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Title: All the People

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Release date: March 30, 2016 [EBook #51603]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Greg Weeks, Mary Meehan and the Online
Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ALL THE PEOPLE ***



ALL THE PEOPLE

By R. A. LAFFERTY

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

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Galaxy Magazine April 1961.
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***Tin Tony Trotz had only one job—to
watch out for something a little
odd—in a universe that was insane!***

Anthony Trotz went first to the politician, Mike Delado. "How many people do you know, Mr. Delado?"

"Why the question?"

"I am wondering just what amount of detail the mind can hold."

"To a degree I know many. Ten thousand well, thirty thousand by name, probably a hundred thousand by face and to shake hands with."

"And what is the limit?" Anthony inquired.

"Possibly I am the limit." The politician smiled frostily. "The only limit is time, speed of cognizance and retention. I am told that the latter lessens with age. I am seventy, and it has not done so with me. Whom I have known I do not forget."

"And with special training could one go beyond you?"

"I doubt if one could—much. For my own training has been quite special. Nobody has been so entirely with the people as I have. I've taken five memory courses in my time, but the tricks of all of them I had already come to on my own. I am a great believer in the commonality of mankind and of near equal inherent ability. Yet there are some, say the one man in fifty, who in degree if not in kind do exceed their fellows in scope and awareness and vitality. I am that one man in fifty, and knowing people is my specialty."

"Could a man who specialized still more—and to the exclusion of other things—know a hundred thousand men well."

"It is possible. Dimly."

"A quarter of a million?"

"I think not. He might learn that many faces and names, but he would not know the men."

Anthony went next to the philosopher, Gabriel Mindel.

"Mr. Mindel, how many people do you know?"

"How know? *Per se? A se? Or In Se? Per suam essentiam*, perhaps? Or do you mean *Ab alio*? Or to know as *Hoc aliquid*? There is a fine difference there. Or do you possibly mean to know in *Substantia prima*, or in the sense of comprehensive *noumena*?"

"Somewhere between the latter two. How many persons do you know by name, face, and with a degree of intimacy?"

"I have learned over the years the names of some of my colleagues, possibly a dozen of them. I am now sound on my wife's name, and I seldom stumble over the names of my offspring—never more than momentarily. But you may have come to the wrong man for—whatever you have come for. I am notoriously poor at names, faces, and persons. I have even been described (*vox faucibus haesit*) as absent-minded."

"Yes, you do have the reputation. But perhaps I have not come to the wrong man in seeking the theory of the thing. What is it that limits the comprehensive capacity of the mind of man? What will it hold? What restricts?"

"The body."

"How is that?"

"The brain, I should say, the material tie. The mind is limited by the brain. It is skull-bound. It can accumulate no more than its cranial capacity, though not one tenth of that is ordinarily used. An unbodied mind would (in esoteric theory) be unlimited."

"And how in practical theory?"

"If it is practical, a *pragma*, it is a thing and not a theory."

"Then we can have no experience with the unbodied mind, or the possibility of it?"

"We have not discovered any area of contact, but we may entertain the possibility of it. There is no paradox there. One may rationally consider the irrational."

Anthony went next to see the priest.

"How many people do you know?"

"I know all of them."

"That has to be doubted," said Anthony after a moment.

"I've had twenty different stations. And when you hear five thousand confessions a year for forty years, you by no means know all about people, but you do know all people."

"I do not mean types. I mean persons."

"Oh, I know a dozen or so well, a few thousands somewhat less."

"Would it be possible to know a hundred thousand people, a half million?"

"A mentalist might know that many to recognize; I don't know the limit. But darkened man has a limit set on everything."

"Could a somehow emancipated man know more?"

"The only emancipated man is the corporally dead man. And the dead man, if he attains the beatific vision, knows all other persons who have ever been since time began."

"All the billions?"

"All."

"With the same brain?"

"No. But with the same mind."

"Then wouldn't even a believer have to admit that the mind which we have now is only a token mind? Would not any connection it would have with a completely comprehensive mind be very tenuous? Would we really be the same person if so changed? It is like saying a bucket would hold the ocean if it were fulfilled, which only means filled full. How could it be the same mind?"

"I don't know."

Anthony went to see a psychologist.

"How many people do you know, Dr. Shirm?"

"I could be crabby and say that I know as many as I want to; but it wouldn't be the truth. I rather like people, which is odd in my profession. What is it that you really want to know?"

"How many people can one man know?"

"It doesn't matter very much. People mostly overestimate the number of their acquaintances. What is it that you are trying to ask me?"

"Could one man know everyone?"

"Naturally not. But unnaturally he might seem to. There is a delusion to this effect accompanied by an euphoria, and it is called—"

"I don't want to know what it is called. Why do specialists use Latin and Greek?"

"One part hokum, and two parts need; there simply not being enough letters in the alphabet of exposition without them. It is as difficult to name concepts as children, and we search our brains as a new mother does. It will not do to call two children or two concepts by one name."

"Thank you. I doubt that this is delusion, and it is not accompanied by euphoria."

Anthony had a reason for questioning the four men since (as a new thing that had come to him) he knew everybody. He knew everyone in Salt Lake City, where he had never been. He knew everybody in Jebel Shah where the town is a little amphitheater around the harbor, and in Batangas and Weihai. He knew the loungers around the end of the Galata bridge in Istanbul, and the porters in Kuala Lumpur. He knew the tobacco traders in Plovdiv, and the cork-cutters of Portugal. He knew the dock workers in Djibouti, and the glove-makers in Prague. He knew the vegetable farmers around El Centro, and the muskrat trappers of Barrataria Bay. He knew the three billion people of the world by name and face, and with a fair degree of intimacy.

"Yet I'm not a very intelligent man. I've been called a bungler. And they've had to reassign me three different times at the filter center. I've seen only a few thousands of these billions of people, and it seems unusual that I should know them all. It may be a delusion as Dr. Shirm says, but it is a heavily detailed delusion, and it is not accompanied by euphoria. I feel like green hell just thinking of it."

He knew the cattle traders in Letterkenny Donegal; he knew the cane cutters of Oriente, and the tree climbers of Milne Bay. He knew the people who died every minute, and those who were born.

"There is no way out of it. I know everybody in the world. It is impossible, but it is so. And to what purpose? There aren't a handful of them I could borrow a dollar from, and I haven't a real friend in the lot. I don't know whether it came to me suddenly, but I realized it suddenly. My father was a junk dealer in Wichita, and my education is spotty. I am maladjusted, introverted, incompetent and unhappy, and I also have weak kidneys. Why would a power like this come to a man like me?"

The children in the streets hooted at him. Anthony had always had a healthy hatred for children and dogs, those twin harassers of the unfortunate and the maladjusted. Both run in packs, and

both are cowardly attackers. And if either of them spots a weakness he will never let it go. That his father had been a junk dealer was not reason to hoot at him. But how did the children even know about that? Did they possess some fraction of the power that had come to him lately?

But he had strolled about the town for too long. He should have been at work at the filter center. Often they were impatient with him when he wandered off from his work, and Colonel Peter Cooper was waiting for him when he came in now.

"Where have you been, Anthony?"

"Walking. I talked to four men. I mentioned no subject in the province of the filter center."

"Every subject is in the province of the filter center. And you know that our work here is confidential."

"Yes, sir, but I do not understand the import of my work here. I would not be able to give out information that I do not have."

"A popular misconception. There are others who might understand the import of it, and be able to reconstruct it from what you tell them. How do you feel?"

"Nervous, unwell, my tongue is furred, my kidneys—"

"Ah yes, there will be someone here this afternoon to fix your kidneys. I had not forgotten. Is there anything that you want to tell me?"

"No, sir."

Colonel Cooper had the habit of asking that of his workers in the manner of a mother asking a child if he wants to go to the bathroom. There was something embarrassing in his intonation.

Well, he did want to tell him something, but he didn't know how to phrase it. He wanted to tell the colonel that he had newly acquired the power of knowing everyone in the world, that he was worried how he could hold so much in his head that was not noteworthy for its capacity. But he feared ridicule more than he feared anything else and he was a tangle of fears.

But he thought he would try it a little bit on his co-workers.

"I know a man named Walter Walloroy in Galveston," he said to Adrian. "He drinks beer at the Gizmo bar, and is retired."

"What is the superlative of *so what?*"

"But I have never been there," said Anthony.

"And I have never been in Kalamazoo."

"I know a girl in Kalamazoo. Her name is Greta Harandash. She is home today with a cold. She is prone to colds."

But Adrian was a creature both uninterested and uninteresting. It is very hard to confide in one who is uninterested.

"Well, I will live with it a little while," said Anthony. "Or I may have to go to a doctor and see if he can give me something to make all these people go away. But if he thinks my story is a queer one, he may report me back to the center, and I might be reclassified again. It makes me nervous to be reclassified."

So he lived with it a while, the rest of the day and the night. He should have felt better. A man had come that afternoon and fixed his kidneys; but there was nobody to fix his nervousness and apprehensions. And his skittishness was increased when the children hooted at him as he walked in the morning. That hated epithet! But how could they know that his father had been a dealer in used metals in a town far away?

He had to confide in someone.

He spoke to Wellington who also worked in his room. "I know a girl in Beirut who is just going to bed. It is evening there now, you know."

"That so? Why don't they get their time straightened out? I met a girl last night that's cute as a correlator key, and kind of shaped like one. She doesn't know yet that I work in the center and am a restricted person. I'm not going to tell her. Let her find out for herself."

It was no good trying to tell things to Wellington. Wellington never listened. And then Anthony got a summons to Colonel Peter Cooper, which always increased his apprehension.

"Anthony," said the colonel, "I want you to tell me if you discern anything unusual. That is really your job, to report anything unusual. The other, the paper shuffling, is just something to keep your idle hands busy. Now tell me clearly if anything unusual has come to your notice."

"Sir, it has." And then he blurted it all out. "I know everybody! I know everybody in the world. I know them all in their billions, every person. It has me worried sick."

"Yes, yes, Anthony. But tell me, have you noticed anything *odd*? It is your duty to tell me if you

have."

"But I have just told you! In some manner I know every person in the world. I know the people in Transvaal, I know the people in Guatemala. I know *everybody*."

"Yes, Anthony, we realize that. And it may take a little getting used to. But that isn't what I mean. Have you (besides that thing that seems out of the way to you) noticed anything unusual, anything that seems out of place, a little bit wrong?"

"Ah—besides that and your reaction to it, no, sir. Nothing else odd. I might ask, though, how odd can a thing get? But other than that—no, sir."

"Good, Anthony. Now remember, if you sense anything odd about anything at all, come and tell me. No matter how trivial it is, if you feel that something is just a little bit out of place, then report it at once. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, sir."

But he couldn't help wondering what it might be that the colonel would consider a little bit odd.

Anthony left the center and walked. He shouldn't have. He knew that they became impatient with him when he wandered off from his work.

"But I have to think. I have all the people in the world in my brain, and still I am not able to think. This power should have come to someone able to take advantage of it."

He went into the Plugged Nickel Bar, but the man on duty knew him for a restricted person from the filter center, and would not serve him.

He wandered disconsolately about the city. "I know the people in Omaha and those in Omsk. What queer names have the towns of the earth! I know everyone in the world, and when anyone is born or dies. And Colonel Cooper did not find it unusual. Yet I am to be on the lookout for things unusual. The question rises, would I know an odd thing if I met it?"

And then it was that something just a little bit unusual did happen, something not quite right. A small thing. But the colonel had told him to report anything about anything, no matter how insignificant, that struck him as a little queer.

It was just that with all the people in his head, and the arrivals and departures, there was a small group that was not of the pattern.

Every minute hundreds left by death and arrived by birth. And now there was a small group, seven persons; they arrived into the world, but they were not born into the world.

So Anthony went to tell Colonel Cooper that something had occurred to his mind that was a little bit odd.

But damn-the-dander-headed-two-and-four-legged-devils, there were the kids and the dogs in the street again, yipping and hooting and chanting:

"Tony the tin man. Tony the tin man."



He longed for the day when he would see them fall like leaves out of his mind, and death take them.

"Tony the tin man. Tony the tin man."

How had they known that his father was a used metal dealer?

Colonel Peter Cooper was waiting for him.

"You surely took your time, Anthony. The reaction was registered, but it would take us hours to pin-point its source without your help. Now then, explain as calmly as you can what you have felt or experienced. Or, more to the point, where are they?"

"No. You will have to answer me certain questions first."

"I haven't the time to waste, Anthony. Tell me at once what it is and where."

"No. There is no other way. You have to bargain with me."

"One does not bargain with restricted persons."

"Well, I will bargain till I find out just what it means that I am a restricted person."

"You really don't know? Well, we haven't time to fix that stubborn streak in you. Quickly, just what is it that you have to know?"

"I have to know what a restricted person is. I have to know why the children hoot 'Tony the tin man' at me. How can they know that my father was a junk dealer?"

"You had no father. We give to each of you a sufficient store of memories and a background of a distant town. That happened to be yours, but there is no connection here. The children call you Tony the Tin Man because (like all really cruel creatures) they have an instinct for the truth that can hurt; and they will never forget it."

"Then I am a tin man?"

"Well, no. Actually only seventeen percent metal. And less than a third of one percent tin. You are compounded of animal, vegetable, and mineral fiber, and there was much effort given to your manufacture and programming. Yet the taunt of the children is essentially true."

"Then, if I am only Tony the Tin Man, how can I know all the people in the world in my mind?"

"You have no mind."

"In my brain then. How can all that be in one small brain?"

"Because your brain is not in your head, and it is not small. Come, I may as well show it to you; I've told you enough that it won't matter if you know a little more. There are few who are taken on personally conducted sight-seeing tours of their own brains. You should be grateful."

"Gratitude seems a little tardy."

They went into the barred area, down into the bowels of the main building of the center. And they looked at the brain of Anthony Trotz, a restricted person in its special meaning.

"It is the largest in the world," said Colonel Cooper.

"How large?"

"A little over twelve hundred cubic meters."

"What a brain! And it is mine?"

"You are an adjunct to it, a runner for it, an appendage, inasmuch as you are anything at all."

"Colonel Cooper, how long have I been alive?"

"You are not."

"How long have I been as I am now?"

"It is three days since you were last reassigned, since you were assigned to this. At that time your nervousness and apprehensions were introduced. An apprehensive unit will be more inclined to notice details just a little out of the ordinary."

"And what is my purpose?"

They were walking now back to the office work area, and Anthony had a sad feeling at leaving his brain behind him.

"This is a filter center, and your purpose is to serve as a filter, of a sort. Every person has a slight aura around him. It is a characteristic of his, and is part of his personality and purpose. And it can be detected, electrically, magnetically, even visually under special conditions. The accumulator at which we were looking (your brain) is designed to maintain contact with all the auras in the world, and to keep a running and complete data on them all. It contains a multiplicity of circuits for each of its three billion and some subjects. However, as aid to its operation, it was necessary to assign several artificial consciousnesses to it. You are one of these."

The dogs and the children had found a new victim in the streets below. Anthony's heart went out to him.

"The purpose," continued Colonel Cooper, "was to notice anything just a little bit peculiar in the auras and the persons they represent, anything at all odd in their comings and goings. Anything like what you have come here to report to me."

"Like the seven persons who recently arrived in the world, and not by way of birth?"

"Yes. We have been expecting the first of the aliens for months. We must know their area, and at once. Now tell me."

"What if they are not aliens at all. What if they are restricted persons like myself?"

"Restricted persons have no aura, are not persons, are not alive. And you would not receive knowledge of them."

"Then how do I know the other restricted persons here, Adrian and Wellington, and such?"

"You know them at first hand. You do not know them through the machine. Now tell me the area quickly. The center may be a primary target. It will take the machine hours to ravel it out. Your only purpose is to serve as an intuitive short-cut."

But Tin Man Tony did not speak. He only thought in his mind—more accurately, in his brain, a hundred yards away. He thought in his fabricated consciousness:

"The area is quite near. If the colonel were not burdened with a mind, he would be able to think more clearly. He would know that cruel children and dogs love to worry what is not human, and that all of the restricted persons are accounted for in this area. He would know that they are worrying one of the aliens in the street below, and that is the area that is right in my consciousness.

"I wonder if they will be better masters? He is an imposing figure, and he would be able to pass for a man. And the colonel is right: The Center is a primary target.

"Why! I never knew you could kill a child just by pointing a finger at him like that! What opportunities I have missed! Enemy of my enemy, you are my friend."

And aloud he said to the colonel:

"I will not tell you."

"Then we'll have you apart and get it out of you mighty quick."

"How quick?"

"Ten minutes."

"Time enough," said Tony, for he knew them now, coming in like snow. They were arriving in the world by the hundreds, and not arriving by birth.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ALL THE PEOPLE ***

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