

however to pull aside the curtain just a little. I. Tichy, seeing where attempts to improve prehistory and history were leading, in his capacity as Director of the Temporal Institute did something, as a result of which something the Theory of Time Vehicles and Transport never was discovered. Since at his order this discovery was undiscovered, by that very act the Telechronic Program to correct history vanished, so did the Temporal Institute and so—alas—did I. Tichy himself, being its Director. The pain caused by that loss is assuaged in part by the knowledge that we will now not have to fear any unpleasant surprises from the past (at least), and in part by the startling fact that he who tragically is no more still lives, without at all having risen from the dead. Admittedly, this circumstance is perplexing; for its full explanation we direct the Reader to the appropriate places, namely, the Twentieth and Twenty-first Voyages.

In conclusion I should like to announce the establishment in our Association of a special futurological section, which, in keeping with the spirit of the times, will make available—using the method of so-called self-realizing prognoses—those star journeys of I. Tichy which as yet he has not undertaken, nor indeed intends to.

—PROF. A. S. TARANTOGA  
*on behalf of the Associated Institutes of Tichology, Tichography  
 and Tichonomics Descriptive, Comparative and Prognostic*

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## THE SEVENTH VOYAGE

**I**t was on a Monday, April second—I was cruising in the vicinity of Betelgeuse—when a meteor no larger than a lima bean pierced the hull, shattered the drive regulator and part of the rudder, as a result of which the rocket lost all maneuverability. I put on my spacesuit, went outside and tried to fix the mechanism, but found I couldn't possibly attach the spare rudder—which I'd had the foresight to bring along—without the help of another man. The constructors had foolishly designed the rocket in such a way, that it took one person to hold the head of the bolt in place with a wrench, and another to tighten the nut. I didn't realize this at first and spent several hours trying to grip the wrench with my feet while using both hands to screw on the nut at the other end. But I was getting nowhere, and had already missed lunch. Then finally, just as I almost succeeded, the wrench popped out from under my feet and went flying off into space. So not only had I accomplished nothing, but lost a valuable tool besides; I watched helplessly as it sailed away, growing smaller and smaller against the starry sky.

After a while the wrench returned in an elongated ellipse, but though it had now become a satellite of the rocket, it never got close enough for me to retrieve it. I went back inside and, sitting down to a modest supper, considered how best to extricate myself from this stupid situation. Meanwhile the ship flew on, straight ahead, its velocity steadily increasing, since my drive regulator too had been knocked out by that blasted meteor. It's true there were no heavenly bodies on course, but this headlong flight could hardly continue indefinitely. For a while I contained my anger, but then discovered, when starting to wash the dinner dishes, that the now-overheated atomic pile had ruined my very best cut of sirloin (I'd been keeping it in the freezer for Sunday). I momentarily lost my usually level head, burst into a volley of the vilest oaths and smashed a few plates. This did give me a certain satisfaction, but was hardly practical. In addition, the sirloin which I threw overboard, instead of drifting off into the void, didn't seem to want to leave the rocket and revolved about it, a second artificial satellite, which

produced a brief eclipse of the sun every eleven minutes and four seconds. To calm my nerves I calculated till evening the components of its trajectory, as well as the orbital perturbation caused by the presence of the lost wrench. I figured out that for the next six million years the sirloin, rotating about the ship in a circular path, would lead the wrench, then catch up with it from behind and pass it again. Finally, exhausted by these computations, I went to bed. In the middle of the night I had the feeling someone was shaking me by the shoulder. I opened my eyes and saw a man standing over the bed; his face was strangely familiar, though I hadn't the faintest idea who this could be.

"Get up," he said, "and take the pliers, we're going out and screwing on the rudder bolts..."

"First of all, your manner is somewhat unceremonious, and we haven't even been introduced," I replied, "and secondly, I know for a fact that you aren't there. I'm alone on this rocket, and have been now for two years, en route from Earth to the constellation of the Ram. Therefore you are a dream and nothing more."

However he continued to shake me, repeating that I should go with him at once and get the tools.

"This is idiotic," I said, growing annoyed, because this dream argument could very well wake me up, and I knew from experience the difficulty I would have getting back to sleep. "Look, I'm not going anywhere, there's no point in it, A bolt tightened in a dream won't change things as they are in the sober light of day. Now kindly stop pestering me and evaporate or leave in some other fashion, otherwise I might awake."

"But you *are* awake, word of honor!" cried the stubborn apparition. "Don't you recognize me? Look here!"

And saying this, he pointed to the two warts, big as strawberries, on his left cheek. Instinctively I clutched my own face, for yes, I had two warts, exactly the same, and in that very place. Suddenly I realized why this phantom reminded me of someone I knew: he was the spitting image of myself.

"Leave me alone, for heaven's sake!" I cried, shutting my eyes, anxious to stay asleep. "If you are me, then fine, we needn't stand on ceremony, but it only proves you don't exist!"

With which I turned on my other side and pulled the covers up over my head. I could hear him saying something about utter nonsense; then finally, when I didn't respond, he shouted: "You'll regret this, knucklehead! And you'll find out, too late, that this was not a dream!"

But I didn't budge. In the morning I opened my eyes and immediately recalled that curious nocturnal episode. Sitting up in bed, I thought about what strange tricks the mind can play: for here, without a single fellow creature on board and confronted with an emergency of the most pressing kind, I had—as it were—split myself in two, in that dream fantasy, to answer the needs of the situation.

After breakfast, discovering that the rocket had acquired an additional chunk of acceleration during the night, I took to leafing through the ship's library,

searching the textbooks for some way out of this predicament. But I didn't find a thing. So I spread my star map out on the table and in the light of nearby Betelgeuse, obscured every so often by the orbiting sirloin, examined the area in which I was located for the seat of some cosmic civilization that might possibly come to my aid. But unfortunately this was a complete stellar wilderness, avoided by all vessels as a region unusually dangerous, for in it lay gravitational vortices, as formidable as they were mysterious, one hundred and forty-seven of them in all, whose existence was explained by six astrophysical theories, each theory saying something different.

The cosmonautical almanac warned of them, in view of the incalculable relativistic effects that passage through a vortex could bring about—particularly when traveling at high velocities.

Yet there was little I could do. According to my calculations I would be making contact with the edge of the first vortex at around eleven, and therefore hurriedly prepared lunch, not wanting to face the danger on an empty stomach. I had barely finished drying the last saucer when the rocket began to pitch and heave in every direction, till all the objects not adequately tied down went flying from wall to wall like hail. With difficulty I crawled over to the armchair, and after I'd lashed myself to it, as the ship tossed about with ever increasing violence, I noticed a sort of pale lilac haze forming on the opposite side of the cabin, and in the middle of it, between the sink and the stove, a misty human shape, which had on an apron and was pouring omelet batter into a frying pan. The shape looked at me with interest, but without surprise, then shimmered and was gone. I rubbed my eyes. I was obviously alone, so attributed the vision to a momentary aberration.

As I continued to sit in—or rather, jump along with—the armchair, it suddenly hit me, like a dazzling revelation, that this hadn't been a hallucination at all. A thick volume of the General Theory of Relativity came whirling past my chair and I grabbed for it, finally catching it on the fourth pass. Turning the pages of that heavy tome wasn't easy under the circumstances—awesome forces hurled the rocket this way and that, it reeled like a drunken thing—but at last I found the right chapter. It spoke of the manifestation of the "time loop," that is, the bending of the direction of the flow of time in the presence of gravitational fields of great intensity, which phenomenon might even on occasion lead to the complete reversal of time and the "duplication of the present." The vortex I had just entered was not one of the most powerful. I knew that if I could turn the ship's bow, even if only a little, towards the Galactic Pole, it would intersect the so-called Vortex Gravitatiosus Pinckenbachii, in which had been observed more than once the duplication, even the triplication, of the present.

True, the controls were out, but I went down to the engine room and fiddled with the instruments so long, that I actually managed to produce a slight deflection of the rocket towards the Galactic Pole. This took several hours. The results were beyond my expectations. The ship fell into the center of the vortex at around midnight, its girders shook and groaned until I began to fear for its safety;

but it emerged from this ordeal whole and once again was wrapped in the lifeless arms of cosmic silence, whereupon I left the engine room, only to see myself sound asleep in bed. I realized at once that this was I of the previous day, that is, from Monday night. Without reflecting on the philosophical side of this rather singular event, I ran over and shook the sleeper by the shoulder, shouting for him to get up, since I had no idea how long his Monday existence would last in my Tuesday one, therefore it was imperative we go outside and fix the rudder as quickly as possible, together.

But the sleeper merely opened one eye and told me that not only was I rude, but didn't exist, being a figment of his dream and nothing more. I tugged at him in vain, losing patience, and even attempted to drag him bodily from the bed. He wouldn't budge, stubbornly repeating that it was all a dream; I began to curse, but he pointed out logically that bolts tightened in dreams wouldn't hold on rudders in the sober light of day. I gave my word of honor that he was mistaken, I pleaded and swore in turn, to no avail—even the warts did not convince him. He turned his back to me and started snoring.

I sat down in the armchair to collect my thoughts and take stock of the situation. I'd lived through it twice now, first as that sleeper, on Monday, and then as the one trying to wake him, unsuccessfully, on Tuesday. The Monday me hadn't believed in the reality of the duplication, while the Tuesday me already knew it to be a fact. Here was a perfectly ordinary time loop. What then should be done in order to get the rudder fixed? Since the Monday me slept on—I remembered that on that night I had slept through to the morning undisturbed—I saw the futility of any further efforts to rouse him. The map indicated a number of other large gravitational vortices up ahead, therefore I could count on the duplication of the present within the next few days. I decided to write myself a letter and pin it to the pillow, enabling the Monday me, when he awoke, to see for himself that the dream had been no dream.

But no sooner did I sit at the table with pen and paper than something started rattling in the engines, so I hurried there and poured water on the overheated atomic pile till dawn, while the Monday me slept soundly, licking his lips from time to time, which galled me no end. Hungry and bleary-eyed, for I hadn't slept a wink, I set about making breakfast, and was just wiping the dishes when the rocket fell into the next gravitational vortex. I saw my Monday self staring at me dumbfounded, lashed to the armchair, while Tuesday I fried an omelet. Then a lurch knocked me off balance, everything grew dark, and down I went. I came to on the floor among bits of broken china; near my face were the shoes of a man standing over me.

"Get up," he said, lifting me. "Are you all right?"

"I think so," I answered, keeping my hands on the floor, for my head was still spinning. "From what day of the week are you?"

"Wednesday," he said. "Come on, let's get that rudder fixed while we have the chance!"

"But where's the Monday me?" I asked.

"Gone. Which means, I suppose, that you are he."

"How is that?"

"Well, the Monday me on Monday night became, Tuesday morning, the Tuesday me, and so on."

"I don't understand."

"Doesn't matter—you'll get the hang of it. But hurry up, we're wasting time!"

"Just a minute," I replied, remaining on the floor. "Today is Tuesday. Now if you are the Wednesday me, and if by that time on Wednesday the rudder still hasn't been fixed, then it follows that something will prevent us from fixing it, since otherwise you, on Wednesday, would not now, on Tuesday, be asking me to help you fix it. Wouldn't it be best, then, for us not to risk going outside?"

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed. "Look, I'm the Wednesday me and you're the Tuesday me, and as for the rocket, well, my guess is that its existence is patched, which means that in places it's Tuesday, in places Wednesday, and here and there perhaps there's even a bit of Thursday. Time has simply become shuffled up in passing through these vortices, but why should that concern us, when together we are two and therefore have a chance to fix the rudder?!"

"No, you're wrong!" I said. "If on Wednesday, where you already are, having lived through all of Tuesday, so that now Tuesday is behind you, if on Wednesday—I repeat—the rudder isn't fixed, then one can only conclude that it didn't get fixed on Tuesday, since it's Tuesday now and if we were to go and fix the rudder right away, that *right away* would be your *yesterday* and there would now be nothing to fix. And consequently..."

"And consequently you're as stubborn as a mule!" he growled. "You'll regret this! And my only consolation is that you too will be infuriated by your own pigheadedness, just as I am now—when you yourself reach Wednesday!!"

"Ah, wait," I cried, "do you mean that on Wednesday, I, being you, will try to convince the Tuesday me, just as you are doing here, except that everything will be reversed, in other words you will be me and I you? But of course! That's what makes a time loop! Hold on, I'm coming, yes, it makes sense now..."

But before I could get up off the floor we fell into a new vortex and the terrible acceleration flattened us against the ceiling.

The dreadful pitching and heaving didn't let up once throughout that night from Tuesday to Wednesday. Then, when things had finally quieted down a little, the volume of the General Theory of Relativity came flying across the cabin and hit me on the forehead with such force, that I lost consciousness. When I opened my eyes I saw broken dishes and a man sprawled among them. I immediately jumped to my feet and lifted him, shouting:

"Get up! Are you all right?"

"I think so," he replied, blinking. "From what day of the week are you?"

"Wednesday," I said, "come on, let's get that rudder fixed while we have the chance."

"But where's the Monday me?" he asked, sitting up. He had a black eye.

"Gone," I said, "which means that you are he."

"How is that?"

"Well, the Monday me on Monday night became, Tuesday morning, the Tuesday me, and so on."

"I don't understand."

"Doesn't matter—you'll get the hang of it. But hurry up, we're wasting time!"

Saying this, I was already looking around for the tools.

"Just a minute," he drawled, not budging an inch. "Today is Tuesday. Now, if you are the Wednesday me, and if by that time on Wednesday the rudder still hasn't been fixed, then it follows that something will prevent us from fixing it, since otherwise you, on Wednesday, would not be asking me now, on Tuesday, to help you fix it. Wouldn't it be best, then, for us not to risk going outside?"

"Nonsense!!" I yelled, losing my temper. "Look, I'm the Wednesday me, you're the Tuesday me..."

And so we quarreled, in opposite roles, during which he did in fact drive me into a positive fury, for he persistently refused to help me fix the rudder and it did no good calling him pigheaded and a stubborn mule. And when at last I managed to convince him, we plunged into the next gravitational vortex. I was in a cold sweat, for the thought occurred to me that we might now go around and around in this time loop, repeating ourselves for all eternity, but luckily that didn't happen. By the time the acceleration had slackened enough for me to stand, I was alone once more in the cabin. Apparently the localized existence of Tuesday, which until now had persisted in the vicinity of the sink, had vanished, becoming a part of the irretrievable past. I rushed over to the map, to find some nice vortex into which I could send the rocket, so as to bring about still another warp of time and in that way obtain a helping hand.

There was in fact one vortex, quite promising too, and by manipulating the engines with great difficulty, I aimed the rocket to intersect it at the very center. True, the configuration of that vortex was, according to the map, rather unusual—it had two foci, side by side. But by now I was too desperate to concern myself with this anomaly.

After several hours of bustling about in the engine room my hands were filthy, so I went to wash them, seeing as there was plenty of time yet before I would be entering the vortex. The bathroom was locked. From inside came the sounds of someone gargling.

"Who's there?!" I hollered, taken aback.

"Me," replied a voice.

"Which me is that?!"

"Jjon Tichy."

"From what day?"

"Friday. What do you want?"

"I wanted to wash my hands..." I said mechanically, thinking meanwhile with

the greatest intensity: it was Wednesday evening, and he came from Friday, therefore the gravitational vortex into which the ship was to fall would bend time from Friday to Wednesday, but as for what then would take place within the vortex, that I could in no way picture. Particularly intriguing was the question of where Thursday might be. In the meantime the Friday me still wasn't letting me into the bathroom, taking his sweet time, though I pounded on the door insistently.

"Stop that gargling!" I roared, out of patience. "Every second is precious—come out at once, we have to fix the rudder!"

"For that you don't need me," he said phlegmatically from behind the door. "The Thursday me must be around here somewhere, go with him..."

"What Thursday me? That's not possible..."

"I ought to know whether it's possible or not, considering that I'm already in Friday and consequently have lived through your Wednesday as well as his Thursday..."

Feeling dizzy, I jumped back from the door, for yes, I did hear some commotion in the cabin: a man was standing there, pulling the toolbag out from under the bed.

"You're the Thursday me?!" I cried, running into the room.

"Right," he said. "Here, give me a hand..."

"Will we be able to fix the rudder this time?" I asked as together we pulled out the heavy satchel.

"I don't know, it wasn't fixed on Thursday, ask the Friday me..."

That hadn't crossed my mind! I quickly ran back to the bathroom door.

"Hey there, Friday me! Has the rudder been fixed?"

"Not on Friday," he replied.

"Why not?"

"This is why not," he said, opening the door. His head was wrapped in a towel, and he pressed the flat of a knife to his forehead, trying in this manner to reduce the swelling of a lump the size of an egg. The Thursday me meanwhile approached with the tools and stood beside me, calmly scrutinizing the me with the lump, who with his free hand was putting back on the shelf a siphon of seltzer. So it was its gurgle I had taken for his gargle.

"What gave you that?" I asked sympathetically,

"Not what, who," he replied. "It was the Sunday me."

"The Sunday me? But why ... that can't be!" I cried.

"Well it's a long story..."

"Makes no difference! Quick, let's go outside, we might just make it!" said the Thursday me, turning to the me that was I.

"But the rocket will fall into the vortex any minute now," I replied. "The shock could throw us off into space, and that would be the end of us..."

"Use your head, stupid," snapped the Thursday me. "If the Friday me's alive, nothing can happen to us. Today is only Thursday."

"It's Wednesday," I objected.

"It makes no difference, in either case I'll be alive on Friday, and so will you."

"Yes, but there really aren't two of us, it only looks that way," I observed, "actually there is *one* me, just from different days of the week..."

"Fine, fine, now open the hatch..."

But it turned out here that we had only one spacesuit between us. Therefore we could not both leave the rocket at the same time, and therefore our plan to fix the rudder was completely ruined.

"Blast!" I cried, angrily throwing down the toolbag. "What I should have done is put on the spacesuit to begin with and kept it on. I just didn't think of it—but you, as the Thursday me, you ought to have remembered!"

"I had the spacesuit, but the Friday me took it," he said.

"When? Why?"

"Eh, it's not worth going into," he shrugged and, turning around, went back to the cabin. The Friday me wasn't there; I looked in the bathroom, but it was empty too.

"Where's the Friday me?" I asked, returning. The Thursday me methodically cracked an egg with a knife and poured its contents onto the sizzling fat.

"Somewhere in the neighborhood of Saturday, no doubt," he replied, indifferent, quickly scrambling the egg.

"Excuse me," I protested, "but you already had your meals on Wednesday—what makes you think you can go and eat a second Wednesday supper?"

"These rations are mine just as much as they are yours," he said, calmly lifting the browned edge of the egg with his knife. "I am you, you are me, so it makes no difference..."

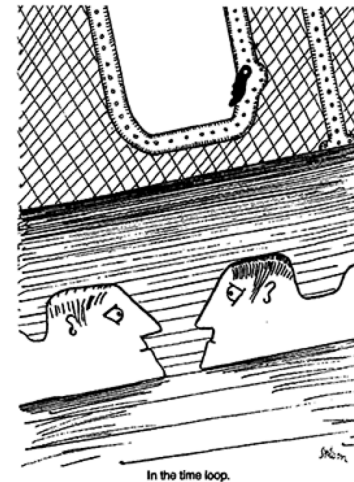
"What sophistry! Wait, that's too much butter! Are you crazy? I don't have enough food for this many people!"

The skillet flew out of his hand, and I went crashing into a wall: we had fallen into a new vortex. Once again the ship shook, as if in a fever, but my only thought was to get to the corridor where the spacesuit was hanging and put it on. For in that way (I reasoned) when Wednesday became Thursday, I, as the Thursday me, would be wearing that spacesuit, and if only I didn't take it off for a single minute (and I was determined not to) then I would obviously be wearing it on Friday also. And therefore the me on Thursday and the me on Friday would both be in our spacesuits, so that when we came together in the same present it would finally be possible to fix that miserable rudder. The increasing thrust of gravity made my head swim, and when I opened my eyes I noticed that I was lying to the right of the Thursday me, and not to the left, as I had been a few moments before. Now while it had been easy enough for me to develop this plan about the spacesuit, it was considerably more difficult to put it into action, since with the growing gravitation I could hardly move. When it weakened just a little, I began to inch my way across the floor—in the direction of the door that led to the corridor. Meanwhile I noticed that the Thursday me was likewise heading for the

door, crawling on his belly towards the corridor. At last, after about an hour, when the vortex had reached its widest point, we met at the threshold, both flattened to the floor. Then I thought, why should I have to strain myself to reach the handle? Let the Thursday me do it. Yet at the same time I began to recall certain things which clearly indicated that it was I now who was the Thursday me, and not he.

"What day of the week are you?" I asked, to make sure. With my chin pressed to the floor I looked him in the eye. Struggling, he opened his mouth.

"Thurs—day—me," he groaned. Now that was odd. Could it be that, in spite of everything, I was *still* the Wednesday me? Calling to mind all my recollections of the recent past, I had to conclude that this was out of the question. So he must have been the Friday me. For if he had preceded me by a day before, then he was surely a day ahead now. I waited for him to open the door, but apparently he expected the same of me. The gravitation had now subsided noticeably, so I got up and ran to the corridor. Just as I grabbed the spacesuit, he tripped me, pulling it out of my hands, and I fell flat on my face.



"You dog!" I cried. "Tricking your own self—that's really low!"

He ignored me, stepping calmly into the spacesuit. The shamelessness of it was appalling. Suddenly a strange force threw him from the suit—as it turned out, someone was already inside. For a moment I wavered, no longer knowing who was who.

"You, Wednesday!" called the one in the spacesuit. "Hold back Thursday, help me!"

For the Thursday me was indeed trying to tear the spacesuit off him.

"Give me the spacesuit!" bellowed the Thursday me as he wrestled with the

other.

"Get off! What are you trying to do? Don't you realize I'm the one who should have it, and not you?!" howled the other.

"And why is that, pray?"

"For the reason, fool, that I'm closer to Saturday than you, and by Saturday there will be two of us in suits!"

"But that's ridiculous," I said, getting into their argument, "at best you'll be alone in the suit on Saturday, like an absolute idiot, and won't be able to do a thing. Let *me* have the suit: if I put it on now, then you'll be wearing it on Friday as the Friday me, and I will also on Saturday as the Saturday me, and so you see there will then be two of us, and with two suits... Come on, Thursday, give me a hand!"

"Wait," protested the Friday me when I had forcibly yanked the spacesuit off his back. "In the first place, there is no one here for you to call 'Thursday,' since midnight has passed and *you* are now the Thursday me, and in the second place, it'll be better if I stay in the spacesuit. The spacesuit won't do you a bit of good."

"Why not? If I put it on today, I'll have it on tomorrow too."

"You'll see for yourself ... after all, I was already you, on Thursday, and *my* Thursday has passed, so I ought to know..."

"Enough talk. Let go of it this instant!" I snarled. But he grabbed it from me and I chased him, first through the engine room and then into the cabin. It somehow worked out that there were only two of us now. Suddenly I understood why the Thursday me, when we were standing at the hatch with the tools, had told me that the Friday me took the spacesuit from him: for in the meantime I myself had become the Thursday me, and here the Friday me was in fact taking it. But I had no intention of giving in that easily. Just you wait, I thought, I'll take care of you, and out I ran into the corridor, and from there to the engine room, where before—during the chase—I had noticed a heavy pipe lying on the floor, which served to stoke the atomic pile, and I picked it up and—thus armed—dashed back to the cabin. The other me was already in the spacesuit, he had pulled on everything but the helmet.

"Out of the spacesuit!" I snapped, clenching my pipe in a threatening manner.

"Not a chance."

"Out, I say!!"

Then I wondered whether or not I should hit him. It was a little disconcerting, the fact that he had neither a black eye nor a bump on his head, like the other Friday me, the one I'd found in the bathroom, but all at once I realized that this was the way it had to be. *That* Friday me by now was the Saturday me, yes, and perhaps even was knocking about somewhere in the vicinity of Sunday, while this Friday me inside the spacesuit had only recently been the Thursday me, into which same Thursday me I myself had been transformed at midnight. Thus I was moving along the sloping curve of the time loop towards that place in which the Friday me before the beating would change into the Friday me already beaten.

Still, *he did* say, back then, that it had been the Sunday me who did it, and there was no trace, as yet, of *him*. We stood alone in the cabin, he and I. Then suddenly I had a brainstorm.

"Out of that spacesuit!" I growled.

"Keep off, Thursday!" he yelled.

"I'm not Thursday, I'm the SUNDAY ME!" I shrieked, closing in for the kill. He tried to kick me, but spacesuit boots are very heavy and before he could raise his leg, I let him have it over the head. Not too hard, of course, since I had grown sufficiently familiar with all of this to know that I in turn, when eventually I went from the Thursday to the Friday me, would be on the receiving end, and I wasn't particularly set on fracturing my own skull. The Friday me fell with a groan, holding his head, and I brutally tore the spacesuit off him. While he made for the bathroom on wobbly legs, muttering, "Where's the cotton ... where's the seltzer," I quickly began to don the suit that we had struggled over, until I noticed—sticking out from under the bed—a human foot. I took a closer look, kneeling. Under the bed lay a man; trying to muffle the sound of his chewing, he was hurriedly bolting down the last bar of the milk chocolate I had stored away in the suitcase for a rainy sidereal day. The bastard was in such a hurry that he ate the chocolate along with bits of tin foil, which glittered on his lips.

"Leave that chocolate alone!" I yelled, pulling at his foot. "Who are you anyway? The Thursday me?..." I added in a lower voice, seized by a sudden doubt, for the thought occurred that maybe I already was the Friday me, and would soon have to collect what I had dished out earlier to the same.

"The Sunday me," he mumbled, his mouth full. I felt weak. Now either he was lying, in which case there was nothing to worry about, or telling the truth, and if he was, I faced a clobbering for sure, because the Sunday me—after all—was the one who had hit the Friday me, the Friday me told me so himself before it happened, and then later I, impersonating the Sunday me, had let him have it with the pipe. But on the other hand, I said to myself, even if he's lying and not the Sunday me, it's still quite possible that he's a later me than me, and if he is a later me, he remembers everything that I do, therefore already knows that I lied to the Friday me, and so could deceive me in a similar manner, since what had been a spur-of-the-moment stratagem on my part was for him—by now—simply a memory, a memory he could easily make use of. Meanwhile, as I remained in uncertainty, he had eaten the rest of the chocolate and crawled out from under the bed.

"If you're the Sunday me, where's your spacesuit?!" I cried, struck by a new thought.

"I'll have it in a minute," he said calmly, and then I noticed the pipe in his hand... The next thing I saw was a bright flash, like a few dozen supernovas going off at once, after which I lost consciousness. I came to, sitting on the floor of the bathroom; someone was banging on the door. I began to attend to my bruises and bumps, but he kept pounding away; it turned out to be the Wednesday me. After

a while I showed him my battered head, he went with the Thursday me for the tools, then there was a lot of running around and yanking off of spacesuits, this to in one way or another I managed to live through, and on Saturday morning crawled under the bed to see if there wasn't some chocolate left in the suitcase. Someone started pulling at my foot as I ate the last bar, which I'd found underneath the shirts; I no longer knew just who this was, but hit him over the head anyhow, pulled the spacesuit off him and was going to put it on—when the rocket fell into the next vortex.

When I regained consciousness, the cabin was packed with people. There was barely elbowroom. As it turned out, they were all of them me, from different days, weeks, months, and one—so he said—was even from the following year. There were plenty with bruises and black eyes, and five among those present had on spacesuits. But instead of immediately going out through the hatch and repairing the damage, they began to quarrel, argue, bicker and debate. The problem was, who had hit whom, and when. The situation was complicated by the fact that there now had appeared morning me's and afternoon me's—I feared that if things went on like this, I would soon be broken into minutes and seconds—and then too, the majority of the me's present were lying like mad, so that to this day I'm not altogether sure whom I hit and who hit me when that whole business took place, triangularly, between the Thursday, the Friday and the Wednesday me's, all of whom I was in turn. My impression is that because I had lied to the Friday me, pretending to be the Sunday me, I ended up with one blow more than I should have, going by the calendar. But I would prefer not to dwell any longer on these unpleasant memories; a man who for an entire week does nothing but hit himself over the head has little reason to be proud.

Meanwhile the arguments continued. The sight of such inaction, such wasting of precious time, drove me to despair, while the rocket rushed blindly on, straight ahead, plunging every now and then into another gravitational vortex. At last the ones wearing spacesuits started slugging it out with the ones who were not. I tried to introduce some sort of order into that absolute chaos and finally, after superhuman efforts, succeeded in organizing something that resembled a meeting, in which the one from next year—having seniority—was elected chairman by acclamation.

We then appointed an elective committee, a nominating committee, and a committee for new business, and four of us from next month were made sergeants at arms. But in the meantime we had passed through a negative vortex, which cut our number in half, so that on the very first ballot we lacked a quorum, and had to change the bylaws before proceeding to vote on the candidates for rudder-repairer. The map indicated the approach of still other vortices, and these undid all that we had accomplished so far; first the candidates already chosen disappeared, and then the Tuesday me showed up with the Friday me, who had his head wrapped in a towel, and they created a shameful scene. Upon passage through a particularly strong positive vortex we hardly fit in the cabin and

corridor, and opening the hatch was out of the question—there simply wasn't room. But the worst of it was, these time displacements were increasing in amplitude, a few grayhaired me's had already appeared, and here and there I even caught a glimpse of the close-cropped heads of children, that is of myself, of course—or rather—myself from the halcyon days of boyhood.

I really can't recall whether I was still the Sunday me, or had already turned into the Monday me. Not that it made any difference. The children sobbed that they were being squashed in the crowd, and called for their mommy; the chairman—the Tichy from next year—let out a string of curses, because the Wednesday me, who had crawled under the bed in a futile search for chocolate, bit him in the leg when he accidentally stepped on the latter's finger. I saw that all this would end badly, particularly now as here and there gray beards were turning up. Between the 142nd and 143rd vortices I passed around an attendance sheet, but afterwards it came to light that a large number of those present were cheating. Supplying false vital statistics, God knows why. Perhaps the prevailing atmosphere had muddled their wits. The noise and confusion were such that you could make yourself understood only by screaming at the top of your lungs. But then one of last year's Jjons hit upon what seemed to be an excellent idea, namely, that the oldest among us tell the story of his life; in that way we would learn just who was supposed to fix the rudder. For obviously the oldest me contained within his past experience the lives of all the others there from their various months, days and years. So we turned, in this matter, to a hoary old gentleman who, slightly palsied, was standing idly in the corner. When questioned, he began to speak at great length of his children and grandchildren, then passed to his cosmic voyages, and he had embarked upon no end of these in the course of his ninety-some years. Of the one now taking place—the only one of interest to us—the old man had no recollection whatever, owing to his generally sclerotic and overexcited condition, however he was far too proud to admit this and went on evasively, obstinately, time and again returning to his high connections, decorations and grandchildren, till finally we shouted him down and ordered him to hold his tongue. The next two vortices cruelly thinned our ranks. After the third, not only was there more room, but all of those in spacesuits had disappeared as well. One empty suit remained; we voted to hang it up in the corridor, then went back to our deliberations. Then, following another scuffle for the possession of that precious garment, a new vortex came along and suddenly the place was deserted. I was sitting on the floor, puffy-eyed, in my strangely spacious cabin, surrounded by broken furniture, strips of clothing, ripped-up books. The floor was strewn with ballots. According to the map, I had now passed through the entire zone of gravitational vortices. No longer able to count on duplication, and thus no longer able to correct the damage, I fell into numb despair. About an hour later I looked out in the corridor and discovered, to my great surprise, that the spacesuit was missing. But then I vaguely remembered—yes—right before that last vortex two little boys sneaked out into the corridor. Could they have possibly, both of them,

put on the one spacesuit?! Struck by a sudden thought, I ran to the controls. The rudder worked! So then, those little tykes had fixed it after all, while we adults were stuck in endless disagreements. I imagine that one of them placed his arms in the sleeves of the suit, and the other—in the pants; that way, they could have tightened the nut and bolt with wrenches at the same time, working on either side of the rudder. The empty spacesuit I found in the air lock, behind the hatch. I carried it inside the rocket like a sacred relic, my heart full of boundless gratitude for those brave lads I had been so long ago! And thus concluded what was surely one of my most unusual adventures. I reached my destination safely, thanks to the courage and resourcefulness I had displayed when only two children.

It was said afterwards that I invented the whole thing, and those more malicious even went so far as to insinuate that I had a weakness for alcohol, carefully concealed on Earth but freely indulged during those long and lonely cosmic flights. Lord only knows what other gossip has been circulating on the subject. But that is how people are; they'll willingly give credence to the most far-fetched drivel, but not to the simple truth, which is precisely what I have presented here.

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## THE EIGHTH VOYAGE

**W**ell, it finally happened. I was Earth's delegate to the United Planets—or more precisely, a candidate, though that isn't right either, since it was not my candidacy, but all humanity's which the General Assembly was going to consider.

Never in my life did I feel so nervous. My tongue was thick, my mouth dry, and when I walked out onto the red carpet spread from the astrobus, I couldn't tell whether it or my knees were gently buckling under me. Speeches would surely have to be given, but I was too choked with emotion to stammer out a single word, so that when I caught sight of a large, shiny machine with a chrome counter and little slots for coins, I hurriedly inserted one, placing the cup of my thermos underneath its spigot. This was the first interplanetary incident in the history of human diplomacy on the galactic level, since what I had taken for a soft drink vending machine turned out to be the deputy chairman of the Rhohch delegation in full regalia. By a great stroke of luck the Rhohches happened to be the ones who had offered to sponsor our candidacy at the meeting, though I didn't know this at the time, and when that high dignitary spat upon my boots I took it as a bad sign, while in fact it was only the aromatic secretion of his salutation glands. All this I understood after swallowing an informational-translational tablet handed me by some sympathetic UP official; immediately the jangling sounds around me changed in my ears to perfectly coherent words, the quadrangle of aluminum bowling pins at the end of the plush carpet became an honor guard, and the Rhohch that greeted me—till then looking more like a very large pretzel—seemed an old acquaintance, whose appearance was in no way unusual. But my nervousness remained. A small trundler pulled up, constructed especially for the conveyance of biped creatures such as myself; the Rhohch accompanying me squeezed in after me with difficulty and, taking a seat to the right as well as to the left of me, said:

“Honorable Earthling, I must inform you that a slight procedural complication has taken place. The actual head-chairman of our delegation, the one most