to document your family tree with perfect accuracy. You could find out exactly from whom you had sprung.

And so Thatcher Blitt made his fortune. He saw clearly at the beginning what most of us see only now, and he patented it. He was aware not only of the deep-rooted sense of snobbishness that exists in many people, but also of the simple yet profound force of curiosity. Who exactly, one says to oneself, *was* my forty-times-great-great-grandfather? A Roman Legionary? A Viking? A pyramid builder? One of Xenophon's Ten Thousand? Or was he, perhaps (for it is always possible), Alexander the Great?

Thatcher Blitt had a product to sell. And sell he did, for other reasons that he alone had noted at the beginning. The races of mankind have twisted and turned with incredible complexity over the years; the numbers of people have been enormous.

With thirty thousand years in which to work, it was impossible that there was not, somewhere along the line, a famous ancestor for everybody. A minor king would often suffice, or even a general in some forgotten army. And if these direct ancestors were not enough, it was fairly simple to establish close blood kinship with famous men. The blood lines of Man, you see, begin with a very few people. In all of ancient Greece, in the time of Pericles, there were only a few thousand families.

Seeing all this, Thatcher Blitt became a busy man. It was necessary not only to patent his idea, but to produce the enormous capital needed to found a large organization. The cost of the time scanner was at first prohibitive, but gradually that obstacle was overcome, only for Thatcher to find that the government for many years prevented him from using it. Yet Blitt was indomitable. And eventually, after years of heart-rending waiting, Genealogy, Inc., began operations.

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It was a tremendous success. Within months, the very name of the company and its taut slogan, "An Ancestor for Everybody," became household words. There was but one immediate drawback. It soon became apparent that, without going back very far into the past, it was sometimes impossible to tell who was really the next father in line. The mothers were certain, but the fathers were something else again. This was a ponderable point.

But Blitt refused to be discouraged. He set various electronic engineers to work on the impasse and a solution was found. An ingenious device which tested blood electronically through the scanner—based on the different sine waves of the blood groups—saved the day. That invention was the last push Genealogy, Inc., was ever to need. It rolled on to become one of the richest and, for a long while, most exclusive corporations in the world.

Yet it was still many years before Thatcher Blitt himself had time to rest. There were patent infringements to be fought, new developments in the labs to be watched, new ways to be found to make the long and arduous task of father-tracing easier and more economical. Hence he was well past sixty when he at last had time to begin considering himself.

He had become by this time a moderately offensive man. Surrounded as he had been all these years by pomp and luxury, by impressive names and extraordinary family trees, he had succumbed at last. He became unbearably name-conscious.

He began by regrouping his friends according to their ancestries. His infrequent parties were characterized by his almost Parliamentary system of seating. No doubt, all this had been in Thatcher Blitt to begin with—it may well be, in perhaps varying quantities, in all of us—but it grew with him, prospered with him. Yet in all those years he never once inspected his own forebears.

You may well ask, was he afraid? One answers, one does not know. But at any rate, the fact remains that Thatcher Blitt, at the age of 67, was one of the few rich men in the world who did not know who exactly their ancestors had been.

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And so, at last, we come to the day when Thatcher Blitt was sitting alone in his office, one languid hand draped vacantly over his brow, listening with deep satisfaction to the hum and click of the enormous operations which were going on in the building around him.

What moved him that day remains uncertain. Perhaps it was that, from where he was sitting, he could see row upon row of action pictures of famous men which had been taken from his time scanners. Or perhaps it was simply that this profound question had been gnawing at him all these years, deeper and deeper, and on this day broke out into the light.

But whatever the reason, at 11:02 that morning, he leaped vitally from his chair. He summoned Cathcart, his chief assistant, and gave him the immortal command.

"Cathcart!" he grated, stung to the core of his being. "Who am I?"

Cathcart rushed off to find out.

There followed some of the most taut and fateful days in the brilliant history of Genealogy, Inc. Father-tracing is, of course, a painstaking business. But it was not long before word had begun to filter out to interested people.

The first interesting discovery made was a man called Blott, in eighteenth century England. (No explanation was ever given for the name's alteration from Blott to Blitt. Certain snide individuals took this to mean that the name had been changed as a means to avoid prosecution, or some such, and immediately began making light remarks about the Blotts on old Blitt's escutcheon.) This Blott had the distinction of having been a wineseller of considerable funds.

This reputedly did not sit well with Thatcher Blitt. Merchants, he snapped, however successful, are not worthy of note. He wanted empire builders. He wanted, at the very least, a name he had heard about. A name that appeared in the histories.

His workers furiously scanned back into the past.

Months went by before the next name appeared. In 9th century England, there was a wandering minstrel named John (last name unprintable) who achieved considerable notoriety as a ballad singer, before dying an unnatural death in the boudoir of a lady of high fashion. Although the details of this man's life were of extreme interest, they did not impress the old man. He was, on the contrary, rather shaken. A minstrel. And a rogue to boot.

There were shakeups in Genealogy, Inc. Cathcart was replaced by a man named Jukes, a highly competent man despite his interesting family name. Jukes forged ahead full steam past the birth of Christ (no relation). But he was well into ancient Egypt before the search began to take on the nature of a crisis.

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Up until then, there was simply nobody. Or to be more precise, nobody but *nobodies*. It was incredible, all the laws of chance were against it, but there was, actually, not a single ancestor of note. And no way of faking one, for Thatcher Blitt couldn't be fooled by his own methods. What there was was simply an unending line of peasants, serfs, an occasional foot soldier or leather worker. Past John the ballad-singer, there was no one at all worth reporting to the old man.

This situation would not continue, of course. There were so few families for men to spring from. The entire Gallic nation, for example, a great section of present-day France, sprang from the family of one lone man in the north of France in the days before Christ. Every native Frenchman, therefore, was at least the son of a king. It was impossible for Thatcher Blitt to be less.

So the hunt went on from day to day, past ancient Greece, past Jarmo, past the wheel and metals and farming and on even past all civilization, outward and backward into the cold primordial wastes of northern Germany.

And still there was nothing. Though Jukes lived in daily fear of losing his job, there was nothing to do but press on. In Germany, he reduced Blitt's ancestor to a slovenly little man who was one of only three men in the entire tribe, or family, one of three in an area which now contains millions. But Blitt's ancestor, true to form, was simply a member of the tribe. As was his father before him.

Yet onward it went. Westward back into the French caves, southward into Spain and across the unrecognizable Mediterranean into a verdant North Africa, backward in time past even the Cro-Magnons, and yet ever backward, 30,000 years, 35,000, with old Blitt reduced now practically to gibbering and still never an exceptional forebear.



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There came a time when Jukes had at last, inevitably, to face the old man. He had scanned back as far as he could. The latest ancestor he had unearthed for Blitt was a hairy creature who did not walk erect. And yet, even here, Blitt refused to concede.

"It may be," he howled, "it *must* be that my ancestor *was* the first man to walk erect or light a fire—to do *something*."

It was not until Jukes pointed out that all those things had been already examined and found hopeless that Blitt finally gave in. Blitt was a relative, of course, of the first man to stand erect, the man with the first human brain. But so was everybody else on the face of the Earth. There was truly nowhere else to explore. What would be found now would be only the common history of mankind.

Blitt retired to his chambers and refused to be seen.

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The story went the rounds, as such stories will. And it was then at last, after 40,000 years of insignificance, that the name of Blitt found everlasting distinction. The story was picked up, fully documented, by psychologists and geneticists of the time, and inserted into textbooks as a profound commentary on the forces of heredity. The name of Thatcher Blitt in particular has become famous, has persisted until this day. For he is the only man yet discovered, or ever likely to be discovered, with this particular distinction.

In 40,000 years of scanner-recorded history, the blood line of Blitt (or Blott) never once produced an exceptional man.

That record is unsurpassed.

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