“Presumably,” said August Pointdexter, “there is such a thing as overweening pride. The Greeks called it hubris, and considered it to be defiance of the gods, to be followed always by ate, or retribution.” He rubbed his pale blue eyes uneasily.

“Very pretty,” said Dr. Edward Barron impatiently. “Has that any connection with what I said?” His forehead was high and had horizontal creases in it that cut in sharply when he raised his eyebrows in contempt.

“Every connection,” said Pointdexter. “To construct a time machine is itself a challenge to fate. You make it worse by your flat confidence. How can you be sure that your time-travel machine will operate through all of time without the possibility of paradox?”

Barron said, “I didn't know you were superstitious. The simple fact is that a time machine is a machine like any other machine, no more and no less sacrilegious. Mathematically, it is analogous to an elevator moving up and down its shaft. What danger of retribution lies in that?”

Pointdexter said energetically, “An elevator doesn't involve paradoxes. You can't move from the fifth floor to the fourth and kill your grandfather as a child.”

Dr. Barron shook his head in agonized impatience. “I was waiting for that. For exactly that. Why couldn't you suggest that I would meet myself or that I would change history by telling McClellan that Stonewall Jackson was going to make a flank march on Washington, or anything else? Now I'm asking you point blank. Will you come into the machine with me?”

Pointdexter hesitated. “I…I don't think so.”

“Why do you make things difficult? I've explained already that time is invariant. If I go into the past it will be because I've already been there. Anything I decided to do and proceed to do. I will have already done in the past all along, so I'll be changing nothing and no paradoxes willresult. If I decided to kill my grandfather as a baby, and did it I would not be here. But I am here. Therefore I did not kill my grandfather. No matter how I try to kill him and plan to kill him, the fact is I didn't kill him and so I won't kill him. Nothing would change that. Do you understand what I'm explaining?”

“I understand what you say, but are you right?”

“Of course I'm right. For God's sake, why couldn't you have been a mathematician instead of a machinist with a college education?” In his impatience, Barron could scarcely hide his contempt. “Look, this machine is only possible because certain mathematical relationships between space and time hold true. You understand that, don't you, even if you don't follow the details of the mathematics? The machine exists, so the mathematical relations I worked out have some correspondence in reality. Right? You've seen me send rabbits a week into the future. You've seen them appear out of nothing. You've watched me send a rabbit a week into the past one week after it appeared. And they were unharmed.”

“All right. I admit all that.”

“Then will you believe me if I tell you that the equations upon which this machine is based assume that time is composed of particles that exist in an unchanging order; that time is invariant. If the order of the particles could be changed in any way-any way at all-the equations would be invalid and this machine wouldn't work; this particular method of time travel would be impossible.”

Pointdexter rubbed his eyes again and looked thoughtful. “I wish I knew mathematics.”

Barron said, “Just consider the facts. You tried to send the rabbit two weeks into the past when it had arrived only one week in the past. That would have created a paradox, wouldn't it? But what happened? The indicator stuck at one week and wouldn't budge. You couldn't create a paradox. Will you come?”

Pointdexter shuddered at the edge of the abyss of agreement and drew back. He said, “No.”

Barron said, “I wouldn't.ask you to help if I could do this alone, but you know it takes two men to operate the machine for intervals of more than a month. I need someone to control the Standards so that we can return with precision. And you're the one I want to use. We share the-the glory of this thing now. Do you want to thin it out, but in a third person? Time enough for that after we've established ourselves as the first time travelers in history. Good Lord, man, don't you want to see where we'll be a hundred years from now, or a thousand; don't you want to see Napoleon, or Jesus, for that matter? We'll be like-like”-Barron seemed carried away-“like gods.”

“Exactly,” mumbled Pointdexter. “ Hubris. Time travel isn't godlike enough to risk being stranded out of my owntime.”

“Hubris. Stranded. You keep making up fears. We're just moving along the particles of time like an elevator along the floors of a building. Time travel is actually safer

because an elevator cable can break, whereas in the time machine there'll be no gravity to pun us down destructively. Nothing wrong can possibly happen. I guarantee it," said Barron, tapping his chest with the middle finger of his right hand. "I guarantee it."

"Hubris," muttered Pointdexter, but fell into the abyss of agreement nevertheless, overborne at last.

Together they entered the machine.

Pointdexter did not understand the controls in the sense Barron did, for he was no mathematician, but he knew how they were supposed to be handled.

Barron was at one set, the Propulsions. They supplied the drive that forced the machine along the time axis. Pointdexter was at the Standards that kept the point of origin fixed so that the machine could move back to the original starting point at any time.

Pointdexter's teeth chattered as the first motion made itself felt in his stomach, Like an elevator's motion it was, but not quite, It was something more subtle, yet very real. He said, "What if-"

Barron snapped out, "Nothing can go wrong. Please!" And at once there was a jar and Pointdexter fell heavily against the wall.

Barron said, "What the devil!"

"What happened?" demanded Pointdexter breathlessly. "I don't know, but it doesn't matter. We're only twenty-two hours into the future. Let's step out and check."

The door of the machine slid into its recessed panel and the breath went out of Pointdexter's body in a panting whoosh. He said, "There's nothing there."

Nothing. No matter. No light. Blank!

Pointdexter screamed. "The Earth moved. We forgot that. In twenty-two hours, it moved thousands of miles through space, traveling around the sun."

"No," said Barron faintly, "I didn't forget that. The machine is designed to follow the time path of Earth wherever that leads. Besides, even if Earth moved, where is the sun? Where are the stars?"

Barron went back to the controls. Nothing budged. Nothing worked. The door would no longer slide shut. Blank!

Pointdexter found it getting difficult to breathe, difficult to move. With effort he said, “What's wrong, then?”

Barron moved slowly toward the center of the machine. He said painfully, “The particles of time. I think we happened to stall…between two…particles.”

Pointdexter tried to clench a fist but couldn't. “Don't understand.”

“Like an elevator. Like an elevator.” He could no longer sound the words, but only move his lips to shape them. “Like an elevator, after all…stuck between the floors.”

Pointdexter could not even move his lips. He thought: Nothing can proceed in nontime. All motion is suspended, all consciousness, all everything. There was an inertia about themselves that had carried them along in time for a minute or so, like a body leaning forward when an automobile comes to a sudden halt-but it was dying fast.

The light within the machine dimmed and went out. Sensation and awareness chilled into nothing.

One last thought, one final, feeble, mental sigh: Hubris, ate!

Then thought stopped, too.

Stasis! Nothing! For all eternity, where even eternity was meaningless, there would only be-blank!