

At night, my education has turned me, and practically everyone else I know, into an efficient examination-passing machine. I wouldn't know how to be original outside the limited field of my own speciality, and the only reason I can make that an exception is that apparently most of my predecessors have been even more blinkered than I am. I know a thousand per cent more about evolution than Darwin did, that's taken for granted. But where between now and the day I die is there room for me to do something that's *mine* and not a gloss on someone else's work? Sure, when I get my doctorate the spiel that comes with it will include something about presenting a quote original unquote thesis, but what it'll mean is the words are in a different order from last time!"

"You have a fairly high opinion of your own ability," Dr. Foden commented.

"You mean I sound conceited? I guess I probably do. But what I'm trying to say is I don't want to take credit for being massively ignorant. You see—"

"What are you going to do for a career?"

Diverted from his orbit, Donald binked. "Well, something which uses up a minimum of my time, I imagine. So I can use the rest to mortar up the gaps in my education."

"Ah-hah. Interested in a salary of fifty thousand per to do—essentially—nothing *but* complete your education?"

There was one talent Donald Hogan did possess which the majority of people didn't: the gift of making right guesses. Some mechanism at the back of his mind seemed ceaselessly to be shifting around factors from the surrounding world, hunting for patterns in them, and when such a pattern arose a silent bell would ring inside his skull.

Factors: Washington, the absence of the Dean, the offer of a salary competitive with what he could hope to earn in industry, but for studying, not for working . . . There were people, extremely top people, whom specialists tended to refer to disparagingly as dilettanti but who dignified themselves with the title "synthesist", and who spent their entire working lives doing nothing but making cross-references from one enclosed corner of research to another.

It seemed like too much to hope for, coming on top of his expectation, moments back, that his grant was to be discontinued. He had to put his hands together to stop them trembling.

"You're talking about synthesis, aren't you?"

"Yes, I'm from the Dilettante Dept—or more officially, from the Office of Research Co-ordination. But I doubt if you have in mind exactly what I'm going to propose. I've seen the graphs of your scholastic career, and I get the impression that you could make yourself into a synthesist if you wanted to badly enough, with or without a doctorate." Dr. Foden leaned back in her chair.

"So the fact that you're still here—gripping, but putting up with things—makes me suspect you *don't* want to badly enough. It'll take a good fat bribe to make you opt for it. I think nonetheless you may be honest enough to stay bribed. Tell me, given the chance, what would you do to round out your education?"

Donald stammered over his answer, turning crimson at his own inability to utter crisp, decisive plans. "Well—uh—I guess . . . History, particularly recent history; nobody's taught me about anything nearer to home than World War II without loading it full of biased dreck. All the fields which touch on my own, like crystallography and ecology. Not

omitting human ecology. And to document that I'd like to delve into the written record of our species, which is now about eight thousand years deep. I ought to learn at least one non-Indo-European language. Then—"

"Stop. You've defined an area of knowledge greater than an individual can cover in a lifetime."

"Not true!" Donald was gathering confidence by the moment. "Of course you can't if you've been taught the way I have, on the basis of memorising facts, but what one ought to learn is how to extract *patterns*! You don't bother to memorise the literature—you learn to read and keep a shelf of books. You don't memorise log and sine tables; you buy a slide-rule or learn to punch a public computer!" A helpless gesture. "You don't have to know everything. You simply need to know where to find it when necessary."

Dr. Foden was nodding. "You seem to have the right basic attitude," she acknowledged. "However, I must put on my Mephistopheles hat at this point and explain the conditions that attach to the offer I'm making. First, you'd be required to read and write fluent Yatakangi."

Donald blanched slightly. A friend of his had once started on that language and switched to Mandarin Chinese as an easier alternative. However . . .

He shrugged. "I'd be willing to shoot for that," he said.

"And the rest of it I can't tell you until you've been to Washington with me."

Where a man called Colonel—Donald was not told if he had a name of his own—said, "Raise your right hand and repeat after me: 'I Donald Orville Hogan . . . do solemnly declare and attest . . .'"

Donald sighed. Back then, it had seemed like the fulfilment of his wildest dreams. Five mornings a week doing nothing but read, under no compulsion to produce any kind of results—merely requested to mention by mail any association or connection he spotted which he had reason to believe might prove helpful to somebody: advise an astronomer that a market research organisation had a new statistical sampling technique, for instance, or suggest that an entomologist be informed about a new air-pollution problem. It sounded like

paradise, especially since his employers not only did not care what he did with the rest of his time but suggested he make his experience as varied as possible to keep himself alert.

And in under ten years—he had to face the truth—he was getting bored. He could almost wish that they'd pull the second string attached to his work, the one which had caused him so much heart-searching.

*Lieutenant Donald Orville Hogan. you are hereby accept IMMEDI-*

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