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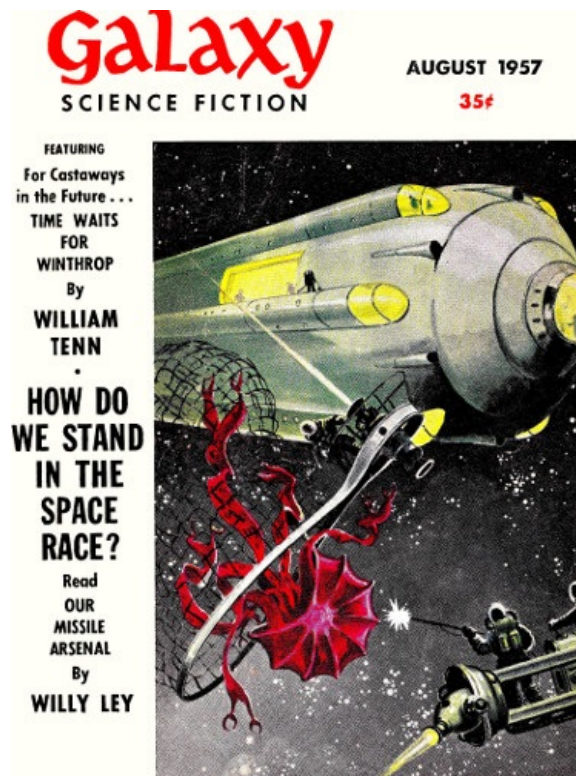
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MAKE ME AN OFFER ***



MAKE ME AN OFFER

By CON BLOMBERG

Illustrated by DILLON

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**Fellow City Mgrs., only you can help me—progress
has made "Go Fight City Hall" a battle cry!**

TO: ALL CITY MANAGERS
FROM: ROSS RO,
NEW YORK CITY MANAGER
SUBJECT: GELATIN MOLDS

Well, boys, this is going to be rather an informal communication because I think there's a serious lesson for you in a situation we had here recently. I might as well be the first to tell you about it. You'll hear about it soon enough anyway. Frankly, I'm hoping you'll have a heart and lend a brother City Manager a hand.

As you boys know, I was re-elected last April to my post as City Manager for another four years and I felt pretty good about it. So good that I was looking around for something to do which would sort of let the voters of little old New York know how I felt about them. Most of you have met my political assistant Charlie Tight—or, rather, my ex-political assistant. Charlie was looking around, too, and he came up with the idea of covering over Central Park.

We have never covered over Central Park with the perma-plast roof like the rest of the city because it is a fairly large area and there wasn't any public demand for it. So naturally it rains and snows there and we spend a lot of dough keeping the grass cut and what have you. It's a popular spot with a lot of folks.

Charlie figured—and I must admit that I agreed with him—that covering over Central Park was quite an idea. Controlled conditions would let the grass grow only so much and the temperature would remain constant. No rain or snow except from 1 A.M. to 3 A.M., when we would put in a little artificial precipitation to keep the greenery going. Plenty of nice air-conditioned air. Eternal spring. Really up-to-date.



We put it through the computer down at the Civic Machine and figured it would cost only about 25 hundred million. It looked real good. You see, we recently got a new addition to the Civic Machine and the manufacturer gave us a deal on a new model Projector for the whole city. It makes constant forecasts on practically everything we need from moment to moment. It doesn't wait for a Tech to run the data thru it. Saves a lot of time because it's directly connected with Supply.

This Projector is so good that we have been able to cut down on expenses about 20 hundred

million in only two years. I figured this would easily pay for the perma-plast roof over good old Central Park.

To make a long story short, I went before the people on TV and told the whole story. Charlie had the TV Techs mock up a scene of what it would look like and we had models posed in family scenes and the like. Should have gone over like a shot—and it would have, except for this screwball Hatty Dakkon.

It wasn't an hour after I had made my broadcast that my secretary announced this Mrs. Hatty Dakkon. She proved to be a young matron type with pretty good legs and a chip on her shoulder. She was against roofing Central Park.

Well, you boys know how it goes. Always some crank who doesn't like things changed, and after they have blown off steam, they quiet down and you can go ahead and do the work.

So I let this Hatty Dakkon talk on and on until my ears were limp from listening.

She said she was against roofing Central Park because it would be just like every other place in the City—weatherproof, air-conditioned and humidity controlled.

She figured that children should have some place where they could feel the wind on their faces and the falling of rain and snow and the smell of air as it was in nature.

She said that was the only way most of our children could ever, ever find the ties with the past that were sacred.

She quoted poetry about the wind and the rain in your hair, and on and on and on.

Finally I let her talk off her head of steam and she got calmed down so I could tell her: "Thank you, madam, for this expression of your opinion. You can rest assured that I will do everything within my power and the power of the Civic Machine to see to it that anything possible is done."

Her head came up like a rocket at blastoff.

"Hold it!" she said. "You can't put me off with that old one—that's Standard Answer No. 1 in the City Manager's guidebook and I ain't buying it, Buster. I used to work at the Civic Machine myself, so I know all the Standard Answers backward and forward."

"Well, I assure you, madam—" I said.

"Don't hand me that stuff again. What I want is for you to call off the Civic Machine and quit trying to roof the only place left where our children can feel the open air and sunshine."

"I see. You aren't going to be satisfied with anything else," I said.

"That's right."

"I'm sorry, but that's impossible. We have programmed the roofing job for next month on the Civic Machine and we can't change it now."

"That, Mr. Ro, is a lie," she said, leaning across my desk and sticking a slim white finger under my nose. "I know you can change it in five minutes if you want to."

"It won't be changed," I said.

"Is that your final word?"

"Final."

"Mr. Ro," she said, putting her hands on her hips, "I think you'll be sorry."

She headed for the door, only to turn around and ask me if my wife was at home.

"I suppose she is," I said, "but don't bother her—she takes no interest in Civic affairs."

I don't have to tell you boys that I dismissed the lady from my mind and went on to other more important matters. Or so I thought.

When I got home that night, I didn't say anything about Hatty Dakkon. My wife is inclined to see things differently than I do and I had a hunch she would side with Hatty. Consequently, rather than get into a discussion, I just let it slide.

Not too many of you boys know my wife, but those who do know that she is like so many other women—not particularly interested in any Civic Machine. Just so she gets what she wants when she dials the home connection to the Machine is all she is interested in.

That night, though, my wife surprised me by having a burning interest in the Civic Machine. She wanted to know all about it. How it produces the consumer products. How it gets them to the living area. How it knows what to order. And she especially quizzed me about the new Projector.

When I asked her why she wanted to know about all that after 15 years of married life, she just smiled sweetly and said that naturally she was interested in my work.

Next day, I brought home a sample programming sheet for her to see and damned if she didn't dismiss it with a sniff as being too complicated and boring.

Go figure women out!

That night, we had two molded gelatin dishes. The round kind with a hole in the center.

The next night, we had the same kind of supper, except that instead of fish and something in gelatin, we had meat and something in gelatin. Same sort of deal for dessert.

The next day, I got my first tip that something was up when Willie Kipe, the caster for NYC-TV, called me and asked about the protest on the Central Park roofing proposal, saying he got the item from his woman assistant. I said it didn't amount to much and that the project was going ahead on schedule.

I caught Willie's cast that night and he treated it in a light manner which really made me smile. I should have been crying instead.

That night, we had some more molded gelatin, only in square molds this time. Same thing the next day. I figured it was time to take a stand—a diplomatic one, of course.

"Honey," I said as I sat toying with my food, "can't we have different dishes every night? I'm getting tired of all this gelatin junk. How about a steak?"

"But, darling, gelatin is very good for you. It's simply crammed full of protein and all the girls at the club are eating lots of gelatin."

"But I don't like gelatin *that* well," I said.

"I don't, either, but it's so good for *both* of us," she said with her best don't-try-to-argue-Mother-knows-best smile.

I had a steak that night after she went to bed.

The next day, I got a call from the head of the warehousing division over at Civic, asking me if I had any preference on warehousing molds.

"What molds?" I wanted to know.

"Well, let's see," he said. "We've got 3.5 million round gelatin molds with a hole in the center. We've got 5.6 million square gelatin molds—no center hole. And 7.3 million figure-eight gelatin molds and I understand there's a hell of a lot of deep-dish gelatin molds coming up tomorrow from Supply at Schenectady."

"Why in hell have we got all those molds?"

"Don't know," he said. "Civic Machine ordered them, so I suppose we need them. Where do you want the storing done? Thought we might run up one of those new Kiosk warehouses out east if you have no objection."

"Put it anywhere you want," I said, switching off.

Before I could get back to work, there was a call from Stats.

"Got a little problem down here, Mr. Ro," said the Tech. "Schenectady is sending us premium billing on an over-order of plastic."

"How much is the premium?"

"Quite a little, Boss—about 10 hundred million or thereabouts. I checked with them and the reason for the extra strong premium is because they had to rebuild the factory—let's see which one that was—oh, yes, cold-molding dishes division of the Cooking Receptacle plant. What do you want me to do—enter a protest saying we aren't responsible and get it over to Fed Court where they can pro-rate it over the other cities?"

"Nope, I guess you'd just better pay it."

The chips were falling into place now and I didn't like what they were building for me.

As soon as I switched off, I put in a call to my head Tech at the Civic Machine and asked for a rundown on the food ordered for supper for the past six or eight nights. It took a while, but when I got it back, it was enough to make my hair curl and uncurl in three-quarter time.

First thing I did was call my wife and ask her what we were having for dinner that night.

"We're having your favorite—steak and kidney pie, dear," she said in that innocent-little-girl voice that means there's trouble ahead.

"No more of those gelatin dishes, sweet?"

"No more of that awful gelatin, darling. I'm so tired of it. But I did order a pair of nice shears today—you know, sweetheart, scissors?"

"Yes, dear. That's nice," I said, trying to smooth down the hair on the back of my neck, which was standing straight up.

"The Civic Machine didn't have any scissors, darling, so I told it go ahead and get me a pair regardless of the wait. That was all right, wasn't it, dear?"

"Fine, dear, fine."

"I can't imagine why the Civic Machine should be out of just plain old six-inch scissors, can you?"

"Just can't imagine, darling. Good-by."

"Good-by, sweetie."

My hand was shaking when I called the Tech at the Civic Machine and asked him to check up on the orders for scissors.

It took a minute or two, and when he came back, his face was puzzled.

"Funny thing, Boss—there is an order for just under 10 million pairs of scissors. That's more than we have had in the past seven or eight years. All ordered last night. There must be a mistake somewhere. I'll run it through again and have a test made of the orders section."

"Never mind. Just do this," I said. "Fix up the Projector so it doesn't send out any order for scissors and cancel any order that has been placed." I was wringing wet with sweat. It was going to be a close one.

Believe me, boys, I didn't waste any time getting on FAX and TV, telling everyone that there had been a change in plans due to public demand and we weren't going to be able to roof over Central Park after all. I suggested that, as long as the administration had cooperated, the people should cooperate on the matter.

An hour later, I called the Civic Machine and asked for a check on scissors. The orders had dropped to a mere 5.4 million. Way above normal, but the way the cancellations were coming in, it was obvious that it would be within reasonable proportions soon.

Just in case some of you missed the by-play on that, let me sketch it in for you as I found it out later.

It seems that this Hatty Dakkon had organized a phone campaign on the Let Our Children Enjoy Nature theme which went over big with the women. Every woman called five woman friends and these five called five and so on. You figure it out—with geometrical progression, it doesn't take long to get in touch with about 14-15 million women. Not as fast as TV, maybe, but a darn sight more effective and thorough.

It was the talk of the women's world and we men didn't even know about it until the battle was all over.

This horde of women, led by Hatty Dakkon, agreed that they would order the same dish—gelatin in a round mold on the same night.

You know what this can do to a good Projector. It just went frantic.

Projectors work on the basis of average demand for anything, and with an average demand for round mold gelatin foods two nights in a row of about 10-11 million, it went ahead and ordered a whole conveyor-load of mold dishes from Schenectady.

The next time, it was square molds for two nights; and the next, it was figure-eight for two nights and then a double shot of deep-dish.

They have a new Projector up at Schenectady, same as we have, and it ordered an increase in the size of the mold-making factory based on our demand (which was run in with everyone else's demand). Then, when the demand didn't come through from us and from the other cities in the area, we had to pay the premium for building the new factory.

The scissors business would have bankrupted us completely. Think of it—millions of pairs of steel scissors in the year 2006! Think of the premium for increase in size of factory, prospecting the planets, mining, spaceship freight rates, and so forth. That's why I was glad to give up the Central Park project.

Well, to make a long story short, we aren't going near Central Park. And Charlie, who originally thought of the idea, is probably out there now, wondering why he did it.

Now in closing, I hope all the rest of you who have had a good laugh will sober up and sympathize with me and see what you can do about ordering gelatin molds from us. We'll ship them out pronto—we have a large supply—and no reasonable offer will be refused. Please, fellows!

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